Back-to-Back Drawing Communication Activity

One partner describes a simple picture while the other sketches from words alone; then partners can switch roles and compare how each instruction landed.

Host guide / Letter / Pairs; 4–20 adults, or opt-in breakout pairs online / 15–20 minutes including instructions, two rounds, and optional reflection

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

- Per pair: 2 sheets of plain paper, 2 pencils or pens, and 2 target cards selected from the 10 text instructions below and drawn by the host on separate cards; the drawings are not pre-rendered.

- A folder, clipboard, or screen barrier if partners prefer not to sit back-to-back.

- A timer; optional large-print target cards or host-read descriptions.

How to run it

1. Before play, choose any two of the 10 target descriptions below and draw each target on a separate card using basic shapes and clear positions. Show each target only to the describer, never to the sketcher. Do not use personal photos, confidential work, copyrighted characters, or a participant’s image.

2. Invite people to form pairs by choice. Explain that one person sees the target and describes it; the other sketches from words. A person can observe, host, draw privately, or pass without explaining.

3. Let each pair choose to sit back-to-back, face opposite directions, or use a folder as a screen. Physical contact is not part of the game. For remote play, send the target privately to the describer; cameras remain optional.

4. Give the describer 30 seconds to view the target, then allow two minutes for describing and sketching. The sketcher may ask clarifying questions unless both people opt into a no-questions variation. Either person may pause or stop.

5. Reveal the target only if both partners agree. Compare the images without scoring accuracy. Ask whether the pair wants to switch roles and use a second card.

6. Close with an optional process question: “Which description made a shape easier to place?” or “What did you ask to make the direction clearer?” Do not diagnose a person or generalize the result to work.

Choose simple, fair targets

A useful target has a few distinct shapes and clear relationships: a large circle above a line, a triangle beside a rectangle, or a small square inside a larger outline. Avoid tiny details, perspective, cultural references, and precision demands. Important: the ten cards in this JSON are text descriptions, not supplied drawings or ready-to-print picture cards. Before play, the host must draw each chosen target on a separate blank card or slip from its description, then keep that sketch hidden from the drawer until reveal.

New York University Steinhardt’s activity page describes the core paired format: one person sees an image, the other has paper and pen, and the first gives verbal directions without naming the image. This version uses original shape cards, permits clarifying questions, and avoids accuracy scoring.

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Do not hand the text instruction to the sketcher and do not describe this page as already containing printable graphics. The simple reference image is made by the host during preparation; the drawing cards themselves are not included as image assets.

Host script and boundaries

Read: “One person will see a simple target and describe it. The other will draw from directions. This is not an art contest. You can ask questions, switch roles, observe, or pass. We will compare only if both people agree.”

Do not pair people based on presumed skill. A participant who does not want to pair can host, observe, or complete a private draw-from-words sheet. Ask permission before displaying any sketch to the room.

Accessibility and remote options

People can remain seated. A divider, screen, or separate rooms can replace sitting back-to-back. If holding a pencil is difficult, use a digital shape board, dictate directions to a willing partner, or have the host move shapes under the participant’s direction. Offer high-contrast, large-print targets and extra time.

For remote pairs, send one target privately to the describer and let the sketcher use paper or a blank canvas. Do not require screen sharing, camera use, or a view of someone’s home. Audio-only participants can describe, sketch off-screen, or observe.

Printable host sheet

Setup: people choose pairs and roles; give each pair a hidden target and a blank page. Round one: 30 seconds to inspect, two minutes to describe and sketch, then reveal if both agree. Round two: switch roles with another card only if both want to. Close with one optional process observation. No scores or rankings.

The describer may explain position, size, edge, and order. The sketcher may ask for a repeat. A no-questions challenge is optional and must be agreed in advance.

Debrief without overinterpreting

Ask about the task: Which direction was easiest to act on? What question helped? Did the pair prefer one instruction at a time or a full description first? These questions let people discuss the game without disclosing a personal difficulty.

A mismatched sketch is not proof that someone failed. The image, wording, pace, drawing conventions, and access needs all affect the result. Thank both partners and move on; do not connect the drawing to employee evaluation or promise that the activity improves communication.

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CARDS / Back-to-Back Drawing Communication Activity

R_BACKDRAW-001 / Target card

Host prep target: draw a large circle near the top center; place a short horizontal line below it.

R_BACKDRAW-002 / Target card

Host prep target: draw a square in the lower-left area with a small circle just above its right edge.

R_BACKDRAW-003 / Target card

Host prep target: draw an upward triangle, with a small dot inside near the bottom.

R_BACKDRAW-004 / Target card

Host prep target: draw two parallel vertical lines, then a short horizontal line joining them near the top.

R_BACKDRAW-005 / Target card

Host prep target: draw a wide rectangle; add a smaller rectangle inside it, aligned to the right.

R_BACKDRAW-006 / Target card

Host prep target: draw a crescent opening to the left, then a dot below it.

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CARDS / Back-to-Back Drawing Communication Activity

R_BACKDRAW-007 / Target card

Host prep target: draw a diagonal line from lower left to upper right; add a circle at each end.

R_BACKDRAW-008 / Target card

Host prep target: draw a wide oval; place three short vertical marks inside, evenly spaced.

R_BACKDRAW-009 / Target card

Host prep target: draw a five-point star above a short wavy line.

R_BACKDRAW-010 / Target card

Host prep target: draw a small square inside a large circle, slightly below the center.

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Host answer key

Keep this section separate from player cards. Accept equivalent wording where the meaning matches.

01. Circle above a short horizontal line

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

02. Square lower left; small circle above and to the right

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

03. Upward triangle with an interior dot

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

04. Two vertical parallel lines joined near the top

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

05. Large rectangle with smaller inset rectangle on the right

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

06. Left-opening crescent above one dot

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

07. Rising diagonal with circles at both endpoints

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

08. Wide oval with three vertical marks

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

09. Star above a short wavy line

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

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10. Circle with an inset square below center

The host draws this target on a separate card and shows it only to the describer; the sketcher hears words, not a view of the target.

Hosting questions

Do partners have to sit back-to-back?

No. They can face away, use a folder as a screen, join from separate locations, or use private image sharing. Physical contact is not required.

Can the sketcher ask questions?

Yes. The default version allows repeats and clarifying questions. A no-questions round should be optional and agreed in advance.

How long should each round last?

Two minutes is enough for a simple target. Add time when requested and do not treat speed as ability.

Should the group choose a winner?

No. This version avoids scoring. Invite pairs to notice which wording or question helped, then move on.

References

Primary university activity description for paired image viewing, verbal description, sketching, and comparing. This draft supplies original geometric targets, clarification options, and access adjustments.

https://technology.steinhardt.nyu.edu/hc/en-us/articles/20009009269787-Back-to-Back-Drawing

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

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