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Are you married or single? Do you have brothers and sisters?Are they older or younger than you? Do you like baseball? Do you live alone? Do you live in a house or an apartment? Have you ever lived in another country? Have you ever met a famous person? How long have you been studying English? How old are you? How tall are you? Tell me about a favorite event of your childhood. Tell me about a favorite event of your childhood. What are your hobbies? What two things could you not do when you were...? What countries have you visited? What country are you from? What do you do on Sundays? What do you do? What's your job? What do you like to do in your free time? What hobbies do you have? What is the nearest bus stop or train station to your house? What is your motto? What is your religion? (Perhaps not a good question in some situations.) What kind of food do you like? What kind of people do you not like? What languages do you speak? What two things could you not do when you were a child, but you can do now? What's something you do well? What's your address? What's your father like? What's your mother like? What's your name? What's your phone number? What's your telephone number? When did you start to study English? Where are you from? Where do you live? Where do you live? How long have you lived there? Where were you born? Which sports do you like? Who do you live with? Who do you respect the most? Who has had the most influence in your life? Why did you decide to take this course? Why do you want to learn English? Would you like to be famous? What do you think you will be doing five years from now?Where do you think you'll be living five years from now? What is your goal in life? Are you a 'morning' or 'night' person? When do you feel best? In the morning, afternoon, or evening? How many cities have you lived in? What jobs have you done? Which do you prefer, sunrises or sunsets? What could you do as a child that you can't do now? Who is your next door neighbor in your home country?What is he or she like?Did you get along with each other? What is the best memory of our country that you will take back home with you? What is the worst memory of our country? How many times did you move as a child? Are you a task oriented person or a people oriented person? What is the profile of the wife/husband you would meet?What kind of woman/man would you like to marry? If you can think of another good question for this list, please add it. of these questions come from textbooks Copyright © 1982-2000 by Charles Kelly & Lawrence Kelly (Used by Permission) Copyright © 1997-2010 by The Internet TESL Journal A Part of Conversation Questions for the ESL Classroom. Related: Plans, Goals, Dreams What does the future hold? What will the future be like? Who invented the very first computer? What is AI? What is the definition of a 'robot'? What is robotics? Where did the word 'robot' come from? Can robots tie shoes? Will robots take our jobs? How will the development of robots that think change your future? Imagine the job you wish to hold when you get older - could a robot be programmed to do that job as well as you? A film like The Matrix has explored the idea that we might be living in virtual reality. But what evidence is there for or against this hypothesis? And what are its implications? Do you know ISAAC ASIMOV? What did he do? Can you think of movies that have robots in them?Did you enjoy this movie? Do you think we create a new problem with each invention? Think of examples. Is there anything that does not yet exist that you would like to see invented? What is it? Where do you plan on going college? What type of job would you like to do in the future? How do you get that type of job? Will you make much money in that job? Do you want to get married? Do you know who you are marrying? What high school are you going to go to? How can we preserve the future for the next generation? How will computers change in the future? How will cellphones change in the future? How will transportation develop in future times? How old will people live to be in the future? What kind of developments might happen in health care in the future? Could there be another world war in the future? How can we prevent a world war from happening? Where do you plan on going in the future? Can fortune-tellers predict the future? Is it possible to know the future? Where do you hope to travel before you die? What do you hope to do in your life? How will technology change? Do you think life will be more difficult or easier for our grandchildren? In what ways? How do you think your country will change in the future? How will the United States and the world order change in the future? Do you think the future will be better or worse for your grandchildren? Do robots go to college? Would you marry a robot? Do you think that one day robots will serve as childcare providers? How would you feel if you child liked the robot better than he/she liked you? How will computers change in the future? Where do you plan on going in the future? How do you think your country will change in the future? How will the United States and the world order change? Do you think the future will be better or worse for your grandchildren? In what ways? How young will people live in the future? Would you want to live on another planet? Should the world solve all of it's problems before humans move into space? What is the future of money? What if you could program your children's genetics? Would you want to? What would you change? Do you believe animals can be preserved? Would you like to live in a city inside a building? Do you believe faster-than-light travel is possible? Do you