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Video gaming: Helping your English learners take control

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Rosemere Bard

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Key points

- **What is this?** Serious suggestions for helping students improve their English in their out-of-class video-gaming time (or their use of other authentic English language content).
- **Why did you make it?** Most literature for teachers naturally focuses on in-class activities, but video gamers spend much more time on their games outside of class.
- **Who is it for?** Teachers who want to encourage their students to actively use authentic English-language materials outside of class.
- **Why do we need this?** The multiplayer video game universe is huge and offers learners a great chance to improve their second-language skills with players from around the world.

Tweet synopsis

Most video-gaming is done outside-of-class. There is much that teachers who use games in class can do to help their students add a language-learning dimension to their free-play time and take better advantage of the rich multiplayer universe. Includes video.

#englishfromvideogames #teachingwithgames

View at the LLP Playground:

<https://llpjournal.org/2021/12/14/fredrickson-helping-your-english-learners-take-control.html>

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Introduction

This is primarily a video submission with supporting text. The video is full of in-game video clips which should give teachers a good picture of what the online gaming experience can be like for English learners and how the learners themselves can actively take advantage of what is available.

Active learning involves listening comprehension, speaking – the ability to respond to and initiate spoken communication – and carrying out appropriate social interactions. In video gaming, praise is probably at the top of the list.

The video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixLbatYwovo>

Purpose

The purpose of this submission is to help teachers understand how they can assist their students in taking advantage of their out-of-class video game time to significantly improve their English language skills. This involves the ability to understand the English spoken by English speakers to other English speakers – "real" English where no concessions are made to less proficient speakers. And for those brave enough, it also involves joining video games with English speakers, native and otherwise.

The focus is on video gaming outside of class. The only in-class activities I am suggesting aim to make learners aware that they can use their recreational gaming to improve their English and to give them ideas on how to do this productively. This should take only one or two sessions with your students to get them started, and then, they are on their own.

As Rose Bard and D.M. Jones point out, learners can use similar techniques with other English-language activities they carry out outside of class, especially watching movies, documentaries or news broadcasts.

