

Subskills snakes and ladders

Trainer's notes

Aims	To promote better understanding of subskills To help trainees differentiate between subskills within the same main skill
Syllabus area	Language skills
Timetable fit	For use after input sessions on all four skills
Interaction pattern	Group work
Timing	40 minutes
Materials needed	One copy of the game board (1.5A) and one set of skills cards (1.5B–D) for each group One dice per group and one counter per player

Trainees can usually name the four skills really easily, but have trouble naming subskills precisely. This activity addresses this by featuring many examples of subskills in learners’ real-life contexts.

Instructions

1.

Divide the class into groups of four to six trainees.
2.

Explain/demonstrate how to play the game. (These instructions are rich in game-playing language so you may wish to highlight the italicised words and have trainees make a record of them.)
 - Each player *takes it in turns* to *roll the dice* and *move their counter* the correct number of *spaces* along the board.
 - Every time they *land on* a skills square (marked READING, WRITING, LISTENING or SPEAKING) the player opposite picks a card from the corresponding pile and reads the scenario (but not the answer!) out loud to them.
 - The player whose turn it is must say which subskill or strategy is being used. The player who read the card checks this against the answer on the card. In case of any debate, the team should call on the trainer to act as referee.
 - If the subskill named is correct, the player may go up the ladder or remain at the head of the snake. If the subskill named is incorrect, or if the player doesn’t know, he must remain at the foot of the ladder or slide down to the tail of the snake.
 - The reader then returns the card to the *bottom of the pile* and it is the next player’s turn.
 - The winner is the first player to land on the ‘finish’ square.

3.

Circulate, monitor, arbitrate or encourage debate where required, and note down any areas of difficulty.
4.

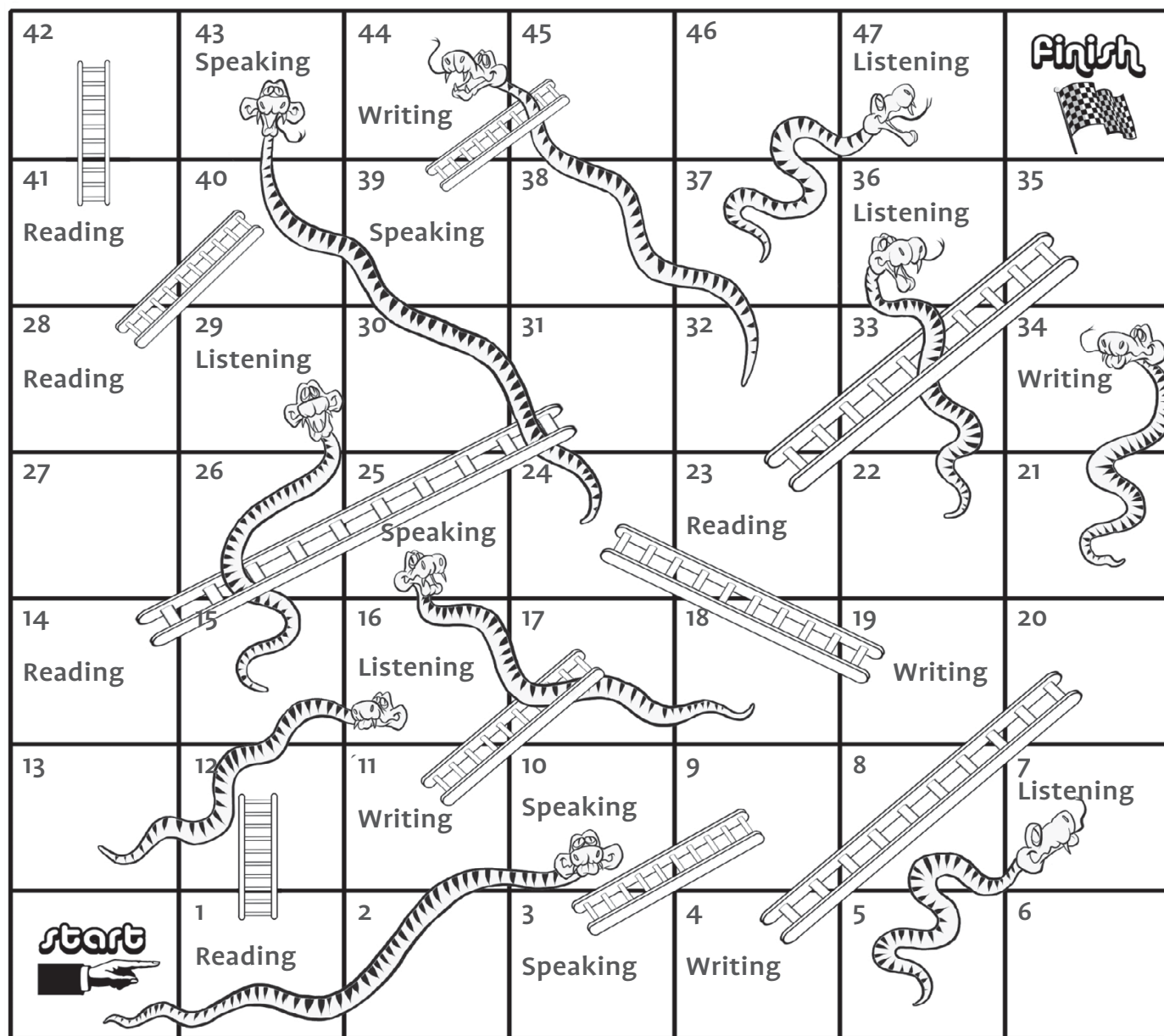
At the end of the game, lead feedback, asking what trainees have learnt from the activity and clarifying any points of difficulty.

