



Barrier Games

Barrier Games are a useful tool to support student's expressive (speaking) and receptive (understanding) language development. Barrier Games involve two people sitting so they are unable to view each other's work. In a barrier game, the players work together - giving, receiving and responding to verbal instructions to complete a task. This is similar to popular games such as "Battleship" and "Guess Who?".

Keywords: *barrier games, expressive language, receptive language, comprehension, listening*

Benefits of Barrier Games

Barrier games can be used to enhance skills in:

- Comprehending and expressing basic concepts.
- Improving listening abilities, including paying attention to directions and details.
- Using a range of descriptive words such as adjectives, adverbs and prepositions.
- Giving explicit information to a listener (i.e. let them know what they need to know in a situation) and improve unclear messages.
- Asking questions to clarify or gain more information (Paul, 2007; McLaughlin, 2006).

How to play a barrier game?

1. To begin, two players sit across from each other with a barrier such as a book, folder or easel between them. Each player has a copy of the same scenes, resources and/or objects.
2. One player sets a scene using their resources, this may be a drawing or a scenario using tangible objects. Ideas for barrier game topics are outlined below under *Barrier Game Ideas*.
3. The player who developed the scene then gives verbal directions to help the other player to set up their scene exactly the same. Players may take turns in asking questions to build their scene. It is best to model the language to be used, for example, *at the bottom of the page...; to the right of...; put the X on top of the...;* placing emphasis on the target word. For example, if targeting the preposition *under*, say, "Put the pig **under** the chair".
4. At the end of the game, remove the barrier and check whether your scenes look the same. Talk about the objects that are in the right place and discuss what went wrong.

Tips and Suggestions for Playing Barrier Games

- Teach students good listening and understanding strategies, such as looking at the speaker, chunking information, visualising, and asking for help. Some students may respond well to visual prompts such as checklists or posters to do this.



- Provide models of the language to be used, focusing on the language concepts being targeted.
- Increase the number of steps to increase the difficulty level of questions. For example, draw a circle → draw a circle, then put a dot in the centre.
- Increase the number of information carrying words to increase the difficulty level of questions (e.g. “draw a circle” → “draw a big, yellow circle”). Similarly, reduce the number of information carrying words to simplify instructions.
- Have students work in teams to provide an opportunity to practice social skills.
- Develop a story about the scene and the people or characters in it to work on narrative skills.
- Practice using new sentence structures and vocabulary.

Barrier Game Ideas

- Dress Ups - have two copies of the same person or character and two identical sets of clothes and accessories. One person dresses the person or character and describes its attributes to the student. Students then compare the similarities and differences between the pictures. Mr. Potato Head® is another way to adapt this task.
- Dream Home - one person draws a picture of their dream home and describes it. The other listens to the directions and attempts to draw the same picture on his/her page. Switch roles after each turn. This activity can be adapted to include different themes such as a vegetable patch or day at the beach. Colouring book pictures are an effective way to modify this activity.
- Path Finder - for older students, get some simple maps and have the student draw a path from one location to another and then give directions to the other students.
- Online resources - a number of free, downloadable barrier game resources are available online. A range of themes are available and can be used to target many different skills.

Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

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