

50 REVIEW GAMES GAME 16

Sign Detective

Find the error, explain the fix

Sign Detective turns students into language detectives. You sign an example containing one deliberate mistake; they watch closely, name what went wrong, explain why, and demonstrate the correct form. It trains the kind of careful looking that receptive ASL depends on.

TIME NEEDED

15–25 minutes

GROUP SIZE

Pairs, groups, or whole class

GRADE LEVELS

Middle, High, College

01 Purpose & Objective

Review vocabulary, grammar, and signing accuracy by identifying and correcting common ASL errors. Spotting a mistake requires knowing the correct form well enough to notice its absence, which is a step beyond simply producing the sign.

Students identify signing errors, explain why they are incorrect, and demonstrate the correct form.

02 Materials & Skills

Materials

- Teacher-prepared signed examples, live or on video
- Detective clue sheets (optional)
- Whiteboard (optional)

ASL Skills Practiced

- Receptive ASL
- Expressive ASL
- Vocabulary recall
- Grammar
- Observation skills

03 Setup

1. **Prepare ten to fifteen signed examples.** Each should contain exactly one intentional error, drawn from the cases on the next page.
2. **Review the detective mission with students.** They are looking for what is wrong, why it is wrong, and what the correct version looks like – all three.
3. **Set the tone for respectful discussion.** The signer in the example is you, not a classmate, and the point is observation rather than correction of each other.

Before You Start

Sign each example correctly first, then again with the error. Students who have just seen the right version notice the difference; students who have not are only guessing at which detail changed.

04 Detective Cases

Ten error types to build examples from. The first five are the parameters of an individual sign; the next four move up to grammar and discourse.

THE FIVE PARAMETERS OF A SIGN

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Incorrect handshape | 2 Wrong movement |
| 3 Incorrect location | 4 Missing facial expression |
| 5 Incorrect palm orientation | |

GRAMMAR AND STRUCTURE

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 6 Wrong ASL word order | 7 Incorrect classifier |
| 8 Missing role shift | 9 Incorrect vocabulary choice |

THE HARD ONE

- 10 Multiple errors — find them all

Working Through the Parameters

Cases one through five are the five building blocks every sign is made of. Running them in order gives students a checklist they can carry into any example: handshape, movement, location, expression, orientation.

05 Directions

1. Present one signed example.
2. **Students observe quietly before responding.** A few seconds of silence keeps the fastest hand from ending everyone else's thinking.
3. Ask students to identify the error.
4. They explain why it is incorrect and demonstrate the correct version.
5. Discuss the answer as a class before moving to the next case.

Challenge Mode

Present a short signed story containing three to five intentional errors. Teams compete to find every one and explain each correction. Tell them how many errors are hidden — the hunt is sharper when they know when to stop.

06 Variations

Beginning

Focus on simple vocabulary errors.

Intermediate

Include sentence structure and non-manual markers.

Advanced

Students create detective cases for classmates to solve.

07 Assessment Ideas

Observe students for:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Receptive accuracy | ☐ Grammar awareness |
| ☐ Ability to explain a correction | ☐ Attention to detail |
| ☐ Quality of the corrected demonstration | ☐ Participation and respectful discussion |

Naming the error is the easy half. The student who can explain why it changes the meaning, and then sign it correctly, is the one who has really understood the case.

Paul's Best Practice

Remind students that everyone makes mistakes when learning a language. The goal is not to criticize a signer but to become sharper observers and clearer communicators. Keep the errors yours, and keep the discussion about the sign rather than the person.

We are not grading the signer. We are learning to see.

Why It Works

Students sharpen receptive skills by looking past the vocabulary to the details that make ASL clear and accurate. Most learners watch for the word and stop there; this game forces attention onto handshape, movement, location, expression, and orientation — the things that separate a sign that is recognizable from a sign that is correct. Explaining the fix out loud does the rest, because a student who can articulate why something is wrong has moved from imitation to understanding.

Quick Tips

- ✓ Start with one error per example and add more only as students improve.
- ✓ Sign the correct version afterward so the last thing they see is right.
- ✓ Let students take turns as the detective leader.
- ✓ Keep a running list of errors the class misses most often.
- ✓ Vary which parameter you break so no one learns to watch just the hands.

Continue Exploring

Next in the collection:

▶ **Game #17: Team Challenge**

▶ **Game #18: Guess My Word**

▶ **Game #19: Alphabet Race**

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Extend the Activity

Have students build detective cases for each other. Deliberately producing a wrong handshape or dropping a role shift means knowing precisely what the correct version requires — it is a harder task than solving the case, and it shows you exactly who has mastered the parameter.