NB Trainees with a B1 level of language may need some vocabulary support. Consider having mixed language level groups, and be ready to answer queries.

Variation

For a less challenging game, begin with a review of skills and subskills, and write all the subskills on the board. When the trainees play the game, they can refer to the list on the board to help them make their choice.

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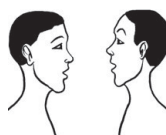
Reading



Writing



Listening



Speaking

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Skills cards (1)



You look for your friend's email address in the address book of your computer.

Answer: Scanning
(reading for specific information)



It's World Cup final day, but you have to finish your thesis. The TV is on behind you and you turn around every time you hear 'Goal!' so you can at least watch the action replay.

Answer: Listening for specific information



You read a letter from a long-lost friend, telling you all about her life these days.

Answer: Reading for detail



You're driving your sister to her friend's house in an unfamiliar part of town for a party. She's lost the map her friend gave her, so you ask her to call for directions from your mobile phone as you turn off the motorway.

Answer: Listening for detail



You're following a secret recipe for an amazing apple cake which is rather complicated, but hopefully worth the effort.

Answer: Reading for detail



You rent a movie on DVD and choose to watch in the original English without subtitles.

Answer: Extensive listening



After dinner, the family passes round a box of assorted chocolates with a description of each variety on the lid. You're looking for a dark and nutty one.

Answer: Scanning
(reading for specific information)



Your son tells you all about his day while you're chopping vegetables. When he finishes, you say: 'It sounds like you had a good day at school then. And I'm glad you had fun this afternoon, too.'

Answer: Listening for gist



You spend a cosy afternoon on the sofa at home with your favourite magazine.

Answer: Extensive reading



In class, the teacher plays a song. You have to clap your hands every time you hear the sound /b/. Other students clap when they hear /v/ or /f/.

Answer: Intensive listening



You're browsing the UK tourist website for the place where you'll be studying English for a month this summer, wondering how much you'll enjoy the city.

Answer: Skimming (reading for gist)



The message on your answer phone is from your boss, telling you he's leaving the company unexpectedly. You need to know how to react to him when you see him the next day – whether to congratulate or commiserate.

Answer: Listening for mood / infer attitude



Your friend has written an article for the local newspaper and has asked you to read it and think of a good title for it – in the next 3 minutes!

Answer: Skimming (reading for gist)



You've checked in and you're waiting in the airport lounge for your flight, number TKT723, to be called. Several announcements have been made already.

