

## Using Dice—Never a Gamble

Those two little white cubes that conjure up images of Las Vegas can be transformed into some of the most useful tools for conversation practice. But our students don't have to know that—they can just think they are playing a game.

**Sharon Abe** sent these hints for using dice:

1. Buy blank dice and write 1-2-3 on them twice, so when rolled no number is higher than three. This makes a game that calls for using dice last longer, and students will stop on targets more frequently than if regular dice are used.

2. Use one die for determining who will go first in a game, instead of doing janken (a bit of American culture). The person who rolls the highest number goes first.

3. Use one die at a time to teach counting to younger children. When they master 1-6, add another die. Keep adding dice as desired. Children enjoy counting races using dice. Give each team a set of dice and see which team can count the number on the dice they have rolled the quickest.

**Philip Brown** calls his activity 'Action Dice.'

Ages: 3-6

Target Language: Action words

Materials: Blank die templates (see <http://www.allentownsd.org/Hohe/hohe/dice.rtf>, for example), scissors, glue and tape. Draw, photocopy or transfer clip art pictures of the target language, i.e. hopping, jumping, crawling, walking, skipping, etc., onto each face of the die. Make the die before or during class, depending on the ages and motor skills of the children.

How to play:

Students line up against one wall of the classroom. Roll the die. Practice the target language, e.g. 'I can hop', 'What can you do?' [I can hop.] Gesture and say, '1...2...3...Go!' and everyone goes to the opposite wall or around the room doing the action as shown on the die. Gesture and say, '3...2...1...Stop!' then elicit the language once more, e.g. 'What can you do?' ...[I can hop.]

Have children take turns rolling the die. Continue as desired.

**Shannon Koga** uses dice to teach prepositions: Make two dice out of construction paper. (Ed. note: See website for blank template above.) On one die write the names of various items in the classroom, i.e. pencil, pencil case, etc. On the other die write the names of places, i.e. the door, the teacher (for fun), etc. Before using the dice practice three or four prepositions (on, in, under). Then have one child role the 'object' die and another child roll the 'place' die. The teacher calls out a preposition, and the children scramble to place the objects in the correct place.

**William Percy** uses his handmade dice for warming up questions. The dice you see in the picture were made by fitting the ends of two milk cartons together and covering them with sticky-backed plastic which was bought at a DIY store. This makes a very solid box. A wooden block was placed inside each cube before sealing them. The idea was to make them roll a little more under momentum. It didn't work, but the children are curious about what is inside. He printed out pictures and questions, and attached these using plastic film. The questions on the dice are as follows:



*Rear left die: What time is it? What's your telephone number? How do you spell ~? What's your favorite ~? How tall are you? What size are your shoes?*

*Rear center die: Do you have a ~? How are you? What's your name? How old are you? Where do you*

*live? Do you like ~s?*

*Rear right die: Can you play (sport)? Can you swim ~ meters? Can you ride a*

*~? Can you play the (musical instrument)? Can you cook ~? Can you ~*

*(Free: spell/speak/touch)*

*Front left die: What number do you like? What sport do you like? What drink do you like? What color do you like? What food do you like? What ice cream do you like?*

*Front right die: What do you do? What do you want to do? What are you doing? What are you wearing? Where's your book? (adaptable) Where are you?*

Once students are familiar with the questions, place the dice in a bucket so that the student who answers can't see the upper face of the die. They must then listen to the questions more carefully.

**Louisa Morioka** also makes her own dice from old milk packs. For holiday parties, though, she makes HUGE dice from cardboard boxes, purchased at a DIY. To make these dice, cover them with contact paper while they are still flat. Add customized language (for Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, etc.), using words or pictures, and tape the ends shut to make a cube. After using them, flatten them out again for compact storage.

In the classroom, Louisa plays Snakes and Ladders to practice self-introductions, using two different dice. On the homemade milk pack die are pictures for self-introductions, as follows: a face—'What's your name?', a number—'How old are you?', a check (✓)—'Can you...?', a happy face—'Do you like...?', a question mark (?)—'What's this?' It's a...', 3 apples—'How many...?'. To play the game Student 1 rolls the question die, and asks Student 2 the question. After answering the question, Student 2 rolls a regular number die and progresses along the board accordingly. The language used should be adapted to the various levels of the students. Very young children can



just answer the questions that the teacher asks, while elementary children can both ask and answer the questions. The pictures on the dice may be changed to prompt other questions about family, school, sports, etc.

