

## Make a Vertical, Whole-Class Board Game

by KEVIN McCAUGHEY



**Author Kevin McCaughey leads a vertical board game during a recent workshop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Workshop participants created some of the content for the games they played.**

**LEVEL:** All levels

**TIME REQUIRED:** 20–40 minutes

**GOALS:** To create materials specific to your classroom context and your students' level; to involve students in the creation of games that elicit speaking; to play those games for the development of speaking skills

**MATERIALS:** Dice—one die for each group; standard pieces of paper and pens or pencils; larger pieces of paper work well, too, as do calendars (no matter the year).

**OVERVIEW:** Teachers will help students create board games, vertically oriented, on the class blackboard or whiteboard. These board games provide opportunities for every learner to participate and share ideas. The strong pattern evident in each game provides useful repetition and modeling.

Students themselves will contribute to the development of the game, ensuring that the content is at their level and of interest to them. Students will then play in groups, keeping track of their progress along the board through memory.

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## PREPARATION

1. It will help for students to experience playing board games and to be familiar with the mechanics of the games. Students may try playing Activate board games in small groups. For more information on how to manage game sessions for classes or clubs, see the article “Let Them Play: Board Games for Serious Language Practice” in this issue of *English Teaching Forum*. Activate board games are available (free) on the American English website at <https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/activate-board-games>.
2. Provide a partially completed game by drawing a grid, like the one in Figure 1, on the blackboard or whiteboard. The words written in each space should be large enough to be read by every person in the room.
3. The game should always have a title. You can write on the board, “Good and Bad Ideas: The Should/Shouldn’t Game.” This particular game will be aimed at intermediate to advanced learners of English, although by simplifying the content, we could easily reach rudimentary levels.
4. You might want to offer a brief explanation of the usage of *should* and *shouldn’t*. They are often used when a speaker gives advice (even to himself or herself): *You should dress warmly today. I shouldn’t ask that girl out because she has a boyfriend*. Students often find it helpful to think of *should* as equating to *It’s a good idea to ...* and *shouldn’t* as *It’s a bad idea to ...*. Thus, the title of our game.
5. Speaking of good ideas, you should draw your partial game on the board before students arrive to class, or while they are busy with some other activity.
6. It’s time for demonstrations. You will say something you should or shouldn’t do under the circumstances on the game board. Roll your die. If the number on your die comes up 4, on the space “at a wedding,” you might say, “You shouldn’t wear shorts and sandals at a wedding.”

|              |              |                       |                      |               |
|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| <b>START</b> | in a bathtub | during a thunderstorm | on holiday           | at a wedding  |
| in Mexico    | when cooking | in a hospital         | while you’re driving | right now     |
|              |              |                       |                      |               |
|              |              |                       |                      |               |
|              |              |                       |                      | <b>FINISH</b> |



**Playing a game, practicing English, and having fun in Tashkent**

7. Give the die to a student. The student will roll and then provide another example. Repeat this process several times, until you are certain everyone in the class knows how to play. If more than one student lands on the same space, that's fine. Each student can create a new answer. The number of things you should and shouldn't do at a wedding, for instance, is nearly unlimited.
8. Now students understand the game, but the board game has only about half the content needed. It's time to form groups of students, from three to eight persons. Ask each group to think of additional circumstances to include in the game. Give groups five minutes to add content. They can write their ideas in list format on a piece of paper.
9. When groups have their lists, ask them to choose a few favorites. Then invite students to write these favorites—in large letters—on the empty spaces of the game board at the front of the class. They don't need to do this one at a time; multiple students can come up. In this way, in a matter of minutes, you will have a complete game—with all spaces filled with content from START to FINISH.
10. You will understand that you are an awesome non-teacher-centered instructor.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Now, with the creation of a filled-in, complete game board, it's time to actually play, to get speaking practice that reinforces the lexical meanings of *should* and *shouldn't*. Students should work in groups—either the same groups as before or new groups.
2. Give each group one die.
3. Students will take turns rolling the die and responding to the prompt on the space where they land.
4. Normally, players move game pieces or tokens along the board to track their movement. With a vertical game board, however, players will need to keep track of their position mentally. They will remember where they last landed, and on their next turn, they will move forward from the previous position. Each player should roll the die, move, and respond to the prompt; that constitutes one turn. This ensures that everyone has a chance to play and to speak.

