

The Dice Book

Speaking and Writing Activities
for English Language Learners



Introduction and User's Guide

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Introduction

Overview

The Dice Book: Speaking and Writing Activities provides teachers with easy, low-tech activities to get students talking. There are 112 dice frames. The frames cover open-ended speaking topics (Chapters 1-2), grammar practice (Chapters 3-6), and vocabulary building (Chapters 7-8).

The dice frames in this book work best with intermediate and advanced students of English, either ESL or EFL. Many frames are even suitable for native English speakers in high school and college, particularly the frames on experience and critical thinking in Chapters 1 and 2.

Below is a sample of the dice frames you will see throughout this book:

1.14 Do you believe in _____?			
	space aliens		magic
	true love		miracles
	ghosts		climate change

Directions: Your roll will give you a topic. Say whether you believe that thing exists or not. Say why or how you know.

The Online “Dice Frames” Collection

A complete printable collection of all and only the frames is also available on Pro Lingua’s website. The frames in this collection, called “The Dice Frames,” are larger than those in the book and may be used in lieu of printing and handing out the entire page or writing the frame on the board. Go to: www.ProLinguaAssociates/TheDiceBook and click on The Dice Frames.

Using the Frames

To play, put students in groups. Each group has a die. Players take turns rolling the die and talking according to the prompt. For instance, a player rolls a 5 and says, “I don’t believe in miracles.” Other students may react to this with comments of their own, and a conversation is underway.

Adjusting the content of the frame is a major feature of this book. You can and should alter the content of dice frames to meet the needs of your teaching context and population. And you should do this even while you are playing. If you have lower-level learners, you will quickly see that the content of the frames can be adjusted to accommodate your students.

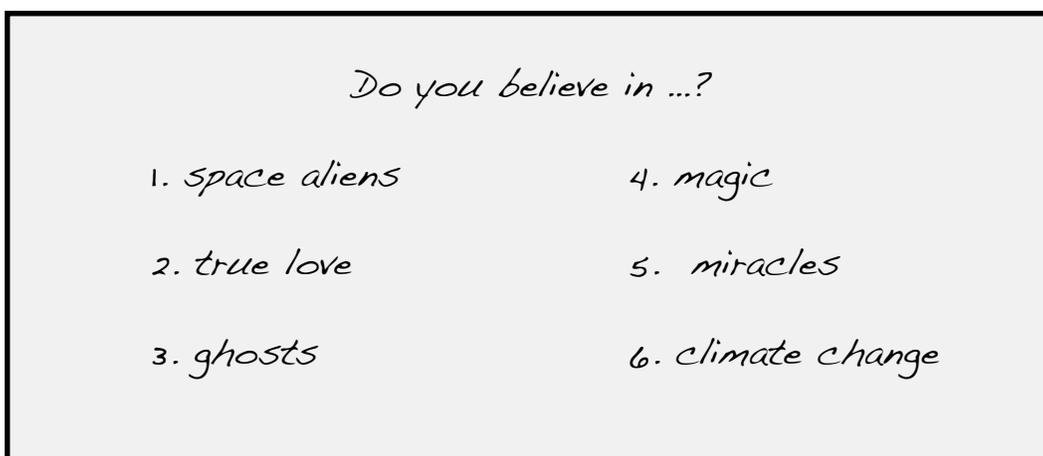
Managing the Activity

Small Classes

As the frames are copyable, the simplest way to manage the game is to give each group (or player) a copy of the frame’s page. You can walk them through the directions, examples, and models or the players can go over the directions, examples, and models together, perhaps with one player being “you.”

Large Classes

Do dice frames work in super large classes? Absolutely. They are a great way of getting student-centered action in an auditorium of 100 participants or a jammed high-school classroom of 60. You can draw the frame in simplified fashion on a board or flip chart:



With any activity that involves a large number of people working together

—in or outside the classroom—you have to exercise planning and care. Consider:

- 1. Flat playing surface.** Before play, ensure that each group has one flat surface on which to roll the die.
- 2. Plastic cups.** When students roll the die, it often bounds away, and there is a lot of chasing, scrambling, and disruption of play. With cheap plastic cups, each player shakes the cup with the die inside, and turns it upside down onto the surface. It's neat and efficient.
- 3. Noise.** Ah, a primal fear of many teachers! Will dice games be noisy? With a lot of students, yes, it will be noisy but you can train students to talk quietly. Assign a noise monitor. Give a handmade reward card to those who talk at a reasonable volume. You can circulate with your phone, too, using an app like “Too Noisy.” Such apps have meters that show noise level, and that works better than your shushing. Or you can have the players simply write their answers.

