

Who is...?

# Modifying “Jeopardy!” Games to Benefit All Students

What is...?

Kathleen Rotter

Do you use the popular TV game show “Jeopardy!” to review material during an instructional unit or before quizzes or exams? Do you also use its format as an assessment technique?

Using this game format allows teachers to assess knowledge without the need for formal tests or to reinforce critical information while avoiding rote practice. The game also allows for adaptation of the questions to any content area and levels of awards based on the difficulty of the question answered. This format also provides some accommodation for the variety of skill levels found within every classroom. This article explores ways teachers can modify the use of the game to benefit *all* their students.

Although “Jeopardy!” type review games can certainly be beneficial, observations of this game in use in classrooms lead to several questions regarding those pupils with mild disabilities.

## Questions About “Jeopardy!” Use

### Is the use of the game actually helping pupils learn the information being reviewed?

Students with learning disabilities

- Need significantly more time for learning.
- Have difficulties with attention, including failure to attend to relevant

stimuli and difficulty sustaining attention.

- Have memory problems, including failure to use rehearsal and other memory-enhancing strategies spontaneously.
- Have difficulties with self-regulation.
- Have difficulty organizing and completing tasks independently (Churton, Cranston-Gringas, & Blair, 1998; Gettinger, 1991).

Given these characteristics, how can students with mild learning disabilities increase their skills through this activity? In addition, because the game does not have a final evaluation process built in, how can teachers determine if the pupils are benefiting from its use?

### If a pupil didn't already study and learn the information, is there any way to get the answer during the game?

Without clear direction and family support to do so, many students with mild disabilities are not likely to have studied at home as part of their homework (Bryan, Nelson, & Mathur, 1995). Pupils who do not know the answers to most of the questions in the game may be embarrassed by their lack of knowledge or may choose to “zone out” or misbehave as ways of avoiding a potentially embarrassing situation. Regardless of the pupil's immediate response, this experience can reinforce learned help-

lessness and decrease motivation to succeed. (Wilson & David, 1994).

Generally, when “Jeopardy!” is played, pupils either know or do not know the answers. As a result, only those pupils who have already studied and learned the content are likely to earn points. You must assume the responsibility for providing the structure and learning strategies necessary to help the pupil with learning disabilities to be actively involved in this learning opportunity (Scanlon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996).

### Who is thinking or working during the game?

In the typical “Jeopardy!” game format, either one student answers at a time (leaving other pupils waiting or unengaged) or teams work together to get the answer (in which case the best prepared pupils typically take over for their team and the others may “drift” away). Students who have not studied may refuse to participate at all. In any of

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these situations, the students most in need of further reinforcement are likely to have the fewest opportunities for reinforcement in this activity.

### **Is the game format helping the pupils prepare for the test?**

While the game format offers novelty—which may attract some pupils with attention difficulties (Churton et al., 1998)—pupils may perceive the game as being unimportant “play time.” This may be especially true for pupils with learning difficulties who are frequently inactive learners and may require explicit instruction in how to use the activity to prepare for the upcoming test (Scanlon et al., 1996).

### **What Can a Teacher Do?**

With some simple modifications to the “Jeopardy!” game, many pupils, including those with learning disabilities, can benefit. Try some of the following helpful hints.

### **Encourage Students to Take Notes and Use Them to Study Ahead**

Explicitly teach students to prepare their notes for the “Jeopardy!” game before the day of the game. Notetaking helps increase students’ understanding and recall of information (Boyle & Weishaar, 2001). It encourages students to become actively involved in lectures, to clarify information, and to increase test performance (Peper & Mayer, 1986; Ruhl & Suritsky, 1995). All students should be assisted in the development of notes in preparation for an upcoming “Jeopardy!” game.

Pupils with mild learning disabilities may have difficulty taking notes because of deficits in written language and related areas (Schumaker & Deshler, 1984). Boyle and Weishaar (2001) summarized a variety of approaches for enhancing notetaking by pupils with mild learning disabilities, including the assignment of a notetaker, modification of lecture style,

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providing outlines of notes, or teaching notetaking strategies and techniques. Suritsky and Hughes (1996) explored two specific strategies for improving notetaking skills in pupils with mild disabilities: LINKS and AWARE. (See Figures 1 and 2.) Regardless of the approach, it is imperative that teachers explicitly address strategies for taking meaningful notes in class.

