

# Word Bricks



# ABOUT WORD BRICKS

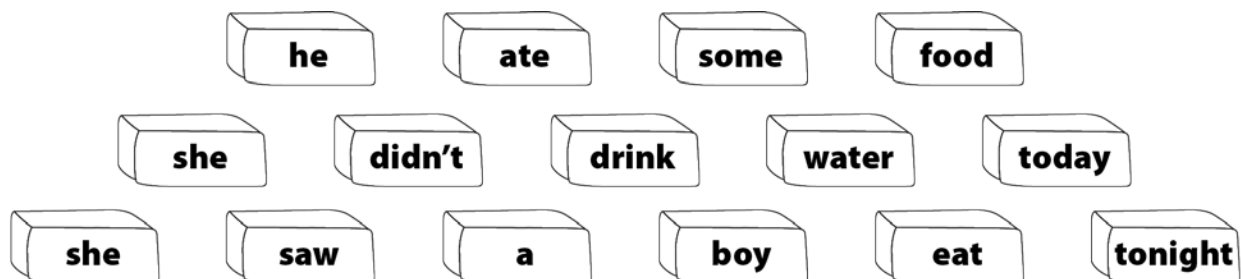
Bricks are blocks made from baked clay that are used for building houses, walls, and buildings. *Word Bricks* are also for building, but they are used for building sentences in English. The *Word Bricks* that come with *Activate: Games for Learning American English* are made from thick paper and have English words written on both sides of the 'brick.' The bricks are printed with a wide range of words in English: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, pronouns, and so on—all of the building blocks that students need to form complete phrases and sentences in English.

Each *Word Brick* has two words, one on each side. These word pairs are related in some way. For example, some word pairs may be different forms of the same word (such as present and past tense verbs or forms of the verb *to be*). Other word pairs might focus on words with opposite or complementary meanings (such as *boy* and *girl*, *happy* and *sad*, *many* and *some*). They look like this:

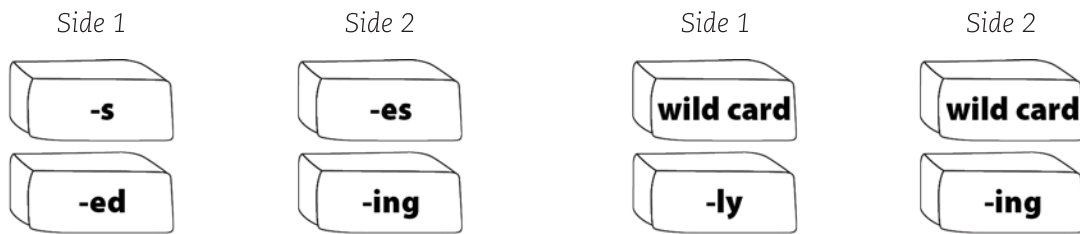


Side 1	Side 2	Side 1	Side 2
drink	drank	a	an
he	she	boy	girl
eat	ate	don't	didn't
water	food	see	saw
today	tonight	many	some

*Activate: Games for Learning American English* comes with 140 brick cards for a total of 280 words. (A complete list of the words can be found on page 109.) Students use the bricks to build complete sentences in English while they talk and play in small groups. At the start of a game, each group receives a handful of *Word Bricks* and engages in the activities that the teacher introduces to them. For example, with the *Word Bricks* pictured above, students could build any of the following sentences:



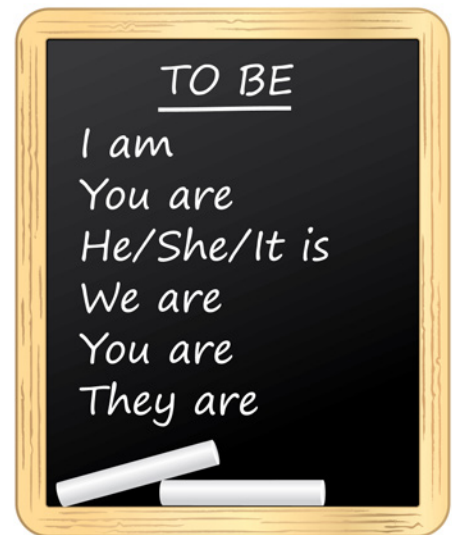
In addition to the regular *Word Bricks*, some special bricks are included to increase the flexibility of the sentence building process. One type of special brick is the “Wild Card,” which the students can use to stand in for any word that they would like to include in their sentence. The “Wild Card” designation appears on both sides of the brick, as shown below. Other bricks contain endings needed to create other forms of words, such as -ed for past tense, -s or -es for plural nouns and subject-verb agreement, -ing for the progressive, and -ly for adverbs.



For each of the games described in this chapter, the groups should have at least one “Wild Card” and one -s. These cards greatly increase the number and range of sentences that students can create. For example, using the special bricks and the bricks above, the students could make the following sentence, in which the “Wild Card” stands in for the adjective *hungry* and the sentence reads, “She saw some hungry boys eat.”