Why Dice?

Dice bring an element of chance and surprise to classroom learning. What the next roll brings, no one knows. Suddenly, what might have been considered an “exercise” is now a game. Which is why in this book I will often refer to activities as games and to participants as players. In addition to increased excitement and fun, the dice frames in this book have several pedagogical advantages.

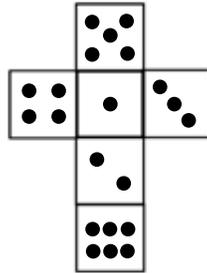
The Advantages of Dice Frames

- 1) Maximizing practice.** When students play in small groups, taking turns, they generate lots of speaking practice.
- 2) Scaffolding.** Students know how to respond after rolling their dice, because each dice frame supplies a structure, model, prompt or example—often all of these.
- 3) Personal interest.** The frames guide students to speak about themselves, to express opinions, to recall experiences, or to be creative.
- 4) No preparation.** You need virtually no preparation for these student-centered games. All you need to do is find a dice frame that fits the lesson, or choose one at random as a warm-up.
- 5) Short activities.** Dice games typically take five to fifteen minutes of class time. You can insert a dice game into every lesson or two. Use them often, but for a short amount of time. Their brevity and flexibility are great strengths of the game.
- 6) Less teacher-centered.** With *The Dice Book*, you can relax and take an interest in what students have to say, assessing student performance, altering the content when necessary, and bringing the activity to an end when it loses steam.

Alternatives to Dice

Dice are easy to find and not expensive. You can order them in bulk online, or find them at discount stores. But in case you don't have any dice, you can make them.

1. Make them from paper. A die is just a cube of six sides, so you can make it from paper. Just cut, fold, and tape, and you have a cube.



2. Scraps of paper are the simplest method of all. Instruct student groups to tear or cut six small pieces of paper of roughly the same size. Write the numbers 1-6 on them, and crumple them up. You are ready to go.

Die or Dice?

The word die is singular, and dice plural. That is how I use them in this book. However, I recognize that it's problematic. Die has unfortunate connotations. Besides, many, if not most, speakers today use dice to mean one or more dice. So, if you want to avoid confusion, you and your students can just use "dice" for singular and plural. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* agrees that dice may be used for either form.

The Frequency Frame

You can add the Frequency Frame to many of the games in the book. Students will be required to roll the die two times: once for the regular content and once for the frequency of the action. The Frequency Frame will evoke new and different responses from students. A full-page Frequency Frame is on page 113.

	always		sometimes
	often		hardly ever
	usually		never

Writing

Below are suggestions on ways to use dice frames for writing practice.

1. Individual writing. Students still play in groups. They can talk out their answers, but each has a piece of paper in front of them, and is also required to distill their answer into one written sentence. Sharing can be done after five minutes of play, or after students have reached the required number of sentences. After the game, each student will also have several potential topics for writing.

2. Group writing. One player will roll the die, but all members of the group will orally shape the answer together. One group member will write the response. After five to ten minutes of play, each group will have collectively made several sentences. At this stage, the whole class can compare with other groups. It can be fun to post all the group writings on the wall for a gallery walk.

3. Note taking. Each student in a group is required to take notes on what another says. For instance, if a group has four players, Player 1 rolls and speaks. Player 2 takes notes on what was said. When player 2 rolls and speaks, Player 3 takes notes. Thus, with each roll, one person speaks, and one writes. After all have played, note-takers use their notes to review the activity.

3. Texting. For classes where virtually all students have phones, texting provides a practical option for real-time written communication and feedback. Each group uses WhatsApp or a similar technology. Players take turns, as usual, responding to the roll of the die, but they type their responses into their phones and send them to the group as a message. This is a process that many students are familiar with and enjoy.