Announce games in advance, and support pupils in their preparation. Students with mild disabilities often experience difficulty with the planning,

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### *Announce games in advance, and support pupils in their preparation.*

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organization, and conduct of their studying at home (Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002). In their study, Hughes et al. found that pupils with mild learning disabilities could be taught to apply and maintain a strategy for independently completing assignments. Within that strategy is a subroutine using the acronym “BEST,” for **B**reak your assignment into parts, **E**stimate the number of study sessions needed, **S**chedule the sessions, and

Take your materials home” (p. 4). You could use this format to help pupils prepare for the game. In addition, devote class time before the day of the game to the organization and content of notes.

For example, as a study strategy, encourage students to predict questions that will be asked on the test. Teams could submit their “best questions” for possible inclusion in the game format. Teams whose questions are chosen could earn bonus points on the game. Copies of the questions developed should be distributed to all pupils. Pupils should also be told to highlight critical information in preparation for the game.

If time is not available for this activity, give the students teacher-developed study packets (including key terms and concepts) to study in preparation for “Jeopardy!”

### **Support the Game With the Use of Content Enhancers for Recall**

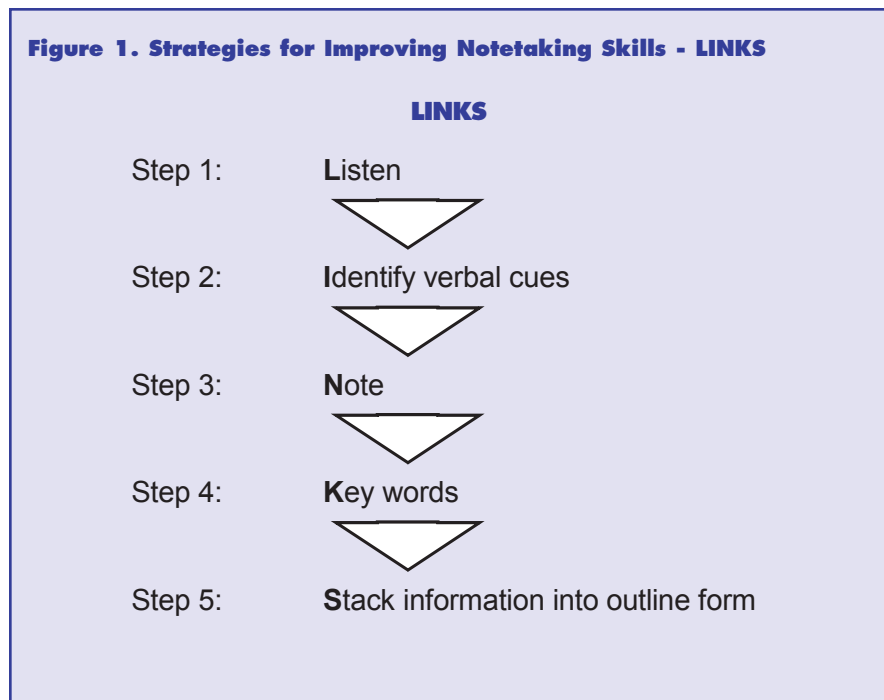
Content enhancers can help all pupils, especially those with mild disabilities

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*Content enhancers can help students identify, organize, comprehend, and retain critical content information.*

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**Figure 1. Strategies for Improving Notetaking Skills - LINKS**



(Hudson, Lignugaris-Kraft, & Miller, 1993). Content enhancers are techniques used by the teacher to help pupils identify, organize, comprehend and retain critical content information (Lenz, Bulgren, & Hudson, 1990). They include

- Advance organizers.
- Visual displays.
- Study guides.
- Mnemonic devices.
- Audio recordings.
- Computer-assisted instruction.
- Peer-mediated instruction.

Hudson et al. (1993) provided an excellent overview of their use.

First, in preparing for “Jeopardy!” you should provide advance organizers in a written form, which the pupils may expand into their classroom notes. Present the advance organizers before you teach the lesson, and provide a variety of information about the upcoming lesson including topics, subtopics, and concepts to be covered; background information; new concepts; new vocabulary; and an organizational framework for the lesson (Hudson et al., 1993).

