

MAKING BARRIER GAMES

From Catherine Redmayne
Speech and language therapist

What are barrier games:

- Barrier games are activities which require one player to give instructions to the other about something the speaker holds out of sight of the listener. There should preferably be something which can show whether the procedure has been successful. There should be turns so each player has a turn at listening, and then at instructing.
- Many purchased activities described as barrier games do not allow for fair turns! They may have a list of instructions only the adult can read! The child does not get a turn at 'telling how'.
- At the simplest picture barrier game level, I hold my giraffe card so you can't see it and say *it's a giraffe*. If you find your giraffe card, we have both succeeded – and we know we have because the cards match! If I give you the wrong label, or you pick up the wrong animal card, then the outcome will be incorrect.
- Making the instructions more complex increases the difficulty for both players. This could be where you have two giraffe cards, with one giraffe eating and one sleeping, and two elephants. Now I must tell you the animal and the action.
- If real objects and pictures of them are used, the variety of possible instructions with even a small set is amazing.

If I have a **picture** of an arrangement of objects, and you have the objects, then I have to give clear instructions on the choice and relationship of the objects to be moved. Complexity can be increased by bringing in choices of size, colour etc. Prepositions and orientation might be needed. Simple illustrations of pegboard patterns can bring in all sorts of concepts. What is even better is that I can hold my picture and watch you trying to follow my instructions. If you do the wrong thing, I can correct you. **This is the best sort of barrier game, however simple the content, for comprehending and expressing instructions.** **TIP:** The teller can see the do-er has gone wrong and will try to point, or put it right! This is not allowed. You can try getting the teller to stand behind the do-er who sits at the table and moves the things. This positioning of the players also gets round the problem of left and right being confused by sitting opposite each other. Or both players can sit on the same side of the table or at the corner so left and right is the same for both. (**TIP:** Don't worry about the labels left and right as children can use instructions like *it's on the window/door side* – using whatever fixed reference point there is available.)

Here are some **suggestions for making a set of pictures for a barrier game** of this sort. You must keep in mind the group of children for whom it is intended:

- Are they able to understand that a 2D picture can be copied with 3D objects?
- Do they have colour and size words?
- Do they use prepositions?
- Can they understand and use sentences which are complex enough to create the scene you have chosen? If in doubt, start simply! For example, a box and a cup, with a small animal and a brick, give enough permutations for many pictures.



Ways to make the picture set

TIP: If you are choosing items to make a picture set with, try to **AVOID**:

- anything that rolls, bounces, bends or stretches (you will regret it)
- anything normally related to the mouth e.g. spoon, cup, brush (irresistible)
- sharp or fragile items (dangerous)
- things that fall over even if they are meant to stand up (poorly designed animals etc.)
- fiddly things you yourself find it hard to recognise in pictures, and/or to arrange.

All of these will waste endless time and be very annoying!

A. The simplest way to make the pictures – and the one which will be the most exact in colour, scale etc. – is to set up your little arrangements one at a time on a neutral background and take **photos** with a digital camera. Do not be over-ambitious and include too many items. With this method you can choose whatever toys or other items you want – very useful for young children with a small vocabulary, or for situations where particular aspects of language are being practised. Because the items will be small, you need a steady hand or a tripod. It is important to take the photos at an angle that will make the arrangement obvious. This will probably be at or near eye-level. **TIP:** Try and make the whole set of photos with the same focal length and flash settings or you may find the colours, quality and apparent size in the resulting photos will change. It is easier not to use the highest magnification you have available – if you have even simple photo software, you can trim off excess borders afterwards and print the pictures in the photo printing program four or six to the page. Print on card and laminate for protection. If you have Widgit's Communicate:In Print, you can import your photos into other work (see below). But beware of making a huge folder of photos or you may run out of RAM when you try to print! Make a separate folder per game and reduce the quality (and file size) of the photos.

B. You can also use **line drawings** – even drawing around shaped blocks and hand-colouring the drawings. You only need one set and can laminate the drawings.

C. You can also make **symbol pictures**. Obviously these are not as exact as photos but can be very satisfactory and are even easier than photos to use again in other work made with CIP. Here are the steps which will make the task not too time-consuming:

1. Choose the toys, blocks etc. you mean to use.
2. Use the most extensive Wordlist you have available.
3. Look for the symbol pictures you will need with Use List.
4. If you cannot find a suitable symbol picture for an item, leave it out.
5. Put one of each picture you will need on the Scratch area. Make the page smaller to increase the room.
6. You may want to use an object which will take up too much space on the Scratch area. A way round this is to place the symbol picture of it on the first page and adjust the scale. Then make it a Master item for pages, say, 2-12. Unmake the Master item at this point! Now you will be able to use the object in any picture you want. If you don't want it on any page when you make the scenes, just delete it.
7. Adjust the size of each item so the scale is roughly correct.
8. Make additional copies (from the scaled symbols) for different colours.
9. Adjust the colours as necessary.
10. If some items can face right or left create an extra copy and reverse it.
11. **OR use simple things like patterns of coloured bricks, or circles for pegboard pegs, which are easy to do on a 'grid' (table) with the line colour then made transparent.**

USE THE STAR ICON FOR MAKING ALL THE NEW COPIES – IT'S SPEEDY!

