

## Bingo, the Grandfather of ESL Games

Before I became an English teacher, playing bingo meant Tuesday night at church with a room full of senior citizens, all waiting with anticipation to see which number would be called next. After joining the ranks of ESL teachers, I was amazed at how many variations such a simple, yet thrilling, game could have. Because of its versatility, I doubt there is any teacher who has never used bingo in some form in the classroom. However, as the possibilities for this game are endless, I'm sure you will find the following ideas useful, and perhaps they will be the springboard for yet other versions.

**Peter McEntyre** of Koala English School shares a game he calls "Bingo on the Board." It mainly uses reading, speaking and listening skills, but writing can also be introduced if you get the students to make the game.

### Materials

The whiteboard, blackboard or a large sheet of paper  
Markers/chalk (3 colors)  
Optional: magnets and flash cards

### Preparation

Draw a large 5 X 5 grid on the board (You can vary the size if you like). Fill in the squares with whatever the class has been studying—words, pictures, questions, flashcards etc. Below is an example for a class that can read.



### How to Play

Divide the students into two teams, say a blue team and a red team, with a minimum of two players each (girls

vs. boys, for example). If there are more than eight people, you can make three teams. Have the teams sit opposite each other and use the "paper, scissors, rock" routine to decide which team starts. The first player of the starting team is urged to choose a square. They can just say the word that is in the square, or they can be asked to use the word in a simple sentence or do something more complicated, depending on their level. They usually pick the easiest ones first, but in the end they are left with more difficult choices as all the easy squares quickly disappear. To score a point a team must cross off three words in a row, up, down, or diagonally, just like "Tic-Tac-Toe." A team can only make three in a row with their own answers. They cannot use a box that has already been claimed by another team to get a point. The game is over when every square has been crossed off the grid.

My theory is "a good game is a quick game," so for the first game, I keep it simple. I usually draw up a small 3 X 3 mini version of the game and run through it as a warm up so the students can see how the game works. It may be necessary to read through all the boxes at the start and give a few example answers. Some students may also need help throughout the game if they are having problems reading or understanding what to do.

A typical game may start like this:  
YUTA: *My mother's name is Mayumi.* (I then ask if he's on the red or the blue team, and he decides what color their team will be.)  
TEACHER: *Red or blue?* (Holding up the markers and looking at Yuta.)  
YUTA: *Blue.* (I then cross off both squares with 'mother' in blue, and Yuta's team remains blue until the game is over.)  
TEACHER: *Next is Mariko, O.K?* (Pointing to Mariko and gesturing for her to pick a box.)

MARIKO: *My father is 47 years old.* (I cross off the squares with 'father' in them, using the red marker to represent Mariko's team.)

Carry on with the rest of the students, and when a point is finally scored, applaud and put the point up on the board in the appropriate column, red or blue. The students can add up the points at the end of the game.

Don't be too concerned if the students make mistakes because the purpose of the game is to get them speaking. If you can guess which word they are referring to, give them the square. Having the same answer in more than one square of the grid heightens awareness as the students then search for the squares that appear more than once, which will give them a better chance of getting a point or two. Pretending to be deaf will also get the students to speak more loudly.



### Scoring

Give one point for each row of three squares that make a straight line in one team's color. The same square can be used to make another line in a different direction, but no points are given for making the line longer, i.e., from three in a row to four in a row does not earn extra points. You cannot use the other team's squares to make points. It is possible to get more than one point per play, and sometimes one answer can score a team two, three or four points, if it connects and makes new scoring lines.

### Tactics

The squares in the middle allow students more chances of scoring than the squares on the sides. As they play this game more and more they will figure this out. Even so, you can

sometimes help the weaker teams by encouraging them to take the middle boxes first. Challenge students to try to get more than one point for each answer, or cut off the other team from scoring by blocking their rows.

