Fun for all the family Article 1
22 Games to Practice Numbers

This series of articles is an attempt to look at games in the classroom in a completely different way, by giving games for language points that absolutely all kinds of students need and so not dividing them up by age or level. The idea behind this is:

● that this will free you up to brainstorm a similar broad range of activities for you're the classes and language points you need to prepare for

● it will help you bring a range of learning styles into classes where they are usually neglected, e.g. logic puzzles with younger students or physical activities with advanced adults

● it will illustrate how cross-fertilization of ideas across different areas of teaching and from outside teaching can be a great source of ideas

This first group of games cover every kind of number practice from counting from one to ten to estimating measurements, for all classes from 2 year olds to technical English and financial English classes in companies. They are more or less organised from the least complex to the most, but sometimes games that are more complex but similar asre put next to each other.

Tower of ten or more
Count with the student as they are building a tower out of blocks

one to TEN
As students count they go from whispering 1 to shouting the higher numbers louder and louder until they are screaming TEN or TWENTY at the top of their voices. They can then write or draw the numbers bigger and bigger in the same way

Growing numbers
Students crouch down huddled up into a ball. As they count from 1 to 10 they grow bigger and bigger until with 10 they are standing tall with their arms stretched up and shouting. They can then shrink back down to one or move to the position of random numbers shouted by the teacher.

Ten steps

The students all stand with their backs against the far wall. The teacher shows a flashcard with number of objects, a figure or a written number. The students can then take that number of steps. The first person to take the right number of steps each time and touch the opposite wall is the winner, but anyone taking more steps than are shown on the card has to go back to beginning. You can also nominate or pick a card to choose which group of students can go forward that number of steps, e.g. people wearing blue socks.

Ten blows
Alternatively, students can have that many tries to try and blow a flashcard across a table or along the floor. This can also be played by flapping a magazine to move the flashcard with the force of air instead of blowing.

Slap that number of chairs
The teacher holds up a flashcard with a picture or word of something in the classroom, and a number flashcard (either just after or at the same time). The students race to be the first to touch that many of that object in the classroom and sit down.

How many plastic apples?
The teacher grabs a whole bunch of things and gets students to guess how many apples, how many red things, how many different kinds of fruit they are holding. The whole class count together and check their answers.

How many is Wally?
Students search for how many pictures of a certain thing are shown in a very detailed picture, or in a whole textbook or textbook chapter, shout out the number and then maybe circle them or colour them in as quickly as possible.

A monster with 12 arms
Students take turns taking a card with a word written on it and a card with a number written on it, e.g. "Windows" and "Seven" or "Arms" and "Twelve". Either just their team or the whole class then have to draw that many things on their picture. Give points for the best pictures when the activity is finished.

Make the number

The teacher shouts out a number or shows a flashcard with that number written on it and teams of students race to be the first to make an image of that figure using their bodies on the floor, pencils lying on the table, playdoh, Lego blocks etc.

Ten times ten
Students have to chant each number the number of times of that number, e.g. starting with "One. Two two. Three three three. etc."

Challenge counting bids
Students bid for how many times they can bounce a ball, bounce a ball with one finger, say the whole alphabet in one minute etc, e.g. "I can bounce a ball on my nose 3 times" "I can bounce a ball on my nose 5 times" etc. The teacher takes the highest bid and the whole class counts as that student tries to do it as many times as they said they could. If they are correct, they get a point. If they can't reach that number, all the other students score a point.

Challenge counting betting bids
Same as Challenge Counting Bids, but when the final bid has been made the other students bet on whether they think the person can really do it or not. Award 5 points to the student if they are successful, and one point to anyone who bet that they could do it.

Choose your score now
With a game like "Ten steps" above, students look as the teacher is shuffling through a pack of number cards facing towards them and shout "Stop" when they see a high number that they want. That student or team then scores that many points. This game is good for fast number word recognition.

Cooperative numbers
With the whole class standing up, the teacher shouts "Five students together" or "Standing on seven legs" and students must group themselves together to create that number. All the students in the first group to do it successfully score one point, and any students in the last group to do it successfully or who cannot do it because they can't get the right number of people together score minus one point. The next thing the teacher shouts out should be designed so everyone is forced to change groups each time, e.g. "Three people with only one red jumper".

Count in jumps

Students count around the class, first from one to ten, then in jumps of two (2,4,6,8 etc.), then in jumps of 5, then in jumps of 2.5 etc. If anyone makes a mistake, everyone else in the class gets a point and the game starts again from zero, either counting with the same interval or choosing a more difficult one. The student who starts the counting could also choose what interval they want the class to count by each time.

Buzz fizz

Students count around the class, but cannot say any number that is a multiple of 3 but should instead say "Buzz", e.g. "One" "Two" "Buzz" "Four" "Five" "Buzz" "Seven" etc. If anyone makes a mistake, they have to sit down and the game continues until only one person is standing.

The game can also be played with "Fizz" said instead of multiples of five, or using both "Buzz" and "Fizz"- multiples of 3 and 5 (15, 30, 45 etc.) being "Fizz buzz".

Circling maths challenge

Students take turns saying numbers and mathematical operations around the class (e.g. "Twelve" "Plus" "Three" "Minus" "Seven" etc.), until one person says "equals". If the person after that person gets the answer right, the person who said "equals" loses a point. If the person gets the answer wrong, the person who said "equals" gets one point. You can also do the same with time ("7 o'clock" "Plus" "20 minutes" etc.)

Answer me

Students are given cards with numbers written on them or write five numbers in their notebook. They must ask questions to make their partner say those numbers, e.g. if they ask "How many sisters have you got?" and the answer is "Five" and they have that number they can cross it off or discard the card. The first person with no more numbers left to get rid of is the winner. This can also be played as a whole class "Jeopardy" type trivia quiz.

Big numbers line up

Students are given one or two pieces of paper with single figures or number words written on them. The teacher shouts out a long number and the students have to line up to show that number as quickly as possible. You can also add decimal points, commas for large numbers, slashes for dates etc.

Reverse pyramids

The teacher shouts out a long number such as a large number, a date and/ or time, or a decimal. Students must write down that number and reduce it down to a single figure between zero and nine by repeatedly adding up numbers next to each other, e.g. "The 15th of November 1965" can be reduced down to "1" like this:

1+5/ 1+1/ 1+9/ 6+5

= 6/ 2   / 10   /11

6+2/ 1+0/ 1+1

=8 / 1   / 2

8+1+2

=11

1+1

=1

The same game can also be used to show who should be compatible by seeing if their dates of birth add up to the same or similar single figures.

Guess the Measurements Bidding

Students take turns guessing the measurements of something in class or something famous, each time outbidding each other with the accuracy with which they claim to be able to guess it, e.g. "7 meters plus or minus 3 meters", "7.5 meters plus or minus 50 centimetres", "7.53 meters plus of minus 2 centimetres" etc. When there are no more bids, reveal the true measurement or measure the object. If the last person to bid is correct to within the margin of error they gave, they score one point. If the measurement is outside that margin of error, everyone else in the class gets one point (even if their own measurement was wrong).