Now you are ready to start building the scenes in Adjust mode:

1. As you want each item, replicate it on the Scratch area with the star icon.
2. Drag the copy to the page. Do not drag the original image onto the page.
3. Move your images so they lie in the order you want by sending back or bringing forward.
4. If a picture just doesn't work, delete that page and make a new one. This is why it is much more convenient to have a copy of all your items on the Scratch area.
5. When you are happy with each 'scene', Select and Group the items. You can then enlarge or shrink the entire scene, keeping the scale correct. You may want to put two pictures on each page. Once grouped, you can select and copy the scene and paste it elsewhere or drag it around. You can also make a table with coloured borders.
6. Continue until you have a set of at least 8 pictures for even a small set of objects (and preferably more than that). There should be some pictures with only minor differences to sharpen looking skills. If you will use your set with a mixed ability group, you can easily devise some easy cards and some much harder ones. You can then choose what each child describes/hears. If your set is too small, you will not have this flexibility and after a few turns everyone knows what is in the set. Simple pictures may just have two items, which are easy to name, in an obvious relationship e.g. *there's a brick in a box*. A very complex picture might have several items (with a choice of colour/size/number) which have to be assembled in a specific order e.g. *put the big blue brick and then the small red brick in the (transparent) pot; put the lid on; balance the pencil across the top, pointing right*.

When you use the cards and objects for the barrier game, it is worth spending a few minutes looking at the objects and talking about them generally. This checks all the vocabulary and you can demonstrate how things look as you turn them round. At each turn, encourage the instructor to tell the other player which of the objects he needs before starting to give the instructions about what to do.

Instead of cutting your pictures into separate cards, you can easily present them as a book with one picture per page. The instructor holds the book and opens it and folds the book back so only one page shows. You can mask the other side from the listener by keeping something behind the book to support it.

Practise whatever you want

This is where making your own pictures with a program as flexible as CIP comes into its own. You will be able to produce images which could never be found to purchase – when you want them. Some examples follow.

- **Rows and columns** – even two items have to be listed in the correct order for me to match what you say. If you say *it's cup and spoon*, I expect the cup to be on the left if the pictures are in a row. I expect it to be at the top if the pictures are in a column.
- **Careful reading cards** - you may be focusing on word-final consonants. Your cards could have little lists (one per card) like:

hot	hog	hop
hot	hop	hop
hop	hot	hot

One player reads the list on his card (*hot hot hop*) and the other player finds his matching card. Again, keeping at least the teller's 'cards' in book form makes life easier!

- **Pronouns (or other language targets)** – use appropriate pictures, with or without text.
- **Reversible word order** – the sets have pictures like *the tractor is following the bus/the bus is following the tractor* OR *the camel is on top of the lorry/the lorry is on top of the camel*. (The ability to 'squash' pictures by deforming them in CIP can make humorous scenes children enjoy!)
- **Topic vocabulary** of any sort e.g. *there's a sphere and a prism/there's a blue T. Rex/there's a pyramid and two mummies...*

If you design your picture set in book form, you can also play a version of the pictures barrier game with the listener looking at the book on screen. The instructor describes a page of his printed book and the listener 'turns' over the pages on screen until he finds the matching picture. This places quite a load on memory because the whole scene must be described and the sentence remembered for comparing with each page e.g. *there's a red pencil under a blue car*.

If you wish to have a set of cards each (and not use objects), make two copies of each page within your document and change the border colour on the second one before printing.

Using your saved pictures for other tasks

- **Read and match** – you can make a workbook with your pictures one per page and suitable sentences on the back page to be cut off, matched and stuck on the correct picture page.
- **Write about the picture** – if the picture is fairly simple, the child can be asked to write a sentence under each picture. This is good where a set focuses on one skill e.g. prepositions. Your pictures could feature e.g. a dog and a cat plus a toy table and chair.
- **Dominos/Lotto/Pairs** – you can make a set of dominos or a lotto game by copying and pasting your pictures onto an appropriate grid. At each turn the players have to describe the picture – this is what builds in practice! You can use any set for Pairs.
- **Combine information** – if you write some short sentences about the picture, a junior child might construct a long sentence with all the information you give. E.g. you provide *there's a brick/the brick is small/the brick is blue/the brick is in a cup/the cup is cracked/the cup is yellow* and the child writes *there's a small blue brick in a cracked yellow cup*.