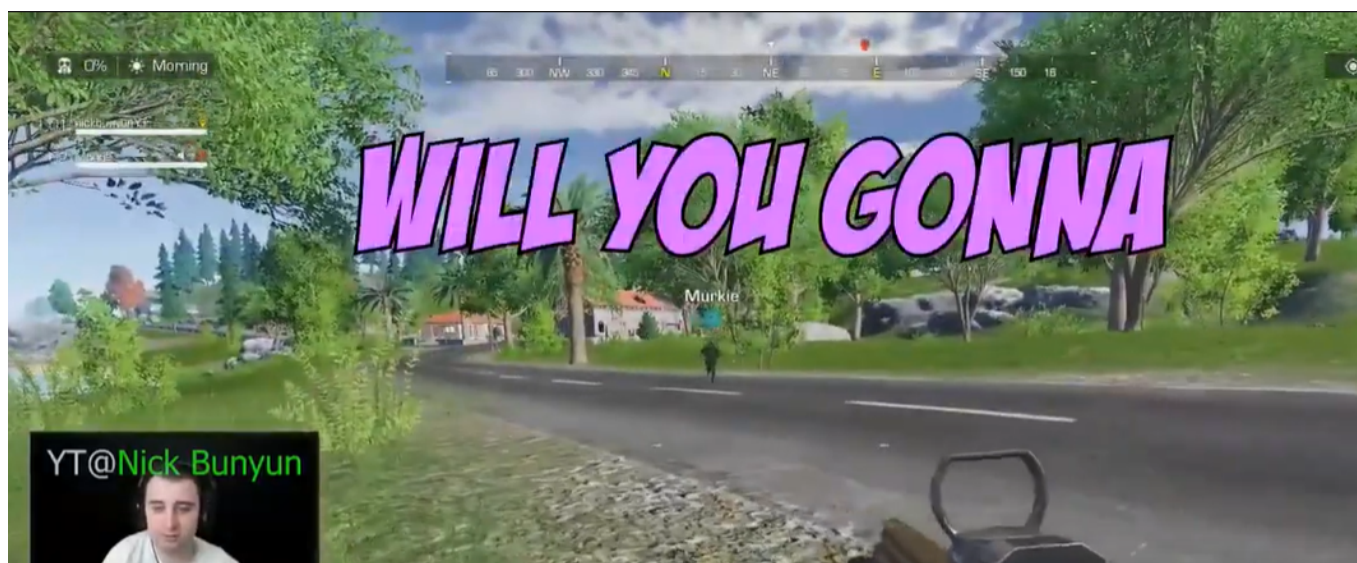
Key suggestions to teachers

1. Find out about your students' video gaming activities outside of class (See the questionnaire in Classroom Activities below and add additional questions if you feel the need.)
2. For those who are gamers, encourage them to spend at least some of their free time watching English-language gameplay videos of their favorite games. (For those who are not, tell them they can still benefit from adding an English-language component to their recreational time.)
3. If you can, use gameplay clips from the playground video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixLbatYwovo>), first to illustrate how communication between English speakers might help your students reach another level of comprehension and confidence. (See the clips of Murkie and *Among Us*).
4. Introduce the idea of active learning. The video clips from *Animal Crossing* will be useful here.
5. Introduce the idea of joining multiplayer games with English speakers. Stress that this is best done through games your students know and play reasonably well. The clip of the nine-year-old Greek player Anton works very well here.
6. Stress that before joining games with English speakers, it helps to do some preparation. Watching English-language videos of a chosen game helps, but actively looking for language you can use helps even more. The playground video has examples from Fortnite and Minecraft.
7. Use the classroom activities suggested in the main text (**What you might do in class**) They will be useful to non-gamers as well.
8. Consider setting up a way for students to conveniently share what they learn outside of class. A class Facebook page might be a good idea.
9. Finally, our YouTube channel *Real English for Gamers* was designed to help students take full advantage of the opportunities multiplayer games offer. You might suggest that they check it out. <https://www.youtube.com/realenglishforgamers>.

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The Content of the Video

The video is made up of explanations interspersed with illustrative video clips. In the first clip we meet Murkie, a non-native speaker who has joined popular gamer Nick Bunyun (one million YouTube subscribers) for a game. Notice that she is a proficient gamer herself, making for smooth exchanges with Nick.



Murkie's English is good, especially her comprehension, but it is not perfect.

While playing with native speakers (or near native-speakers – Nick emigrated to the US 20 years ago from Romania) is the goal, it is more practical for most learners to start by watching gameplay videos featuring highly-proficient English speakers.¹

The second gameplay clip, from *Among Us*, is a good example of the fast, unscripted language learners will be exposed to. But it also points out how learners who know the game are by no means lost. They know what is happening, a huge advantage for listening comprehension.²

¹ **Rose** Terry, the reason I recommended taking out the section about nativespeakerism was because it would derail the conversation from what really matters on your playground piece, which is the Out-of-class strategies learners can use to improve their English (comprehension, gaining vocabulary, etc.)

² **James** Yes, familiarity with the context where a language is being used is a great starting point for language learners. I wrote about this in my connected learning project (York, 2021): <https://llpjournal.org/2021/05/14/j-york-creating-playgrounds-hero-journeys.html>

Active Learning

Your goal as a teacher is to get your students actively involved in improving their English. They should not be simply watching videos passively.³

The next segment of the video (using a clip from *Animal Crossing*) illustrates what your students can and should be doing – watching, replaying, using closed captions, searching for and learning new words and phrases – like “looks can be deceiving”.⁴

This would make a very good classroom activity (See below). Students could work in groups with short clips from their favorite games and share what they come up with. The video also suggests a vocabulary sharing activity that you can easily use.

Your goal as a teacher is to get your students actively involved in improving their English. They should not be simply watching videos passively.

