

Fishbowl Game Rules and Prompts

One deck, three ways to clue the same words: describe them, act them out, then use one word.

Host guide / Letter / Friends & adult social / 25–40 minutes

Read the guide privately first if this activity has hidden answers. Print single-sided at Actual size / 100%. Cut only sheets marked CARDS. Keep answer keys with the host.

What you need

- A bowl or opaque bag
- Paper slips and pens
- A phone timer or kitchen timer
- The 24 starter target cards below, or two target slips per player

How to run it

1. Make two roughly even teams and choose one person to keep time and score. With four players, two teams of two work well; with a larger group, alternate clue-givers within each team.
2. Fold the target slips so nobody can read them in the bowl. Each player may add two light, familiar targets, or the host can use the starter deck. Agree that anyone may replace a target that feels obscure or uncomfortable.
3. Round one is Describe. A clue-giver has 45 seconds to help teammates guess as many slips as possible. Describe freely, but do not say any part of the target, spell it, or point to a matching object. One pass is allowed; return a passed slip to the bowl.
4. Round two is Charades. Return and shuffle every target. Clue-givers may use gestures and acting, but no speech, writing, or sound effects. Keep the same timer and pass rule.
5. Round three is One Word. Shuffle the full deck again. A clue-giver may say exactly one word per target; no spelling, rhymes, or extra hints. Teammates get one guess before the next slip.
6. A team earns one point for each correct target. Rotate clue-givers so everyone who wants a turn gets one. Play until the deck is cleared in each round. If time is short, end after a fixed number of turns and call the current score final.

Keep the same targets across rounds

The repeating deck is the heart of Fishbowl: players remember the earlier clues, then try to communicate each target with less information. Do not add new slips between rounds. A familiar target can turn into a clever callback without requiring anyone to share a personal story.

For a quieter room, skip scorekeeping and let each team work together to clear the bowl before the timer ends. The game remains complete even if you do not use competitive scoring.

- Use everyday objects, places, and shared activities. Avoid private names or references only one person can understand.
- If a target is unclear, let the clue-giver replace it without explanation.

Make it comfortable for mixed groups

A host can explain the pass rule before the first turn: anyone may pass a target or sit out a round. No one has to act, perform, or explain a personal experience. Pick targets that are recognizable without needing specialist knowledge, and leave room for house rules such as longer turns or no score.

The starter set below is deliberately ordinary. It includes travel, books, home, and gathering items so teams have several possible ways to describe each phrase. Fold or cover the list before playing if you want players to draw unseen targets.

- For four to six players, use all 24 targets. For a larger group, have each willing player add two more.
- For a short visit, set a 20-minute cap and stop at the end of the current turn.

A quick host setup

Before guests arrive, cut scrap paper into slips, write the 24 phrases below, and place them in a bowl. Tell the group how long each turn lasts and demonstrate a legal clue with a throwaway example. The host can keep a simple tally on the back of an envelope.

If a player accidentally breaks a clue rule, pause and decide together whether the target returns to the bowl. A friendly, consistent ruling is better than arguing over a close call. Keep the pace moving and start the next turn.

- Example: for a target like “picnic blanket,” a legal description might mention a soft outdoor layer; saying “picnic” or pointing at a blanket would give away the answer.
- One word in the final round means one spoken clue word, not one sentence or a string of hints.

CARDS / Fishbowl Game Rules and Prompts

<p>NC_FISHBOWL-001 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Road-trip playlist</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-002 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Camping lantern</p>
<p>NC_FISHBOWL-003 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Farmers-market tote</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-004 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Picnic blanket</p>
<p>NC_FISHBOWL-005 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Coffee-shop patio</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-006 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Book-club pick</p>

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<p>NC_FISHBOWL-007 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Borrowed board game</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-008 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Garden tomato</p>
<p>NC_FISHBOWL-009 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Travel mug</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-010 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Museum audio guide</p>
<p>NC_FISHBOWL-011 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Souvenir magnet</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-012 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Puzzle piece under the sofa</p>

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<p>NC_FISHBOWL-013 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Friend's new plant</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-014 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Favorite takeout order</p>
<p>NC_FISHBOWL-015 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Rain-soaked umbrella</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-016 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Dog-eared paperback</p>
<p>NC_FISHBOWL-017 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Picnic cooler</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-018 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Group-photo timer</p>

1 inch / print at 100%

25 mm / print at 100%

CARDS / Fishbowl Game Rules and Prompts

<p>NC_FISHBOWL-019 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Folding chair</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-020 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Campfire story</p>
<p>NC_FISHBOWL-021 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Kitchen dance break</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-022 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Lost car keys</p>
<p>NC_FISHBOWL-023 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Thrift-store find</p>	<p>NC_FISHBOWL-024 / Fishbowl target — fold or cover before play</p> <p>Neighborhood block party</p>

Hosting questions

How many people do you need for Fishbowl?

Four or more is comfortable, split into two teams. With three people, try a cooperative version and take turns giving clues.

Can you pass a target?

Yes. A pass keeps the game comfortable and prevents one obscure slip from slowing a turn. Return it to the bowl.

Do you need a special deck?

No. Use paper slips and familiar, easy-to-clue targets. The starter set is optional.

References

Reviewed for common Fishbowl round structure; these rules and targets are independently drafted.

<https://www.shouldweplay.com/games/fishbowl>

Reviewed as a second public description of the familiar repeat-the-deck format; no wording copied.

<https://familygameideas.com/games/fishbowl/>

Original AI-assisted resource with AI editorial review. Independent human playtesting and physical printing have not been completed. Answer, listen, or pass.