Answer: Listening for specific information

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Skills cards (2)



You receive an email from an old friend who you haven't heard from in a long time. She gives a few details of her recent life, but you want to know if she is feeling happy at the moment.

Answer: Read for mood / infer attitude



Your head teacher is explaining why you must teach class 2D again this term. You'd prefer a change, and are hanging on his every word, thinking up counter-arguments as he talks.

Answer: Listening for detail



You have to teach phrasal verbs based on the verb *hang* to your class. You're not sure about all the meanings so you look up *hang* in the dictionary and find lots of example sentences.

Answer: Intensive reading (focus on language)



You hear a short radio report about local reactions to a new by-pass being built in your area. You believe the road will have a positive impact on your community and listen to confirm your opinion.

Answer: Listening for gist



You're visiting a museum and find some parts fascinating, others fairly dull. How do you read the various fact cards on the exhibits?

Answer: Extensive reading



You listen to some pop music on the 50-minute commute to school, just staring out of the window, enjoying the tunes and the lyrics.

Answer: Extensive listening



After composing an email to your colleague, you click on all the words the computer highlights as being wrong, and scan the options for the word you meant to write.

Answer: Proofreading



You look up from your notes as often as possible while making a presentation to your classmates and teacher.

Answer: Making eye contact



You're writing a letter to an English-speaking pen friend, and begin by writing your address in the top right-hand corner.

Answer: Using correct layout



Your eyes and mouth show surprise and delight when your class presents you with a bouquet of flowers at the end of an intensive course, and you say 'Oh, how beautiful! Thank you everybody.'

Answer: Using facial expressions



You enter a class competition to write the best opening line for next week's creative writing essay. You spend ages brainstorming adjectives to make an impact.

Answer: Brainstorming



The burglar alarm is going off at home and you're on your way to class, on your mobile, telling your neighbour how to deactivate it. After each step you say: 'Have you got that?' or 'OK so far?'

Answer: Asking checking questions



Your teacher marks RO in several places on a paragraph you wrote. This means 'run sentence on' in her correction code, so you work on improving these errors.

Answer: Joining sentences correctly



While preparing students for their forthcoming FCE exam, you mention the multiple-choice cloze. When they look blank, you say: 'Remember the spaces in the text where you choose A, B, C or D?'

Answer: Clarifying meaning / paraphrasing

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Skills cards (3)



The teacher praises the fact that ideas in your essay are treated in a logical order, with a topic sentence and supporting ideas for every main point.

Answer: Paragraphing



A student is telling you why he wasn't able to do his homework. You want to keep an open mind and hear the whole story, so you simply say: 'hmm. Ok ...'

Answer: Confirming understanding



You ask your students to write a funny anecdote. One anecdote is so funny that it makes you laugh until tears run down your face.

Answer: Having good ideas



You've finally learnt to drop the /v/ when you say 'cup /ə/ tea' to your host family over breakfast. Now it sounds much more like they say it.

Answer: Using connected speech



You note down some feedback for a teacher friend after observing their class. You want to seem encouraging and give your positive impressions first when you come to speak to them, so you put an asterisk next to each positive point.

Answer: Organising ideas



When you spend time with English friends, you've noticed you can't hesitate or talk too slowly because people just lose interest.

Answer: Speaking with fluency



You avoid contractions in a covering letter for a job application.

Answer: Using appropriate style or function



In the middle of an oral exam, you need – and forget – the word 'leaflet', so you say, 'that piece of paper for advertising or giving people information'.

Answer: Paraphrasing



You are going to write a covering letter to accompany a job application, stating why you would be perfect for the job. You take a blank sheet of paper and jot down as many reasons as possible.

Answer: Brainstorming



You deliberately make your voice rise on the last word of most questions, e.g. 'What did you say?'

Answer: Using intonation



You write an end-of-level test for your class of young learners. As this is your first experience in designing formal assessment, you email a copy to your coordinator for her comments/changes.

Answer: Drafting



You say 'Thanks' when chatting to your classmates but 'Thank you' when talking to your school director.

Answer: Using register