On Third-Person Pronouns

In this book, Pro Lingua Associates is offering our solution to the vexing *he/she* problem. We have come to the conclusion that when a third-person singular pronoun is needed, and that person is indefinite (and hence gender is unknown or unimportant), we will use the third-person plural forms *they, them, their, theirs*. We are aware that historically these forms represent grammatical plurality. However, there are clear instances in the English language where the third-person plural form is used to refer to a preceding indefinite, grammatically singular pronoun. Examples:

Everyone says this, don't they?

Nobody agrees with us, but we will ignore them.

If you will accept the examples, it is not a major step to finding the following acceptable:

"The user of this book should find this easier because they can avoid the confusion and awkwardness of he or she or he/she and the implicit sexism of using he for everybody."

Long ago, English dispensed with *thee, thou, thy, thine* and seems to be functioning quite well with two "*yous*," singular and plural. So why not two "*theys*?"

User's Guide

The following step-by-step instructions will help teachers manage dice games well.

Below is a dice frame called "Love is like" from Chapter 2.

2.5 Love is like

	a hospital		money
	a snake		a forest
	rain		the moon

Directions: Make a simile, comparing love and the thing determined by your roll of the die, and then elaborate. Use this frame:

Love is like _____ because ...
(noun from your roll)

Examples:

- A. "Love is like a hospital because it heals."
- B. "Love is like a snake because it's shiny, graceful, and beautiful, but then it disappears into the grass."
- C. "Love is like the rain because it comes from the sky, sometimes when you don't expect it."

Erase & Replace: a beach, a railroad track, a cherry pie, a tennis game, a ladder, a magnifying glass, a rope swing, a corkscrew, a post office, a gin and tonic, a painting by Dali, a cornfield, a snowman, a gingerbread house, an ice cream parlor, a game of checkers, a barber shop, a frying pan, a package of gum, a cloud, a cocktail hour, a Ferris wheel, a rowboat, a valley, a mountain range, a candle, a golf course, a margarita, a wall, a china cup, a TV show, a daffodil

Teacher note: You can play additional games by replacing the word *love* with concept words like *war*, *poetry*, *hunger*, *marriage*, *victory*, etc.

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The Dice Book: Open-Ended Speaking

By following these instructions you'll get the best results from the game. You'll ...

1. Hand out the dice frame or draw it on the board.

2. Go over the model, if there is one. The model is a kick-starter prompt or a gap-filled sentence that players can follow. It is the language scaffolding which allows them to focus on meaning rather than form.

3. **Go through the examples.** Going through the examples will ensure better content and language once the game is underway.
 - A) **Examples from the book.** You may verbally provide one or all of the three examples in the book. You may write one or more if you think it necessary.
 - B) **Teacher examples.** Next, try rolling the die. Make up, on the spot, an example of your own according to your roll.
 - C) **Student examples.** Now roll the die again, and ask for student responses. Student responses will give you a great idea of how well players understand the task and if it will work.
4. **Form groups and distribute dice and cups.** Now students understand how to play. Divide players into groups of 2-7. If you don't have dice, you'll need students to make them, or use an alternative, and this should happen before instructions and demonstrations. Plastic cups will bring control to rolling.
5. **Play.** Each player takes a turn rolling the die and speaking (or writing if you choose). If an interesting sentence turns into a conversation, or players get sidetracked, that's fine. Circulate around the room to listen actively, noting problems and errors. Sometimes two players roll the same number. The second player should say something different, even if the topic is the same.
6. **Erase & Replace.** This is the key to extending student practice and keeping things fun. After two or three minutes of playing time—or as soon as you see any sign that students are losing interest—start replacing topics in the dice frame. Replace them one at a time. It doesn't matter which one you change. Simply “erase” it and replace it.

If you use the handout, you can replace one topic with another by using a type of Post-It called “Note Flags,” writing the new topic on a flag that covers the old one. Some people call them “sticky notes.”

Changing topics within the dice frames while students are engaged in playing keeps the games fresh and extends student practice. Continue adding a new word every minute or two. This will keep the content of your dice frame interesting and unexpected. Note that the first words in Erase & Replace are the simplest. The more difficult ones can be found at the end of the lists.

7. **End the task.** A rule of thumb is that when one group's interest starts to flag, bring the activity to an end. How long will this be? Five to fifteen minutes usually. Keep activities short, but play often.

Now let's get rolling!