More on sharing

If your students are actively using authentic English-language content – video games or otherwise – outside of class, it would be good to set up a vehicle for them to share what they are learning. A classroom Facebook page might be a good idea. The video suggests vocabulary, but there are many other topics they can share, e.g. gamers to follow, games to play or any other content they think their classmates might enjoy.

If your students are actively using authentic English-language content – video games or otherwise – outside of class, it would be good to set up a vehicle for them to share what they are learning. A classroom Facebook page might be a good idea.

Playing with English speakers

The first video clip in this section illustrates well the first piece of advice I would give learners who want to join English-language video games: Learn the game. I suspect you will be impressed with Nick Bunyun's next playing partner, nine-year-old Anton from Greece.⁵ The full video is worth watching with your class as you see how Nick becomes increasingly impressed with Anton, not just for his gaming skills, but as a thoughtful playing partner. Anton, for example, leaves Nick with a full set of health items. But, again, the key point here is the importance of learning the game.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMr_qhDYobs

³ **Rose** Although the material you are promoting is targeting learners, the audience for your playground piece is the teacher. If you don't engage teachers with what you are writing, what you are writing loses its relevance.

⁴ **Rose Bard** also suggests adding the browser extension Language Reactor <https://www.languagereactor.com>. This will give learners a variety of tools, including translation.

⁵ **James** (Nick plays with young Anton) This was the best clip in the whole video. I think you could write more about it.



Anton knows just enough English to take over at times as the team leader.

Learners, of course, will not only want to master the game, but also the language they need to play comfortably with English speakers. The next set of clips gives practical examples of how this can be done. Again, teachers might want to play these clips for their classes and some might want to go further and try the techniques with other gameplay video clips.

The video ends with a clip from a Minecraft tutorial, a good reason why serious gamers should take an interest in English-language videos. Tutorials abound in other languages as well and there is no harm done if students first go to their native language, but they should give English a try.

Classroom Activities

Possible Questionnaire

If you are planning to do any activities on at-home gaming, it might be useful to first find out a bit about your students' gaming habits. You can then decide if you are primarily introducing the idea of gaming in English to your class, or helping more experienced gamers increase their English language use⁶.

1. How interested are you in video games? a. very b. somewhat c. not at all
2. Do you play video games outside of class?
 - a. If yes, what games?
 - b. If yes, how much time do you spend playing video games?
3. What language do you play in? Your native language? English?
4. Do you play any multiplayer games?
 - a. If yes, how do you play? Solo? Duo (2 players)? Squad (Team) with 3 or more players? (You can choose more than one)
5. What language do you play multiplayer games in? Your native language? English?
6. Do you use your video gameplay to improve your English?
 - a. If not, do you think it would be possible to use a video game to improve your English?

⁶ **DM Jones:** I bet in some cases, the experienced gamers could share a lot of tips as well. Lots of opportunities for peer learning and student-led sharing here.

What you might do in class

I am assuming that class time is limited for many teachers who have a full curriculum to get through. Thus, I am suggesting only a few in-class activities. And since many teachers will probably not be gamers, I've put together a number of video clips they can use for group work.

One of the main sections of the main video is called "Students: Take Control" (3:00 minutes in) which is designed to encourage active learning.

Students will benefit greatly from backup activities that you can do in class and we have prepared three of them. The first two should probably be done in a single session.

Activity 1: Listening actively

The video shows how students can replay sections they have difficulty understanding, check out subtitles to see what is actually said and to slow down the speed if necessary. We'll leave the subtitles to the next activity. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzmRmFjn4_A

The video here contains five short clips from a variety of video games we have used in our "Understanding Real English" series. You might want to do the first one with the class, but the rest can be done in groups, perhaps assigning a single video to each group. Students should watch and listen to the full clip at least twice and then replay difficult sections. Since this is "real English" students may not understand fully. They can experiment with slowing down the speed, but even that might not work fully. Still, they should get a basic understanding of what is happening and what is said.