know who will be your future husband? Do you think one day robots will serve as childcare providers? If we suddenly found out there were alien civilizations on other planets, would that change our world? How? If we could make molecule-sized robots, what could we do with them? What new kinds of energy might be used in the next 100 years? The next 1000 years? What will the human race look like in 1,000,000 years? If it were possible to read minds, would you want to? What will the cars of the future do? What will future houses look like? If you could live under the ocean, would you want to? Would you become half-robot if it meant living 1000 years? If you could fly on a rocket faster than light, and return to Earth in 1,000 years, would you do it? Will there be one global culture? If so, what will it look like? Would you like to live in cyberspace? What could you do there? How would it differ from life in reality? Do you think the Earth will become overpopulated? Will there be any forests left? Would you like to a robot in your house? Who should live on the moon? Should land on the moon be bought and sold? What will education be like in the future? Do you have an idea for an invention? Have you ever had a Deja Vu experience? Have you ever made cheesecake?Have you ever made Chinese food? Have you ever roasted a turkey?Have you ever baked bread? Have you ever met a celebrity? Have you ever played a joke on one of your teachers?How about one of your classmates? Have you ever played an instrument in public? Have you ever sung in public? Have you ever eaten baby talk? Copyright © 1997-2010 by The Internet TESL Journal A Part of Conversation Questions for the ESL Classroom. Have you ever appreciated a sunset?Were you alone or with someone special? Have you ever been a guest at a surprise party?Has anyone ever thrown a surprise party for you? Have you ever been in a fist fight? Have you ever been on TV? Have you ever been to a theatre? (Also spelling "theater.") Have you ever broken a bone? Have you ever broken up with someone? Have you ever called your boyfriend or girlfriend by the wrong name? Have you ever called your girlfriend/boyfriend "Honey?" Have you ever changed your appearance a lot in a short time? (For example, hair style, hair color or weight) Have you ever cheated on an exam? Have you ever cried in public and embarrassed yourself?Have you ever cried for no reason and felt good because of it? Have you ever dated someone from another race, culture or religion?Have you ever dated someone who didn't like you?Have you ever dated a relative by accident? Have you ever done something silly that you wish you had not done? Have you ever driven a sports car?Have you ever driven a truck? Have you ever eaten in a restaurant and realized you forgot your wallet? Have you ever eaten something that you thought you wouldn't like, but found out that you actually liked it? Have you ever eaten frog legs?Have you ever eaten horse meat?Have you ever eaten French food? (Substitute other countries' food, too.) Have you ever fallen asleep and forgotten where you were? Have you ever fallen asleep while taking a bath? Have you ever fallen down the stairs? Have you ever fallen in love at first sight? Have you ever fallen or stumbled in front of others. Have you ever forgotten your mother's birthday?Father's?Girlfriend's?Boyfriend's?Husband's?Wife's? Have you ever given a false excuse to get out of something you didn't want to do? If so, tell us about it. Have you ever given a ring (or other jewelry) to your girlfriend/boyfriend? Have you ever gone mountain climbing? Have you ever gone skiing? Have you ever gone surfing? Have you ever dreamt of a ghost being in your bedroom and then waking up and finding yourself looking around for the ghost? Have you ever gone to greet a friend or family member then noticed it was someone else? Have you ever gotten sunburnt at the tanning saloon and gone back the next day? Have you ever had a Deja Vu experience? Have you ever seen someone who has six fingers? Have you ever cook for more than 20 people? Have you ever traveled without paying for the ticket? Have you ever sung in public? Have you ever been outside your comfort zone? How did you feel? What is your comfort zone? Where do you feel the most comfortable? Have you ever made somebody cry? Have you ever seen your mother / your father cry? Have you ever fired a gun? Have you ever been inside a police car? Have you ever had to dial 911/111/119... (emergency services)? Have you ever fainted in a public place? Have you ever wondered why Asians can't speak English? Have you ever walked into a window because it was just that clean? Have you ever met someone who has six fingers? Have you ever walked into a lamppost? Have you ever wondered why some people want to be alone but never seem to be lonely? Why do you think this is so? Have you ever tried to eat food without first spitting out your chewing gum? Have you ever saved a piece of chewed chewing gum and started chewing it again later? Have you ever called a 'he' she or a 'she' a 'he?' What was the response? Have you ever called a women sir or a Man "ma'am?" Have you ever asked a woman when she was "due" and she wasn't even pregnant? If you can think of another good question for this list, please add it. Thanks to Erica Box who suggested this topic and contributed the first 17 questions in February 2002. Copyright © 1997-2010 by The Internet TESL Journal The Internet TESL Journal Stephan J. Franciosisteve.franciosi (at) gmail.comDoshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts (Kyoto, Japan) Teachers practicing task-based learning styles of instruction, especially those interested in making classroom activities more