

50 REVIEW GAMES GAME 21

Category Challenge

Vocabulary that lives in groups

Category Challenge helps students organize vocabulary by meaning rather than memorizing isolated signs. A category is announced, students take turns signing words that belong in it, and each answer has to be justified — so the game is as much about why a word fits as which word comes to mind.

TIME NEEDED

15–25 minutes

GROUP SIZE

Pairs, groups, or whole class

GRADE LEVELS

Middle, High, College

01

Purpose & Objective

Review vocabulary by organizing signs into meaningful categories while strengthening expressive and receptive ASL. Vocabulary stored in groups is far easier to retrieve than vocabulary stored as a list, which is why this game pays off well beyond the round it is played in.

Students correctly identify, sort, and explain vocabulary using categories.

02 Materials & Skills

Materials

- Category cards — see the set on the next page
- Timer
- Vocabulary cards (optional)

ASL Skills Practiced

- Expressive ASL
- Receptive ASL
- Vocabulary recall
- Categorization
- Critical thinking

03 Setup

1. **Prepare your category cards.** Print the next page and cut along the rows, or write categories on index cards.
2. **Review vocabulary from current and previous lessons.** A quick warm-up puts recent words within reach before the clock starts.
3. **Divide students into teams or pairs.** Teams work well here, since students hear each other's answers and the category fills up faster than any one student could manage.

Before You Start

Decide in advance how you will rule on a borderline answer. Is a TOMATO food or a plant? Is a NURSE an occupation or a hospital word? Saying “defend it and it counts” turns every argument into extra ASL practice instead of a stoppage.

04 Suggested Categories

Twelve categories to start with. Print and cut, then add your own as units go by.

Animals	Food	Family	School
Clothing	Transportation	Sports	Weather
Emotions	Occupations	Colors	Daily Routine

ALSO SEE

These categories double as the Level 1 clues in **Game #14: Vocabulary Pyramid** and as vocabulary sets for **Game #13: Hot Seat**.

05 Sample Challenges

Vary the task, not just the category. Each of these asks students to use the category differently.

- 1 Name five foods.
- 2 Sign four transportation words.
- 3 Which category does HOSPITAL belong to?
- 4 Find the sign that does NOT belong.
- 5 Build a sentence using three words from one category.
- 6 Invent a new category and challenge another team.

06 Directions

1. Draw or display a category.
2. Students take turns signing vocabulary that belongs in it.
3. No repeated answers are allowed.
4. After each response, the student explains why the vocabulary fits.
5. Play continues until no answers remain or time expires.

Challenge Mode

Combine two categories — Food and Colors, or Transportation and Weather — and have students build a short ASL story using vocabulary from both. The overlap is where the interesting sentences live.

07 Variations

Beginning

Picture cards and familiar vocabulary.

Intermediate

Complete ASL sentences with every answer.

Advanced

Defend why a word could fit more than one category.

08 Assessment Ideas

Observe students for:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Vocabulary accuracy | ☐ Quality of the explanation |
| ☐ Organization of ideas | ☐ Receptive understanding |
| ☐ Communication with teammates | ☐ Participation across the round |

The interesting answers are the borderline ones. A student who argues that RAINCOAT belongs in both Clothing and Weather is showing you a stronger grasp of the vocabulary than one who plays it safe.

Paul's Best Practice

Ask students to explain why a sign belongs in a category. The explanation reveals a depth of understanding that naming the vocabulary never will, and it turns a recall game into a reasoning one without changing a single rule.

Naming the word shows they remember it. Explaining the fit shows they understand it.

Why It Works

Grouping vocabulary into meaningful categories strengthens long-term memory and helps students retrieve signs more naturally in conversation. Isolated vocabulary has only one path back to it; a word that sits inside a category can be reached from the category, from a neighboring word, or from the situation it belongs to. That is why students who learn in groups stop hunting for words mid-sentence, and it is the quiet reason this simple game earns its place.

Quick Tips

- ✓ Reuse the same categories throughout the year and watch the lists grow.
- ✓ Let students invent new categories once they know the format.
- ✓ Encourage teamwork and discussion rather than racing.
- ✓ Keep a class list for each category on the wall.
- ✓ Accept a borderline answer if the student can defend it in ASL.

Continue Exploring

Next in the collection:

▶ **Game #22: Conversation Cards**

▶ **Game #23: ASL Pictionary**

▶ **Game #24: Silent Telephone**

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Extend the Activity

Run the game backwards: sign four vocabulary words and have students name the category that holds them, then find a fifth. Working from the members to the group is harder than the other direction, and it is the thinking students use when they meet an unfamiliar sign in conversation.