*Word Bricks* are an excellent way to promote active grammar study in English. With *Word Bricks*, students learn the patterns of English through repeated exploration of the language, through *doing*, rather than through the study of explicitly taught rules. For example, the *Word Bricks* include all of the forms of the verb *to be*, which students will need for correct subject-verb agreement in the simple present and simple past tenses. They can also use these bricks to create verb phrases in the passive (e.g., *was taken*) or the progressive aspect (e.g., *is going*).



*Word Bricks* games can be used to interactively practice and review grammar, and all of the games included in *Activate* can be used in any class. However, teachers can also use *Word Bricks* games to focus on particular grammatical structures, such as different verb tenses and aspects (e.g., *She goes*, *She went*, *She had gone*, *She is going*, *She may go*, etc.), active and passive voice, question forms (including yes/no and *wh-* questions), introductory *there* constructions (e.g., *There are five books on the table.*), relative clauses (e.g., *The boy who caught the fish shared them with everyone.*), and many more structures. The teacher can pair a *Word Bricks* activity with a grammar lesson focusing on these structures and can remind students of these structures before beginning a game.

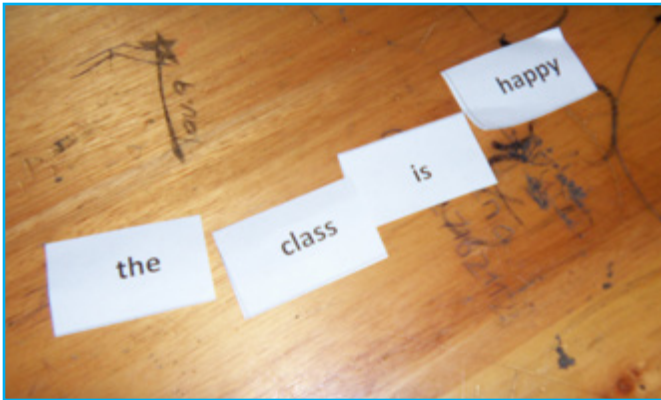
However, *Word Bricks* games do not only focus on building complete, well-formed sentences in English. Several of the games described in this chapter are well-suited to more general practice with words in English. (For examples, see *Brick Bingo*, *Word Category Bingo*, and *Sorting Race*.) These games allow students to reinforce their knowledge about the forms and uses of these words.

## STUDENTS' ROLE

Students use the bricks to build complete sentences in English while they talk and play in small groups. Students at all levels can benefit from playing with the *Word Bricks*. Beginning level students construct short phrases or simple sentences. Intermediate or advanced students make longer sentences. Teachers can adjust the level by adding an extra “Wild Card” or two. This will allow students to add the exact word that they are looking for to their sentence.

## TEACHER'S ROLE

### Before Play



Teachers will want to demonstrate that *Word Bricks* contain words on either side of the brick. In addition, teachers will want to show how to add the special bricks to words in order to make alternate forms of words, such as -s, “Wild Card,” -ed, -ing, -ly, and so on. If a game focuses on a particular grammatical structure, the teacher may want to offer a brief review of the structure.

Most *Word Bricks* games are played in teams or small groups. Each team will need a flat surface to work on as they move their *Word Bricks* around to create sentences. Almost any flat surface will work. For example, in the picture above, the students are using the seat of a chair to build their sentences.

The teacher will need to give each team a handful of *Word Bricks*. Some of the games described below specify the number of bricks each team should have, while the exact number of bricks is not as important for other games. For this second type of game, it is usually not important for each group to have the exact same number of bricks. However, all games benefit from at least one “Wild Card” and one -s brick in each team’s set of *Word Bricks*. The teacher should ensure that each team receives one or more of each of these bricks.

### During Play

Teachers play three fundamental roles during *Word Bricks* games. First, they answer questions or check sentences for correctness, if needed. Second, teachers help players notice errors in the sentences that they produce in a way that helps them correct the sentences themselves. For example, if students make this sentence, “My friend like elephants,” the teacher can put his or her finger on the word *like* to show students where the problem is. Students very often miss an -s or an article (*a, an, the*). However, to promote students’ active learning, the teacher should give them the responsibility of making corrections when a sentence is incorrect. By creating many sentences, students identify patterns. The third important role for the teacher is to keep the game fresh by rotating bricks from one group to another so that players can continue to make new sentences with new words.



## After Play

The teacher should collect all of the *Word Bricks* to be used another time. The teacher should also make note of any additional bricks that would have made the game better, such as replacements for ones that are wearing out, more bricks of a particular word, or special bricks.

The teacher can review a grammar feature that he or she noticed during the game that was particularly difficult or prone to errors. The teacher may also want to review sentence types or grammar structures that were taught during a previous lesson.

## More Play

The bricks can be used again and again in class. Each time students play with the bricks, the combination of bricks that they receive is different, and the make-up of the groups is different. As students progress in language learning throughout the semester, the teacher should observe their progress in the number and complexity of the sentences they build.