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5. Allow groups to play until they reach FINISH. If one player finishes, encourage the others to continue playing. When the action seems to be slowing, and interest is dying, you can draw the games to a close.
6. Gather the attention of the whole class. Ask for examples of good (or bad!) advice that turned up in their games. This will often be hilarious.

### VARIATIONS

1. The grid format used above is easy to draw on the board, but you can also use a trail pattern, as in Figure 2.
2. Instead of writing your game on the board, you and your students can use sheets of paper. For each space of the game, use a piece of A4 paper, which you can attach to the board with tape or sticky putty. Write in large letters so that students can read what is written there.

You can then give a blank piece of paper to each student in the class, and students will create their additional content.

These new spaces can be attached to the board—or to a wall, or whatever surface is available in your classroom or learning space.

### EXTENSIONS

1. You can make an endless number of board games with this method. Think of a grammar structure you are required to teach—e.g., third-person singular. Your game can be called “My Brother, My Sister, My Mother, My Father.” Place a verb or verb phrase on each space of the game: “eats” ... “sleeps” ... “doesn’t pay attention to \_\_\_\_\_” ... “often tells \_\_\_\_\_” ... , etc. Each player responds to the prompt by saying something about a member of their family: “My father doesn’t pay attention to the news.”

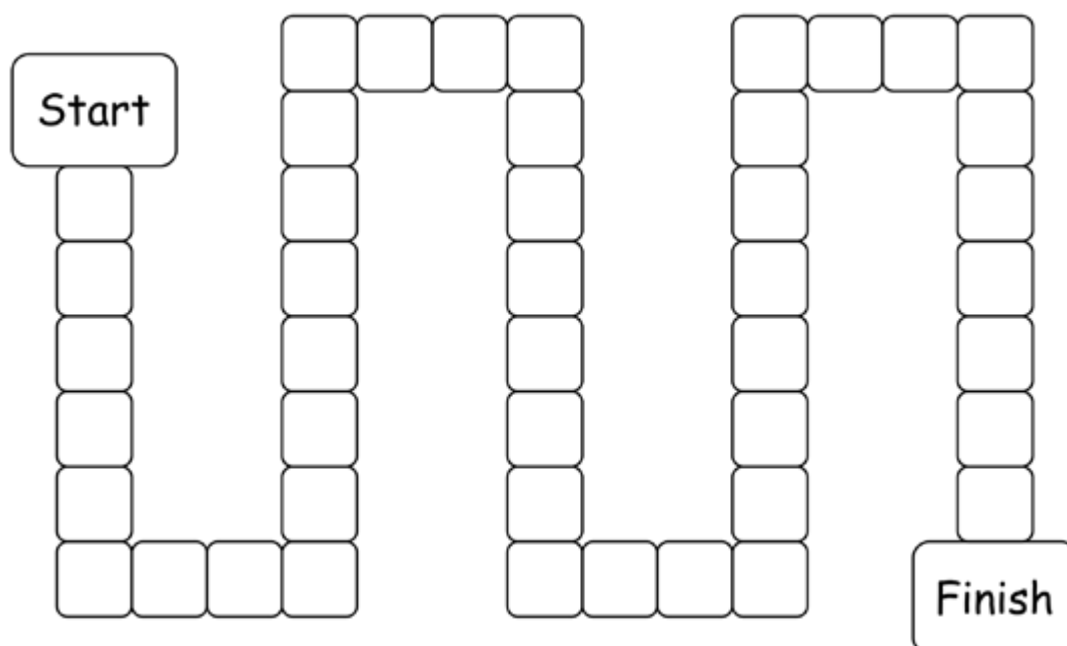


Figure 2. Blank game board with a trail pattern

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Or you can have a game called “Deep Questions” and fill the board with questions: “What makes you happy?” “Why do people make art?” “Can animals fall in love?” Of course, students can contribute their own questions to the game.

2. An easy extension to the “Should/ Shouldn’t” game is to make a class poem. After students have played, collect the best examples from the game. Students can vote on them. Put a dozen or so together in a list, and you will have a funny, wise poem.

3. Photograph the game that was created on your board, or otherwise save all the content that students have created. You can easily create a board game that can be printed and used in classes for years to come.

**Kevin McCaughey** spends much of his free time writing articles for *English Teaching Forum*, although he takes a long time to finish them. He has 12 articles in progress right now. He is nuts about games, accordions, phrasal verbs (which he calls party verbs), and cappuccinos.

Photos by Visola Asrorova