### Teacher Talk

Questions and comments the teacher can introduce throughout the game include: *Who's next?*, *Which team?*, *What color?*, *This one?*, *How many points?*, *Who's winning?*, *Hurry up!*, *Quick!*, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, (counting backwards slowly and loudly is more effective than *Hurry up!*)

### Student Talk

Students can reply using the following expressions: *Me, Him, Her, Blue, Red, My turn, Your turn, Yes, that one or I don't know.*

### Variations

As the students learn how the game is played, make small changes to increase the interest and enthusiasm the game creates. Put cards on the squares using magnets. Behind the cards, write bonus points or bombs or monsters or points for the opposing team. Have a mystery box hidden somewhere on the grid, which provides extra points for the team that picks it. You can sometimes save a little secret surprise for the weakest student. Then everybody has a chance to win or lose, as the game becomes a game of chance and not a game of skill. The fun is in finding out what will happen next, and in order to do that the students will have to use English to communicate and cooperate with each other.

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Some bingo games have been created for very specific purposes. Next, **Peter Warner** of At Home English describes "Creative In/On/Under Bingo."

Some people don't enjoy working with prepositions, yet my most popular bingo game is a simple version of in/on/under bingo. It challenges the students to use prepositions in creative ways, and has an element of suspense.

I put the children in pairs, giving

every child a board grid with a target preposition written in each cell, and place a stack of picture cards in front of each pair, face-down (fig. 1). There

in	on	under
under	in	on

PICTURE CARDS

The picture cards are placed face down, between two players. Unusable cards are placed face up, in a 'neutral zone,' and are free to any player.

under	in	on
on	under	in

Figure 1.

are no written clues on the image cards, and there are no duplicates (see samples in fig. 2 and 3).

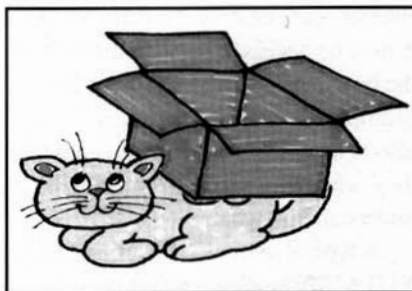


Figure 2.

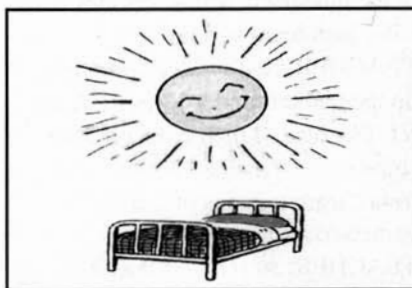


Figure 3.

They each take turns drawing the top card of the stack, describing the image shown on the card using a

preposition ("The pen is in the box."), and placing it onto the cell of that preposition ("in"). When all the cells on the board are covered, they have achieved "BINGO!"

If the preposition that they verbalize is already covered on their board, they place the card, face-up, in a general "neutral zone," where it can be taken and used by any other player as a free turn. An alert child can fill their board from other's discards, and no child is limited by having a slow partner. Since each pair is playing simultaneously, the entire class is kept active, yet focused (fig. 4).

Arrangement for Group and Pair Bingo Play

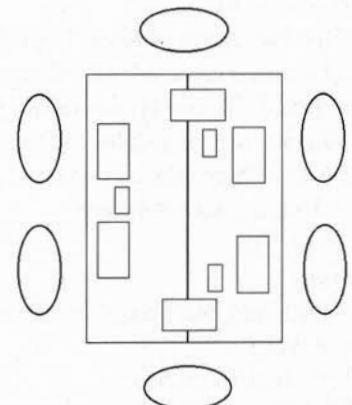


Diagram Key:

- stack of cards (face down) for Pair Play
- (cards placed face up on the table are free for any player)
- Bingo Board
- players

Figure 4.

One result is that they will try to adapt the preposition that they use in order to fill their board first. They quickly learn that "The dog is ON the table" can also be "The table is UNDER the dog." Creative children have come up with "The bed is IN the bedroom," or "The tree is ON the earth." If one pair finishes too quickly, they can be given another set of boards and cards. I play also, and somehow always manage to finish last.

A more extensive description of this game can be found at: <http://etjaichi.kweto.com/presenters/WarnerBingo/index.html>.

[Editor's note: Peter is happy to hear from you with your questions and comments at his school e-mail

address: athomeng@zae.att.ne.jp.]

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**Yuco Kikuchi** says her favorite bingo game is “Yoko Bingo,” or “Horizontal Bingo” in English. She writes:

Usually we need nine words or letters to play bingo, but I play this bingo game after teaching just five words or alphabet letters, for example, A, B, C, D, and E.

