

# Charades

**Charades** is a word guessing game. In the form most commonly played today, it is an acting game in which one player acts out a word or phrase, often by pantomiming similar-sounding words, and the other players guess the word or phrase. The idea is to use physical rather than verbal language to convey the meaning.

Though less commonly heard with this meaning nowadays, the word *charade* was originally also used to indicate a riddle either in verse or prose, of which the listener must guess the meaning, often given syllable by syllable. In France the word *charade* still refers to this kind of linguistic riddle.

## Rules of the acted charade

The rules of the acted charades used vary widely and informally, but these rules, in some form, are common to most players. Since so many rules can vary, clarifying all the rules *before* the game begins can avoid problems later.

## Equipment

- a stopwatch or other timing device
- a notepad and pencil for scorekeeping
- blank slips of paper
- two baskets or other containers for the slips

## Preparation

Divide the players into two teams, preferably of equal size. Divide the slips of paper between the two teams. Select a neutral timekeeper/scorekeeper, or pick members from each team to take turns. Agree on how many rounds to play. Review the gestures and hand signals and invent any others you deem appropriate.

The teams temporarily adjourn to separate rooms, to come up with phrases to put on their pieces of paper. These phrases may either be quotations or titles of books, movies, plays, television shows, and songs. Here are some suggested rules to prevent the phrases from being too hard to guess:

- No team should write down any phrase unless at least three people on the team have heard of it.
- No phrase should be longer than seven words.
- No phrase should consist solely of a proper name (i.e., it should also contain other words).
- No foreign phrases are allowed.

Once they have finished writing their phrases, the teams come back to the same room.

## To Play

Each round of the game proceeds as follows:

- A player from Team A draws a phrase slip from Team B's basket. After he/she has had a short time to review the slip, the timekeeper for team B notes the time and tells the player to start. Team A then has three minutes to guess the phrase. If they figure it out, the timekeeper records how long it took. If they do not figure it out in three minutes, the timekeeper announces that the time is up, and records a time of three minutes.
- A player from Team B draws a phrase slip from Team A's basket, and play proceeds as above.

Normally the game continues until every player has had a chance to "act out" a phrase. The score for each team is the total time that the team needed for all of the rounds. The team with the smallest score wins the game.

## Gestures

To act out a phrase, one usually starts by indicating what category the phrase is in, and how many words are in the phrase. From then on, the usual procedure is to act out the words one at a time (although not necessarily in the order that they appear in the phrase). In some cases, however, it may make more sense to try to act out the "entire concept" of the phrase at once.

- No sounds or lip movements are allowed. Some people play that even clapping is prohibited, while others allow the player to make any sound other than speaking or whistling a recognizable tune.
- The actor cannot point out at any of the objects present in the scene, if by doing so he is helping his teammates.
- Usually, any gesture is allowed other than blatantly spelling out the word, but some play that indicating anything about the *form* of the phrase is prohibited, even the number of words, so that only the *meaning* may be acted out.
- Some standard signals are shown on the next page.

## Silent Charades

On little pieces of paper, write up a bunch of things to act out in pairs. You will need to know how many people are going to play so that you have the correct number of papers. (2 pieces of paper with the same thing on it--ie: ballerina, ballerina, elephant, elephant, etc.) Put them all into a hat mixed together and have everyone draw out one piece of paper. When everyone has a charade, say go, and everyone begins to act out the charade on their piece of paper. The object of the game is to find the person with the same charade as yours. When you find the person that has the same thing as you, sit down on the ground.

After the game is over, have everyone ask their partner what they were. If they were wrong they are out. There can also be a prize for the first pair that sits down. This game is the most fun when you can make each thing pretty difficult to act out.

## Standard signals

A number of standard signals have come into common usage in charades, though they are not required. Note that these signals are standardized by general consensus only, and may vary somewhat from place to place.

<b>To indicate the general category of a word or phrase:</b>	
Person	Stand with hands on hips.
Book title	Unfold your hands as if they were a book.
Movie title	Pretend to crank an old-fashioned movie camera.
Play title	Pretend to pull the rope that opens a theater curtain.
Song title	Pretend to sing.
TV show	Draw a rectangle to outline the TV screen.
Quote or phrase	Make quotation marks in the air with your fingers.
Location	Make a circle with one hand, then point to it, as if pointing to a dot on a map.
Event	Point to your wrist as if you were wearing a watch.
Thing	Make the "crazy" signal, i.e. point to your head and wave your finger in a circle.
Website	Hold your hand out, palm down, horizontal to the ground (as if holding a computer mouse). Make a sweeping motion side to side, as if moving a coconut half on table ("navigating"), then stop and tap index finger (as if "clicking").
<b>To indicate other characteristics of the word or phrase:</b>	
Number of words in the phrase	Hold up the number of fingers.
Which word you're working on	Hold up the number of fingers again.
Number of syllables in the word	Lay the number of fingers on your arm.
Which syllable you're working on	Lay the number of fingers on your arm again.
Length of word	Make a "little" or "big" sign as if you were measuring a fish.
"The entire concept"	Sweep your arms through the air.
"On the nose" (i.e., someone has made a correct guess)	Point at your nose with one hand, while pointing at the person with your other hand.
"Sounds like"	Cup one hand behind an ear, or pull on your earlobe.
"Longer version of"	Pretend to stretch a piece of elastic.
"Shorter version of"	Do a "karate chop" with your hand.
"Plural"	Link your little fingers.
"Proper Name"	Tap the top of your head with an open palm.
"Past tense"	Wave your hand over your shoulder toward your back.
A letter of the alphabet	Move your hand in a chopping motion toward your arm (near the top of your forearm if the letter is near the beginning of the alphabet, and near the bottom of your arm if the letter is near the end of the alphabet).
A color	Point to your tongue, then point to an object of the color you're trying to convey. If no objects are available, then pantomime an object that typically possesses the color in question.
"Close, keep guessing!"	Frantically wave your hands about to keep the guesses coming, or pretend to fan yourself, as if to say "getting hotter".
"Not even close, I'll start over"	Wave hand in a wide sweep, as if to say "go away!" Alternatively, pretend to shiver, as if to say "getting colder". The hand is moved as if flushing a toilet, meaning forget whatever has been done till now and to start afresh.
"A synonym" or "A word or phrase that means the same thing"	Clasp your hands together and then, rotating your clasped hands from the wrists, simulate multiple figure 8's.
"The opposite" or "the antonym of what you are saying"	Form each hand into a hitchhiker's thumb signal, then with the backs of the hands facing away from you, cross your forearms and make the thumbs travel in opposing directions, thus "opposite".
"Stop, work on something else"	Hold both arms out in front of you, palms of your hands waving, facing your teammates, while simultaneously shaking your head, eyes closed.