interesting for students, would benefit by taking a look at such activities through the lens of computer game design. Activities commonly used by ESL/EFL instructors are actually very similar to computer games in that both are goal-oriented and rule-driven processes designed to engage participants with challenges. While the respective purposes may seem different (for the teacher it is to educate, for the game designer it is to entertain), the ultimate effect is the same; students/players learn (improve their skill level) by doing (Squire and Jenkins 2004). Since the goal of a game designer is to create as appealing an experience as possible, and since most teachers would agree that an interesting classroom activity is desirable, I suggest that ESL/EFL instructors could benefit by being aware of some theoretical concepts in the field of game design.I devised the following as a simple checklist for evaluating or modifying classroom activities. The items are based on game design literature, in particular Koster's (2005) list of features shared by historically popular games (120), and Salen and Zimmerman's (2004) discussion on what motivates us to participate in game-like activities (337). They are also partially intended as a summary of the theory (readers interested in learning more about educational computer game applications online are referred to the blog links in the reference section). In order to illustrate the major concepts incorporated in the questions, I will show how a commonly used classroom activity, the cloze task, could and should be more like computer games by showing the computergame application of each item, elaborating on the theory behind it, and discussing the application for classroom activities. An important characteristic of computer games, and arcade games in particular, is that they are all very easy to begin with. The controls are basic, with a single joystick and maybe one or two buttons. The goals are clear, and the actions taken to achieve the goals (jump, shoot, and run) are relatively few and evident. The zombies, demons, or mushroom-people that your avatar must initially face are few and easily defeated. Arcade games especially are intentionally designed this way to entice players, and get them to deposit that first coin. Players put their first coin in because they perceive the goals of the game to be achievable, and this first impression also helps to keep them at the console dropping in more coins. A classroom activity with the same ability to motivate students at the outset would be desirable. Both games and classroom activities involve goals and actions undertaken to achieve the goals, but there is an important difference between teachers and game designers with regard to how goals and actions are treated. Whereas teachers may lump goals and actions together under the label of "task" (where "task" implies the challenging aspect of an activity), game designers would regard goals and actions as the "core mechanic," making a clear distinction from the "challenges." One reason for treating the core mechanic and challenges separately is that doing so allows for a more elegant design of challenges (see the next section). Another reason is that it allows for a relatively clear and accessible core mechanic, so novices can more easily approach an activity. The core mechanic of a cloze activity is relatively clear, but some attention may need to be given to its achievability, especially at the outset. The core mechanic is clear because the goal (completing a sample text) and actions undertaken to achieve it (filling in blanks with missing words or phrases) are concrete, quantifiable and intuitive. Removing the challenges from the core mechanic may entail using grammar and vocabulary slightly below the level of targeted students, limiting the number of cloze items, providing a list of answers, and so on. The point is to start with a cloze activity that students could complete without much difficulty. However, this is not to suggest that the entire activity should be easy, only that an activity that begins at as simple a level as possible has more potential to entice students in. Challenges are worked in later to keep participants engaged. The standard design for computer games resembles a flight of stairs. There is a series of short-term goals (e.g., a number of slow-moving zombies to vanquish in order to get through the courtyard to the keep) interweaving "higher order" goals (powerful demon guarding the gate of the keep). And of course, once you are in the keep, there will be more fleet-footed zombies in the lower levels that you must overcome in order to get to the next gate, where there will be an even more powerful demon waiting for you. The purpose of this hierarchy of goals is to keep players dropping coins in the machine by providing them with a sense of progress and/or accomplishment. However, this structure also serves to facilitate learning by keeping players working at overcoming challenges long enough to increase their skill level. A classroom activity with the same ability to entice learners through their skill acquisition experience would be desirable. An activity which have a range of challenges (obstacles that must be overcome in order to achieve goals) that are integrated (share a salient feature) and that become incrementally more difficult. Challenges are integrated so that aptitude at overcoming them will increase through practice in the course of an activity. Challenges are incrementally more difficult, and ideally, the level of difficulty of the challenges increases in tandem with the skill level of participants. The reason is that if the challenges become too easy too quickly, then the activity