

50 REVIEW GAMES GAME 24

Silent Telephone

Watch once, pass it on

Silent Telephone turns the classic game into receptive ASL practice. A signed message travels down a line of students one pass at a time, and the last version gets compared with the original. What changed along the way is the lesson — and it is always the detail somebody stopped watching for.

TIME NEEDED

15–20 minutes

GROUP SIZE

Teams of 5–10, or whole class

GRADE LEVELS

Middle, High, College

01 Purpose & Objective

Strengthen receptive skills, visual attention, memory, and accurate ASL production. Each student is a receiver and a producer within seconds of each other, so a gap in either one shows up immediately in the next pass.

Students accurately receive and relay signed information while maintaining the meaning of the message.

02 Materials & Skills

Materials

- Prepared ASL sentences or short stories
- Timer (optional)

ASL Skills Practiced

- Receptive ASL
- Expressive ASL
- Memory
- Sequencing
- Non-manual markers

03 Setup

1. **Divide students into lines or small groups.** Five to ten per line is the sweet spot — long enough for the message to drift, short enough that everyone stays engaged.
2. **Sign the message to the first student only.** Once or twice, depending on length. Everyone else should be facing away.
3. **Pass the message student to student in ASL only.** No voice, no fingerspelling shortcuts, and no second viewing once a student has signed it on.

Before You Start

Arrange the line so waiting students genuinely cannot see the pass ahead of them. In a spoken telephone game a whisper protects the message; in a signed one, only body position does.

04 Sample ASL Messages

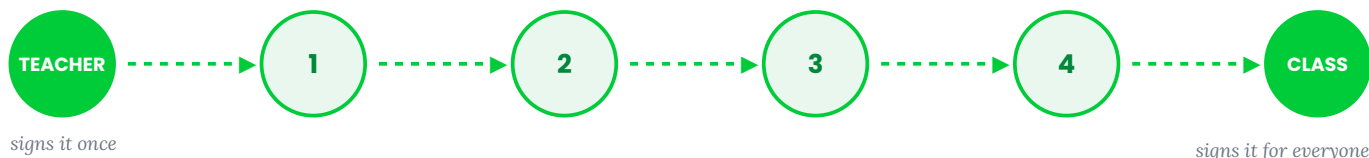
Ten messages to start with, written in ASL gloss. Sign them; do not read them aloud.

- 1 TOMORROW 9:00 MEETING SCHOOL.
- 2 YESTERDAY RAIN HEAVY CANCEL GAME.
- 3 SATURDAY FAMILY PICNIC PARK AFTERNOON.
- 4 DOG CHASE CAT TREE CLIMB.
- 5 NEXT-WEEK FRIEND VISIT MY-HOUSE DINNER.
- 6 BIRTHDAY PARTY FRIDAY 7:00 BRING PIZZA.
- 7 STORE GO BUY MILK BREAD APPLES.
- 8 SUMMER VACATION BEACH SWIM EVERY-DAY.
- 9 TEACHER GIVE HOMEWORK FINISH MONDAY.
- 10 LIBRARY NEW BOOK INTERESTING CHECK-OUT.

ALSO SEE

These are written in ASL gloss — the sentence as it is signed rather than as English would order it. The Level 3 clues in **Game #14: Vocabulary Pyramid** use the same convention.

05 Directions



1. The teacher signs the message to the first student only.
2. Each student signs the message once to the next classmate.
3. The last student signs the message for the whole class.
4. Compare the final version with the original and discuss what changed.
5. Repeat with a new message.

Challenge Mode

Allow the original message to be viewed only once. Award bonus points when the meaning survives even if the wording shifts naturally – that is the outcome worth rewarding, not a word-perfect copy.

06 Variations

Beginning

Short vocabulary phrases.

Intermediate

Complete ASL sentences.

Advanced

Short narratives with classifiers, role shift, and sequencing.

07 Assessment Ideas

Observe students for:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Receptive accuracy | ☐ Non-manual markers carried forward |
| ☐ Message retention | ☐ Sequencing of events |
| ☐ Sign production | ☐ Team communication |

Watch where the message breaks, not just how far it drifted. The pass that dropped the time marker or lost the classifier tells you precisely which feature that student is not yet reading.

Paul's Best Practice

Focus the discussion on preserving meaning rather than producing a perfect copy. Natural language allows for variation, and a student who signs the same idea with different word choices has not made an error — the message only fails when the meaning does.

The question is not whether it matched. It is whether it still meant the same thing.

Why It Works

Students discover how easily information changes when details are missed, which makes the case for careful observation better than any instruction could. The comparison at the end is the real teaching moment: everyone can see exactly where the time marker vanished or the classifier flattened out, and nobody had to be told they were not watching closely. It also puts every student in both roles at once, which is how the language actually works outside a classroom.

Quick Tips

- ✓ Begin with short messages and add length as accuracy improves.
- ✓ Increase complexity over time — time markers, then classifiers, then narrative.
- ✓ Celebrate teamwork and clear communication over exact reproduction.
- ✓ Ask the middle students what they thought they saw.
- ✓ Run the same message twice with different lines and compare the drift.

Continue Exploring

Next in the collection:

▶ **Game #25: Vocabulary Bingo**

▶ **Game #26: Classifier Challenge**

▶ **Game #27: Build the Sentence**

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Extend the Activity

Write the final version and the original side by side on the board and have the class sign both. Naming the difference in ASL is harder than spotting it, and it turns a funny result into a genuine lesson about which features carry meaning.