Second, use mnemonic strategies as content enhancement—to enhance recall. Mnemonic devices may be verbal or pictorial. Crank and Bulgren (1993) provided a clear overview of the use of visual depictions to enhance achievement. Verbal mnemonic techniques include first-letter mnemonics, for example, TEENS to recall the five sensory organs of tongue, ears, eyes, nose, skin. Encourage students to review their notes before the game to identify any possible visual or verbal mnemonic strategies they could use. Encourage the students to share strategies with the class, just as you share strategies you come across. At a minimum, ask: Is there any way we could remember that more easily? Encourage students to share their personal methods for recall.

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*Provide advance organizers in a written form, which the pupils may expand into their classroom notes.*

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### Require the Use of Notes

Ask all students to bring their prepared notes to class on the day of the game. (You may want to keep a duplicate set of student’s notes in the classroom for those pupils who struggle to remember to bring necessary materials to class. In this way, forgetting the materials will not result in an inability to participate in the review.) At game time, direct the students to locate the answer in their notes. When they can point out the answer from their notes, they may attempt to answer the question.

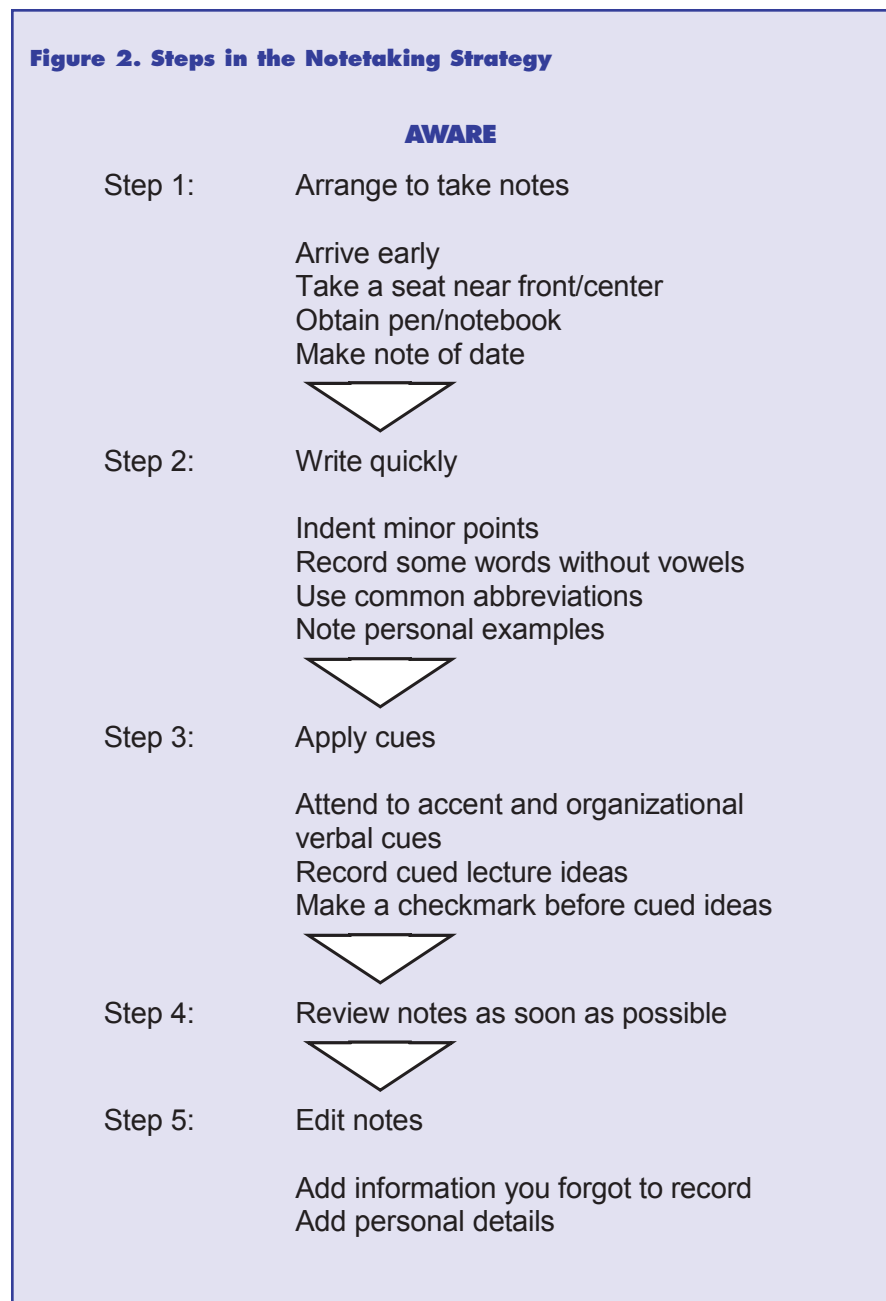
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### *Use mnemonic strategies as content enhancement.*