becomes boring, but conversely a sudden increase in the level of difficulty will frustrate participants. Either boredom or frustration harms interest in an activity. There are several ways to incorporate a range of integrated and incremental challenges in a cloze activity. One way would be to use a single sample text with multiple cloze items, each constituting a separate challenge. The challenges could easily be integrated by focusing on either structural categories such as nouns, verbs, prepositional phrases, etc., or topic-related vocabulary, rather than selecting cloze items at random. The items could be made incrementally more difficult by delving into the discourse of the text to ensure, by purely linguistic criteria, that earlier items are easier than later items. However, I have found it simpler to work with higher orders of challenges in that, rather than using one long cloze passage, I have students complete shorter, increasingly challenging passages in a series of "rounds." Each passage in a round constitutes a challenge on a higher order than an individual cloze item. The passages are easily made incrementally more difficult in a variety of ways that are clear to participants and manageable for teachers, such as imposing an increasingly shorter time limit for completion, creating a greater number of cloze items. Numerous parameters could be manipulated, but there is also an important principle to keep in mind when tweaking difficulty levels.Maintaining a proper challenge/skill balance is relatively easy with competitive games that pit the skill of one competitor (group or individual) against another (e.g., having participants race against each other to complete cloze passages). Assuming that competitors are evenly matched at the outset, their respective skill levels will increase at about the same rate, thus the challenge (to beat the other competitor) will always be roughly appropriate for the skill level. Cooperative tasks, on the other hand, are trickier because the rate of skill-increase has to be anticipated and built into the task. I have found it useful to build in a mechanism whereby the difficulty level can be adjusted mid-task. For example, in a series of cloze rounds, teachers might want to prepare 10 cloze passages with small increases in difficulty. If students start to look bored by, say, the third round, a teacher could then skip ahead to round five or higher, depending on the perceived level of boredom (or frustration). Computer games typically offer an environment rich in meaningful choices. Behind each closed door, an enemy could be waiting in ambush, or a power-up potion could offer extended life. A mushroom-person could be jumped over and passed, or it could be knocked off the parapet with the skillful toss of a red ball. Open the door, or not? Which skill to apply and when? These choices give players a stake in the game by making them responsible for either success or failure. These choices may also facilitate computer addiction, which some may decry, but who would argue against an addicting classroom activity where it might help solve the indelible issue of student motivation? Participants in an activity should not be able to rely on a single "trump" skill to overcome every challenge presented to them. Rather, participation should entail strategic decision-making that ultimately determines an outcome. A choice-rich environment is more interesting than a straight-up test of a single skill because decision-making enhances the perception of control over the outcome. Another reason, which applies to group work in particular, is that a choice-rich environment increases opportunity for participation. For example, if English aptitude were all that was required to successfully complete a cloze challenge, then students working in pairs or groups would have a very strong incentive to over-rely on the member with the highest level of English aptitude. However, if a pair or group were required to call on a range of skills, and further required to make strategic decisions as to which skill to employ at various points in the activity, then there would be more chances for all members to contribute. There are a variety of ways to create decision-making opportunities in a classroom activity. In our series of cloze rounds example, the cloze answers could be provided on cards in a deck. Students could opt to draw cards from the deck during the activity with a point or time penalty. Another technique would be to provide each group or individual working on the activity a hand of cards, and allowing them to draw cards or negotiate swaps with other participants. This could happen during the activity, or card negotiation/swap/draw sessions could be conducted before each round. Another way of creating choices in the context of a time limit is to allow students to "buy" time off the clock before the rounds begin. They could be allowed to trade seconds for points, so that the more seconds they get the fewer points a completed task is worth. In short, just about any parameter for determining the difficulty of a particular challenge can be worked into a mechanism for creating meaningful choices for students to manipulate. It is important that the choices are perceived as clear and achievableRelated challenges that gradually become more difficultMeaningful choices for participantsAn uncertain outcomeThe concepts introduced here can be used on any activity that is goal-oriented and rule-driven. Being aware of them could, I hope, result in an easy modification somewhere which could, in turn, result in a more interesting activity. Koster, Ralph (2005). A Theory of Fun for Game Design. Scottsdale AZ: Paraglyph Press. Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E. (2004). Rules of Play. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press. Squire, K. & Jenkins, H. (2004). Harnessing the power of Games in Education. Insight (3)1, 5-33. The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. XVI, No. 2, February 2010 A Part of Conversation Questions for the ESL Classroom. Are there any famous stories of friendship in your culture? Can you describe one of your closest friends. Do you have any childhood friendships that are still strong today? Tell us about them. Do you have any best friends?How do you keep in touch with your long-distance friends?How often do you see your long-distance friends? Do you think it a good idea to borrow money from a friend? Why or why not? Do you have friends easily? Has a friend ever let you down? Have you made any friends over the Internet?How often do you write to them?Have you ever met them in person? How are your friendships different now than they were when you were a child? How do you maintain a good friendship? How do you make new friends? How many people do you consider your "best friends?" Is it common to have friendships across generations?What are the advantages and disadvantages of these types of friendships.Do you have any friends from a different generation than you? There is a saying "To have a good friend, you need to be a good friend."How can you be a good friend? What do you usually do with your friends? What factors may result in the breakdown of a good friendship? What is a best friend? What is the longest friendship that you have had? What makes friends different from family? What qualities do you think are important in a friend? What things should friends never do? Why do you like your best friend?What are some things you like about your best friend? Where is a good place to meet new friends?Where is a good place to meet a new boyfriend/girlfriend? Do you think it is possible to have a best friend of the opposite sex without becoming a girlfriend or boyfriend? Do you think it would be possible for you still be friends with an ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend? There is a proverb that says, "A friend in need is a friend indeed." Do you agree? Do you believe that there is an end to any true friendships? Do you believe your parents should be your friends? What do you do if you receive a friend's call but you forgot his/her name? Friendship is the most important relationship. Do you agree? Why? Why not? What do you like best about your best friends? What are some ways your best friend has influenced your life in a positive way? How close do you get to your friends? Why do you need a friend? What do you do when you have a misunderstanding with your friend? Do you trust all of your friends? Why? What is the best time for making new friends? What was your best friendship? Are you still friends with him or her?What life lessons did you learn from this relationship? What qualities do you appreciate in your friends? What makes someone special or best friend? Why are friendships important for you? Do you still maintain friendships from the past? How long have you known your best friend? Where did you meet and what did you have in common? What are some good opportunities to meet new people? How can you get to better know a person? What is the relationship between love and friendship? Who is the most interesting person you have ever met? Do you think famous people are happier than ordinary people? Why? What type of people do you get along with best? What quality do you admire most in people and which one do you find the most objectionable? What behavior of others hurts you most? Have you been upset someone by your actions, what do you try to do? What do you consider to be your good and bad qualities? What qualities help you to have good relationships with others? What traits or actions make an interpersonal conflict worse? Are relationships among people better or worse than a few years ago? Why? Give some examples. Do you think that dysfunctional family life contributes to worsening relationships in society? Is getting along with others a natural ability from birth or does it have to be learnt? How important is forgiveness in human relationships? What are friends for? Can you be friends with your student if you are a teacher? To what extent can you be friends with your child? What was your best friendship? Are you still friends with him or her? What life lessons did you learn from this relationship? Do you tell your best friend everything? Do you have a close group of friends? What is it easy for you to make friends? Talk about friends you've made in this country. Are you good friends with your family members? Do you fight with your friends? How often do you talk with your friends? What is the difference between friendship and 'kinship' (blood relatives)? Do you have different groups of friends who never meet one another? *Are you a different 'self' with each group? * Do you think groups would get along if you introduced them to one another? * Would you want these friends to mix,or do you get something different from each set of relationships? There is a saying that "to lose a friend you need to start sharing a flat with him/her". Do you agree? Why/Why not? What would you do if your best friend, that never betrayed you and you thought your relationship to be brother/sister asked you out on a date? Do you think you can find eternal friendships through the internet? What is your best friend like? If you can think of another good question for this list, please add it. to Suzanne Rowe for suggesting this topic and submitting the initial set of questions. Copyright © 1997-2010 by The Internet TESL Journal