Each child is given the same five cards, and places them in a row in any order. Child 1 might place the cards in the order, A, B, C, D, E, while Child 2 might place them B, D, A, C, E.

Then I call a card, and children turn over the card I call. After calling three cards, if anyone has three cards turned over next to each other it is “BINGO!” That is, in the above example, if I call C, D, and B, Child 1 wins. If nobody gets three cards turned over in a row, I call a fourth card.

You can play this bingo game with six or seven cards as well.

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Another simple variation comes from **Lea Watson**. Using the same pre-made bingo cards might get boring, but not when you change the criterion for getting “BINGO!” Lea features a letter of the alphabet as in, “Today’s bingo is the capital letter ‘T,’” and the children must cover all the pictures along the top of the card and all of the pictures running down the middle, in order to declare themselves a winner. The children use red tiles to cover the pictures that will form the featured letter, and white for the rest of the pictures. Letters such as C, H, and O are particularly easy to form, but occasionally the children use the initial of their first name for a more personalized version of the game.

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**Margaret Otake** likes to have students make their own bingo from start to finish. The advantages to this are that it is student-centered, and somewhat student-controlled. It practices a variety of skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and it involves little preparation for the teacher.

Have students make a 9-square grid

by drawing two lines across and two lines down on a piece of scrap paper. Then get them to brainstorm 25 items of whatever it is you want them to practice: letters of the alphabet, colors and numbers, days of the week and months of the year, furniture and rooms in the house, etc. Write them on the board as they take turns calling out the words. Students can help you with the spelling.

Then have the students fill in their 9-square grid with their own choices from the words on the board. The teacher may have to help weaker students so that it does not take too long to fill in the grid.

First time around the teacher calls out the cues. Skew your choices wildly so that everyone has a fair chance of winning. Students call out “BINGO” when they have crossed out three words in a row. The winner becomes the cue caller for the next round. Variations for giving cues are to embed the word in a sentence or to call out opposites.

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A computer whiz, **Nicolas Cueto**, has taken bingo into the realm of high technology. Here’s what he has done:

After hearing incredible stories from teacher friends about how they had actually sat down with scissors and glue to “cut’n’paste” to create ten or twenty or even thirty different bingo cards for their EFL classes—dedicated teachers or what!—I decided to create a website where the very same thing could be achieved but with just the touch of a button. Voila [http://skripts.kweto.com/bingo.html!](http://skripts.kweto.com/bingo.html)



<http://skripts.kweto.com/bingo.html>

At the site visitors will see theme-based buttons—Halloween, Christmas and Valentine’s for now, with more to

come in the future. Click on a button and it’ll result in a 5x5 illustrated bingo card all ready for printing onto A4 paper. Incidentally, the pictures are clip-art available free for non-profit use.

Also at that website is downloadable shareware. Teachers who knew about the website had asked for features a bit too difficult to program into an online version, such as the ability to use their own pictures, so I created a software version (Win or Mac) with this and other requested features in mind.

There’s not much else to add, it’s that straightforward to use. Just one thing though: the most difficult part of the bingo website for me is the pictures, so if you would like to see additional themes AND have all the pictures for it freely available, contact me at my e-mail address—[nrkwe-to@hotmail.com](mailto:nrkwe-to@hotmail.com)—and I’ll see if I can whip up something.

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**David Lisgo’s** favorite bingo game called “Double Sound Bingo” can also be found online and downloaded freely at <http://etjaichi.kweto.com/davidlisgo/BAH/index.html>. In this non-competitive game each bingo board has images representing words containing the 16 double letter sounds found in *Finding Out 1*. To play the game, give each child a game board and 11 counters or chips. Lay the 16 double letter cards (letters only) on the table or floor face-up or down. Have children draw one card at a time and say the sound. Students should find the picture or pictures on their boards representing words that have the same sound. For example, if the *ar* card is drawn, children will have to realize that the *ar* sound is found in *car*, *card* and *carpet*, in order to play the game successfully. The game is over when all 11 chips have been used.

David suggests that the bingo game boards be printed out on A4 size paper and laminated for longer use.

Whoever you teach, whatever you teach, wherever you teach, however you teach, there will always be a bingo game to fit your needs. Bingo—truly a game that will never lose its freshness.