The videos are:

1. Minecraft gameplay with famous Irish gamer JackSepticEye.
2. British Gamer Slogoman and American friends play one round of Gang Beasts, a silly "multiplayer party game".
3. Police chase American gamer Ari12 in Forza Horizon 4.
4. American TmarTn2 goes fishing in Animal Crossing: New Horizons
5. British gamer JackFrag and friends get involved with a giant dog in Apex Legends.

Activity 2: Check your understanding

Here students will see the subtitles, so they can find out exactly what was said. Again, they should listen more than once and replay the parts they had difficulty with. The next step is to look for words and phrases that are new to them and find out their meanings.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qangpjWkok>

Activity 3: Share with your classmates

If your students truly become active learners during their gameplay outside of class, they will have a lot to share. Teachers should take advantage of this. This short video will give learners ideas on how to share vocabulary. It would be good for the class to have an online resource to do this, perhaps through Facebook. If I were still teaching today, I would likely have a class Facebook page and students could use their native language if necessary.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-ylaQ2F1P4> This is an example of what students can share. The focus is on vocabulary, but there are many other topics students can share, e.g., gamers who speak clearly (with their social media links), good multiplayer games for learning English, links to fun or useful videos, links to their own gameplay videos in English, sources for finding English-speaking playing partners, portions of videos they don't understand, etc., etc.

Activity 4: Getting Prepared to Play in English

The thought of playing with highly proficient English speakers – native or highly advanced – can be daunting for many learners. For them, it might be better to ease into English, playing with friends in their native language and gradually adding the English they learn from watching videos, the language they share with their friends, and, of course, by visiting our YouTube channel. The goal should be to eventually play a full game in English. Having one or two reasonably proficient English speakers on each team would be a definite plus.

The thought of playing with highly proficient English speakers – native or highly advanced – can be daunting for many learners. For them, it might be better to ease into English, playing with friends in their native language and gradually adding the English they learn.

At the same time, they should be actively watching videos and looking for words, phrases and sentences they can use for their chosen game. Helping them along is a big project of ours at REFG and it could be an out-of-class project for interested students.

You might suggest that your students watch our first videos in the project which focus on Minecraft. This can be in class or out of class, but you might suggest that students start gathering and sharing useful language for their favorite games.

(1) https://youtu.be/spgYtc15_eM (2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upZfc2qjdRg>

(Instructions to students before they watch the videos)

If you are quite familiar with a game and you play it well, you can quickly join games with English speakers. You might not understand much of what your teammates are saying, but you will know what is happening and what you should do.

Your goal, however, should be to communicate. A good way to prepare is to watch English-language gameplay clips of games you want to play. Watch for words, phrases and sentences you can use.

You can start with two of our *Real English for Gamers* videos where the creators find useful language for you from the game Minecraft. Many more of these videos are coming.

Acknowledgements

First of all, a special thanks to LLP administrators Jonathan deHaan and James York for taking an interest in our work at Real English for Gamers and supporting the idea of a playground submission aimed at English teachers. Thanks also for their comments and for walking us through the submission process.

The review process they have set up at LLP is exceptional. We have largely been alone at REFG for the past three years, posting more than 200 videos with little feedback.

Thanks, then, to reviewers D.M. Jones and Rose Bard whose corrections, comments and observations have been invaluable. Rose, in particular, has been relentless in helping me (Terry) overcome any perceived native speaker bias in my writing.

Appendices

- My Personal Background
- My Introduction to Video Gaming
- Playlists from Real English for Gamers that your students might find useful
- Highly-proficient non-native speaking gamers
- Famous and popular
- Lesser known gamers
- Getting started with Virtual Youtubers (Vtubers)

Personal background

I come to the topic of games in language learning from a different perspective than most of you in the Ludic community. At 76 years of age, my classroom days are over. In fact, I left the classroom in 1992 when I joined the Bangkok Post, Thailand's largest English newspaper. There, I did daily English lessons on the latest news aimed at increasing the Thai audience for the paper.

Helping English learners improve their language skills outside the classroom had long been an interest of mine and when I did my Master's thesis, I focused on Stephan Krashen's approach to schema theory and comprehensible input.

