

Next Word

Ages 9-14 + parents · 2-6 players · about 20 minutes · no screens

OBJECTIVE

The 12 Model cards are a tiny language model, built by counting which word came next in a six-sentence story. Roll the die to make it talk, one word at a time. Before every roll, guess the next word. After every sentence, vote: did the model remember it from the story, or make it up? First to 10 points wins.

MATERIALS

14 cards: 12 Model cards and 2 Story cards. One six-sided die and a coin.

SETUP

- 1 Lay out the 12 Model cards face-up where everyone can read them. They are public. The model has no secrets, only counts.
- 2 Read both Story cards aloud, once, slowly. That's everything the model ever read. Then turn them face-down.
- 3 Put a coin on the START card. The youngest player is the first Speaker and holds the die.

EACH WORD

- 1 Everyone, the Speaker too, counts 3-2-1 and says out loud the word they think comes next.
- 2 The Speaker rolls and finds that number on the card under the coin. That's the next word. Say it, and move the coin to that word's card.
- 3 Everyone who said that word scores 1.
- 4 If the card says Always, there's nothing to guess and nothing to roll. Just move the coin.
- 5 Keep going from the new card. The sentence ends at END.

END OF THE SENTENCE

- 1 Read the whole sentence back. Everyone votes at once: thumbs up = REMEMBERED (it's in the story word for word), thumbs down = MADE UP.
- 2 Flip the Story cards and check. Every right vote scores 1. Turn them face-down again.
- 3 Pass the die left. The coin goes back on START.
- 4 First to 10 points wins. Ties share the win.

TIPS

- 1 Say the word with the most faces. You won't always be right, but you'll be right most often.
- 2 Bet on MADE UP. About 6 out of every 10 sentences the cards roll are not in the story, even though every pair of words in them is.
- 3 A sentence can sound fine and still be made up. That's the trap.

WHAT THE CARDS TEACH

- 1 Next word: a chatbot writes one word at a time, picking each from what usually came next in what it read.
- 2 The model is just counts: every card was made by counting the story. Check one.
- 3 Likely isn't true: "the cat ate a hat" sounds right but never happened. When a chatbot does that, it's called a hallucination.
- 4 Rolling gives variety. Real chatbots roll too. It's why the same question can get different answers.
- 5 One word of memory: these cards only look at the last word. Real models look back over thousands.

VARIANTS

- 1 Greedy robot: no die. Always take the word with the most faces (on a tie, the first one printed). What does it say? Every time? (It recites "the robot saw a fish" word for word. Always picking the top word turns a model into a parrot.)
- 2 Longest sentence: each Speaker rolls one sentence. Longest before END scores 2.
- 3 Train your own: write six short sentences, count what comes after each word, and make your own cards on index cards. Each word needs 1, 2, 3 or 6 words after it so the die splits evenly.

PRINT TONIGHT

Avery 5388 at Actual Size / 100% (never Fit to page). Tear on the perforation. You also need one six-sided die and a coin to mark the current word.

12 Model cards + 2 Story cards = 5 Avery 5388 sheets.