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Instruct all pupils to add or highlight the answers to questions asked as a part of the game. (If some students have difficulty writing, the group may work in pairs or triads with one serving as “scribe” and the other(s) as “researcher.”) Alert students to the need to improve their notes so that they might perform better on the next round or “Double Jeopardy!”

**Figure 2. Steps in the Notetaking Strategy**



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*Cooperative learning is one of the greatest success stories in the history of educational research.*

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Encourage students to review their highlights with the actual material chosen to see how effective they were at predicting the upcoming questions.

### **Help Everyone Respond**

Cooperative learning is a peer-mediated instructional option that offers positive academic results for pupils with mild learning disabilities (Wolford, Heward, & Alber, 2001). Slavin (1996) proclaimed this strategy to be “one of the greatest success stories in the history of educational research” (p. 43). Cooperative learning involves the use of small, heterogeneous groups of students who work together to achieve common learning goals. Students in the groups are often assigned roles, and the groups’ goal is to ensure that all members learn assigned material (Wolford et al.). McMaster and Fuchs (2002) stated that positive academic and social outcomes have been reported for “students in every major subject area, at all grade levels, and in many different types of schools worldwide” (p. 107). They stated that cooperative learning “provides an attractive alternative to ability grouping and competitive environments” (p. 107) for students with mild disabilities and that it can help improve the acceptance of pupils with disabilities by their peers without disabilities.

Cooperative learning typically includes group goals, group accountability, and group rewards on the basis of the performance of respective team members (McMaster & Fuchs, 2002). With the “Jeopardy!” game review, the team format could provide opportunities for peer support and encouragement as needed. To avoid the problem of the “class expert” taking over, everyone (or every pair for those individuals who find the competition too daunting on their own) on the team should have a turn. Students can be allowed to help their teammates find the answer in the notes by asking relevant questions. For

those concerned with other pupils shouting out the correct answer, you could set a rule that anyone shouting out the answer would earn the amount of points for that question for the opposing team. This should prove to be a sufficient disincentive.

Wolford et al. (2001) pointed out, however, that merely placing students with disabilities into groups with their peers will not ensure positive interactions. Pupils with mild learning disabilities often demonstrate difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication and in their ability to adjust to the demands of social situations (Bender & Wall, 1994). Wolford et al. (2001) suggested that teachers need to explicitly teach pupils how to recruit positive attention and feedback from their peers during group activities.

To support those pupils (including those with mild disabilities) who become stressed and unable to respond in quickly paced activities, you may choose to use a timer and allow several minutes for each team to prepare a response before anyone may answer. You might also consider only calling on volunteers for the first round of the game, thus allowing all students to improve their notes and familiarity with the questions.

### **Play It Twice**

To evaluate the students’ acquisition of information from the game, you should evaluate the pupils’ performance on round one, compared with following rounds of the game. If pupils’ performance does not improve on the following round(s), you need to use other reinforcement activities and study strategies.

### **Final Thoughts: Everyone Wins**

Making changes and “enhancements” to the “Jeopardy!” format can increase the success of all pupils, including those

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*To evaluate the students’ acquisition of information from the game, you should evaluate the pupils’ performance on several rounds.*

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with mild learning disabilities, in this fun review activity. The changes will also support the acquisition of content material for all of the students in your classes and make your “Jeopardy!” practice sessions more meaningful for all.

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**Kathleen Rotter** (CEC Chapter #279), Assistant Professor, Special Education, The College of New Jersey, Ewing.

Address correspondence to the author at Special Education, The College of New Jersey, P.O. Box 7718, Ewing, NJ 08628, (e-mail: rotter@tcnj.edu).

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