This was wonderful training for my newspaper work since each topic (elections, floods, protests, etc.) had its own schema. Turning current topics into comprehensible input was made easier by the learners' background from Thai-language news sources.

My Introduction to Video Gaming

Upon retirement, still in Bangkok, I couldn't help but notice that my gamer son, a Thai, was spending endless hours using his English to play with fellow gamers from around the world. This was real English, fast and spontaneous – the English native speakers use with each other. That's the top of the mountain for language learners.

Here, too, I noticed that English learners are not without advantages. Many of them are avid gamers who know their favorite games inside and out – even if they play them in their native language. Thus, in an English setting, while they might not initially understand much of what is being said, they know what is happening.

There was clearly an opportunity for collaboration. I provided the theory and the content and my son became my chief consultant as he took over the YouTube mechanics and video editing. Real English for Gamers was born.

Playlists from Real English for Gamers that your students might find useful.

(Of course, they can choose for themselves from our homepage:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/RealEnglishForGamers>)

- Understanding Real English Playlist (Fast Speech Series) <https://bit.ly/2ZFlnht>
- Building Your Vocabulary With Video Games <https://bit.ly/3Et29fk>
- Words For Gamers <https://bit.ly/3GHY3Xn>
- Grammar For Gamers <https://bit.ly/3pUGYic>
- In-game Examples of Various Grammar Topics <https://bit.ly/3w4Hhrl>
- Language Hunting <https://bit.ly/3CBVFdC>
- Becoming a Skilled Learner: <https://bit.ly/2Y7iBSZ>
- General tips <https://bit.ly/3EtF38m>
- Old Gold (A wide variety of some of more interesting videos from the past three years) <https://bit.ly/3nMarlA>
- Among Us <https://bit.ly/2Y53hWQ>

Highly-proficient non-native speaking gamers

If you search for English-language gameplay videos, either on YouTube or Twitch, you'll see the field is dominated by native English speakers. They come from all over the world, however, and you will likely find some of their accents to be quite challenging. There are also some highly-proficient non-native English speakers who stream games in English. Your students will likely enjoy many of them and these gamers are living examples of young people who have mastered English.

Famous and popular

PewDiePie (Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg) is one of a kind. He was born and raised in Sweden before moving to the UK as an adult. He has 110 million YouTube subscribers.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/PewDiePie>

Nick Bunyun Born in Romania but he moved to the United States 20 years ago at the age of 13.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChAO7Y_97MBAgE5xi_ele-Q

Disguised Toast (Jeremy Wang). Born in Taiwan, moved to Malaysia and then on to Canada

<https://www.youtube.com/c/DisguisedToast>

Robbaz Sweden He's not *PewDiePie*, but over a million YouTube subscribers is not bad.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Robbaz>

WackyJacky101 Denmark

<https://www.youtube.com/c/WackyJacky101>

Xyaa or *Morezyaa* (Shagufta Iqbal) India Probably a true bilingual – English and Hindi

<https://www.youtube.com/c/XyaaLive>

Lesser known gamers

Here's a group of gamers/streamers with very good English but not so many followers. They deserve more and your students are likely to enjoy them.

Orangerocktv (Bulgaria)

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCeRNjXc5_FrIdKBZ1lpBgA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhFOQxhReSY> <https://www.twitch.tv/orangerocktv>

Durbem (Croatia)

<https://www.twitch.tv/durbem>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Tomme991>

Denyave (Czechia)

<https://www.twitch.tv/denyave>

Carnivorus (Germany)

<https://twitch.tv/carnivorus>

InciteTV (Sweden)

<https://www.youtube.com/c/InciteTV>

Lucanaii (Lives in the Netherlands) Queen *Lucanaii* is a gamer with a disability

<https://www.twitch.tv/Lucanaii>

Getting started with Virtual Youtubers (Vtubers)

Here the players are real, but the images you see on the screen are anime characters. I'll let you do your own research on this one. Here's a start.

NIJISANJI EN

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-JSeFfovN5Ehftt1WHMvg>