

50 REVIEW GAMES GAME 19

Alphabet Race

Spell it, sign it, use it

Alphabet Race is a fast-paced game that builds fingerspelling speed, receptive accuracy, and vocabulary recall. You call a letter; students find a word, fingerspell it, produce the sign, and put it in a sentence. Three skills that are usually practiced separately get connected in a single turn.

TIME NEEDED

15–20 minutes

GROUP SIZE

Pairs, groups, or whole class

GRADE LEVELS

Middle, High, College

01 Purpose & Objective

Strengthen fingerspelling, vocabulary recall, and quick thinking through an alphabet challenge. The pressure of the clock is what makes it work — students have to retrieve vocabulary at conversational speed rather than at study speed.

Students quickly recall, fingerspell, and sign vocabulary associated with assigned letters.

02 Materials & Skills

Materials

- Timer
- Alphabet cards (optional)
- Whiteboard for scoring (optional)

ASL Skills Practiced

- Fingerspelling
- Expressive ASL
- Receptive ASL
- Vocabulary recall

03 Setup

1. **Divide students into pairs or teams.** Teams let students coach each other between letters, which is where a lot of the review happens.
2. **Choose a vocabulary unit, or open it up to everything learned so far.** A narrower category is harder and sharper; an open field is friendlier for a first round.
3. **Set a timer for each round.** Keep it visible — the countdown is most of the energy in this game.

Before You Start

Skip the letters that stall a whole class. J, Q, X, and Z rarely start vocabulary students know, and a dead round costs more momentum than the letter is worth. Save them for a bonus challenge instead.

04 Sample Race Categories

Six rounds to start with. Announce the category, then call letters within it.

ROUND 1

Animals

ROUND 2

Food

ROUND 3

School

ROUND 4

Emotions

ROUND 5

Transportation

ROUND 6

Family

05 Directions

1. The teacher announces a letter — M, for example.
2. Students think of a vocabulary word beginning with that letter.
3. They fingerspell the word, then produce the correct ASL sign.
4. They explain it or use it in a complete ASL sentence.
5. Continue with additional letters until time expires.

06 Scoring

Each turn is worth up to four points. Scoring the parts separately shows students that a fast guess with sloppy fingerspelling is not the same as a complete turn.

Correct vocabulary

The word genuinely starts with the letter and fits the category.

1 POINT

Accurate fingerspelling

Handshapes are clear and readable at normal speed.

1 POINT

Correct ASL sign

The sign is produced accurately, not approximated.

1 POINT

Natural sentence

The word is used in a complete ASL sentence.

+1 BONUS

Challenge Mode

Assign a category and a letter at the same time — Animals and B — and require a response before the timer ends. Two constraints at once is a real jump in difficulty, so save it for a class that is already scoring well.

07 Variations

Beginning

Work from a lesson vocabulary list.

Intermediate

Require a complete ASL sentence every turn.

Advanced

Two different vocabulary words for each letter.

08 Assessment Ideas

Observe students for:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Fingerspelling accuracy | ☐ Sign production |
| ☐ Vocabulary recall | ☐ Fluency under time pressure |
| ☐ Readability at speed | ☐ Participation and coaching |

Fingerspelling is the easiest thing on this list to fake at speed. Watch the handshapes rather than the rhythm – a student moving quickly is not necessarily a student spelling clearly.

Paul's Best Practice

Celebrate accuracy before speed. Fast fingerspelling is valuable, but clear and readable fingerspelling is what builds strong communicators. A student who spells slowly and correctly is further along than one who blurs through it and cannot be read.

Speed is worth nothing if nobody can read it.

Why It Works

Students repeatedly connect fingerspelling, vocabulary, and expressive signing, so all three develop together rather than in isolation. That connection is the real value here: fingerspelling drilled on its own tends to stay a separate skill, while spelling a word and immediately signing it teaches students to move between the two the way fluent signers actually do. The pace also mirrors conversation, where vocabulary has to arrive when it is needed rather than when there is time to think.

Quick Tips

- ✓ Rotate categories often to keep the vocabulary pool fresh.
- ✓ Mix current and previous lessons in the same round.
- ✓ Encourage teammates to coach one another between letters.
- ✓ Call letters out of order so no one can prepare the next one.
- ✓ Ask for a repeat when fingerspelling was too fast to read.

Continue Exploring

Next in the collection:

- ▶ **Game #20: Sign Simon Says**
- ▶ **Game #21: Category Challenge**
- ▶ **Game #22: Conversation Cards**

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Extend the Activity

Run a round in reverse: you fingerspell a word and students race to produce the sign and its meaning. It turns the same game into receptive practice, which is the harder half of fingerspelling and the one students get less of.