Louisa also wrote that she is trying out a new non-competitive version of this game with a very competitive class: 'Instead of everybody using their own marker, we use two figures like Spiderman vs Ultraman, or Dekka-red vs Dekka-blue. Student 1 rolls the question dice, and asks the appropriate question to Student 2. Student 3 rolls a number dice to decide how far the figure moves, and Student 4 asks, "What number is it?" and moves the figure along the board. Most of my classes have only four kids in them so it means that all the kids are involved in each move. It sounds a bit cumbersome, but I use this game for reviewing old language, and set a timer for about 5 minutes. That way the students have to ask and answer and move along quickly to see which hero will triumph.'

For a fun review, **Yuco Kikuchi** uses a large sponge die and cards.

Level: Introductory to Intermediate  
Aim: Review vocabulary and/or sentence patterns

Time: 2-5 minutes or longer

Ages: 7-12

Group Size: 2-4 students

Materials: Fifty picture and/or question cards and a die

Preparation: Place about 50 cards you want to review in a pile in the center of the table. The cards can be picture cards or question cards or a mixture of both.

How to play:

1. S1 throws a die, and takes the same number of cards from the pile. If the die shows three, S1 takes three cards.

2. S1 says the cards in English and keeps the cards. If the card is a question card, the teacher asks and S1 answers. If the student can't say/answer in English, the other students can help him/her. If none can help, the teacher provides the answer and everyone practices it. Then the card is returned to the pile.

3. Ss take turns until the time is up. Set a timer to start and finish in order to keep the game fast-paced.

4. The student with the most cards wins.

Variations:

1. For advanced Ss, ask

them to make sentences using picture cards.

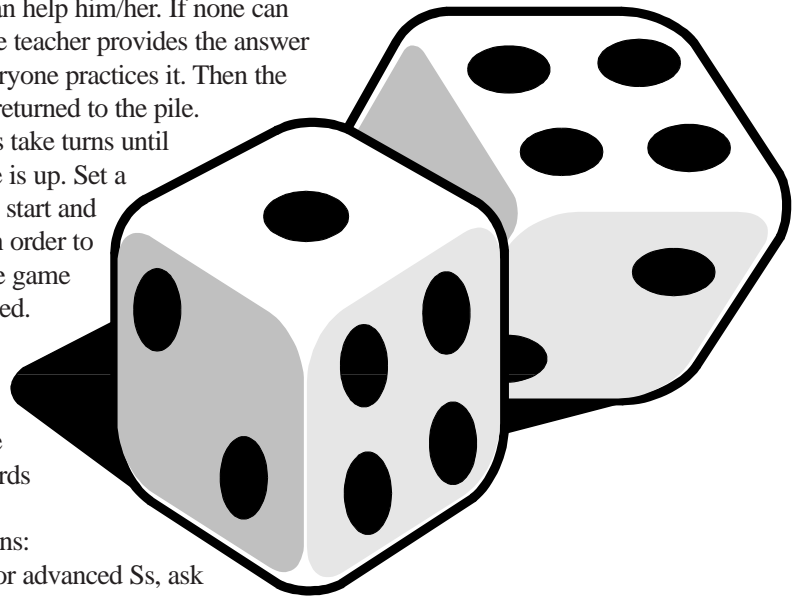
2. To give the children more freedom of choice, scatter all the cards on



the table randomly, face up. Or, put the cards in a circle, also face up.

3. Instead of making one pile, make many piles according to the category of picture cards. e.g. food items, animals, verbs, sports, etc.

4. Use word cards or phonics cards to practice reading.



## Co-operative Corner

By Chris Hunt

Dice are a wonderful tool with many uses. They can even be used to reinvigorate whole lessons: Here are two ways:

1. Write the lesson plan on the board and number it. In the class students take turns to roll a die and see what is next. Where one part of a plan depends upon an earlier part these can be grouped together as one

item. Tick items off as they are done and ignore them for future throws.

2. Assign each student a number. Roll a die to select a student. That student then chooses what to do next. This could be a free choice, or an item from the lesson plan, or an item from a selection of materials. Decide this in advance and also whether one student can choose more than once. If not,

then allow a student who is selected by the die a second time to choose the next student to make a choice.

For more ideas from Chris visit [www.wishat.com](http://www.wishat.com). Chris also edits and contributes to "Teachers Learning with Children", the newsletter of the TCSIG (JALT Teaching Children Special Interest Group).