

## Who is Thiagi and what are Framegames?

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### *Abstract*

*This paper outlines a workshop-style presentation I have used to introduce the work of Sivasailam Thiagarajan, aka Thiagi (<http://www.thiagi.com>), and his performance-based training activities called Framegames. I normally include short overviews of each Framegame (i.e. Classify, Envelopes, Generic Board Games (GBG), Group Grope, Take Five and Matrix Games) and try to give participants a feel for these activities by demonstrating as many as time permits. I also try to describe how I have used these games in my own classes, especially Business English and Studies in Multicultural Economies, as well as other settings such as faculty development meetings and teacher-training workshops. I encourage participants to come up with ideas for using Framegames in their own context and provide them with a list of references to get them started.*

### **Introduction**

I began hearing the name Thiagi in 2006 while taking some online courses in instructional systems technologies through the School of Education at Indiana University. As I remember it, the name came up in online discussions about teaching strategies. The rumor was that this charismatic gentleman was making a splash in Performance Training (PT) circles. I decided to find out more, and one of my first destinations was Thiagi's website (<http://www.thiagi.com>). There I discovered that Thiagi is short for Sivasailam Thiagarajan and that he was originally from India but has been living in the US, and been involved in performance training, for more than thirty years. I also signed up on the website for a free monthly newsletter, and began reading more about his various training techniques. Foremost among these was something called Framegames. Eventually I obtained *Framegames by Thiagi* (2004), as well as some of his other publications, and have been experimenting with these activities for the past two years. So, what are Framegames? The following definition comes from Thiagi himself:

*A framegame is a game that is deliberately designed to permit the easy switching of content. It is a game that can be applied to a wide variety of topics (Thiagi, 2004).*

In other words, these are activity shells that can be used for a wide range of training settings. The teacher/trainer simply plugs in the content. This could involve training police officers how to treat evidence at a crime scene, teaching third-graders how to gather information for a science project or testing factory workers knowledge of safety procedures. To my knowledge, Framegames were not being used in language teaching contexts, but it seemed like a natural fit, especially where the focus is on content and learning the target language by actually using it. I was eager to get started. A short list of reasons for why to use Framegames can be found in Appendix 1.

## **Overviews and examples**

In this section I will outline each of the Framegames and explain some of my own experiences and/or how it might be used in English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classes. Short list of learning objectives that might be addressed by each Framegame are included as appendices together with a set of generic instructions. These appendices were compiled and adapted from Thiagarajan (2004) and can be copied and used as job aids.

### ***Classify***

This Framegame can be used when the learning objective is to get participants to group like items in different categories, check items against some standard or criteria, group items in the appropriate step of a longer process, or match problems with possible solutions. As language teachers, we can use this to involve students in thinking how specific objects, concepts or procedures can be grouped or categorized. Basically, individuals or groups are given a set of criteria to be used for classifying, and then compete to place items in the appropriate category. Points are awarded for each correct response as well as incorrect responses from competing individuals or teams. One of the examples included in Thiagarajan (2004) involves categorizing instructional topics into learning domains (cognitive, psychomotor, interpersonal and affective), and I used my adaptation of this training activity at Teachers Helping Teachers (THT) workshops in both Laos and the Philippines. With further modification, this activity could be used to help ESL/EFL learners better understand how language learning involves development in all of the learning domains. Items might include memorizing vocabulary or grammar items (cognitive), forming different sounds by adjusting tongue placement (psychomotor), expressing interest in what an interlocutor is saying (interpersonal), and building self-confidence in speaking the target language (affective). Appendix 2 includes other ideas and a generic set of instructions for using this Framegame.

### ***Envelopes***

Basically, this activity involves two or more teams offering a solution to the same problem, and then having another team evaluate the solutions on their various merits. I have used this Framegame for both Business English classes and faculty development meetings. For the former, I wrote down the following prompts on the outside of size 3 envelopes (120mm x 235mm): (1) write five rules for students in this class, (2) write five rules for the teacher, (3) write five pieces of advice for succeeding in Business English class, and (4) write five pieces of advice for studying English on your own. Depending on the size of the class, I prepared three or four envelopes with the same prompt. After forming pairs or groups of three, I passed out the envelopes with three or four index cards inside (to match the number of envelopes circulating with that same prompt). The groups would then read the prompt on their envelope and write their response on one of the index cards. After the set time limit (usually about 5 minutes), groups would place their response back in the envelope and then the envelopes would be passed to the group to their immediate left. Each group would then have an envelope with a new prompt (this takes a bit of coordination on the part of the instructor/facilitator). Each group would then consider and write a response to the new problem (without looking at the previous group's response). After two, three or four groups have a chance to write their response, the next

group to get the envelope takes out all of the index cards and evaluates the responses. I tell the students to distribute a total of one hundred points among the cards based on the relative merits of each response (e.g. 40, 40 & 20 for three responses). This has been an extremely successful first-day exercise to get students thinking about where we are going with Business English. As with all of the Framergames, we conclude by debriefing participants and reflecting on what was learned, what was missing, etc.

Prompts for the faculty development (FD) meeting included: (1) write five objectives for our freshman orientation course, (2) write five fundamental skills that incoming freshmen should have to succeed in their studies in our department, and (3) write five ideas for activities aimed at building a sense of classroom community for freshman orientation classes. Using Envelopes with these prompts successfully got faculty members involved in brainstorming activities and resulted in rather extensive lists of ideas for each prompt. Generic instructions and other ideas can be found in Appendix 3.

### ***Generic Board Game (GBG)***

Although quite flexible in terms of context and target objectives, the GBG shell can be used most effectively to review content and check understanding of factual information. One of the examples in Thiagarajan (2004) is a game called ASIA, where participants in groups compete to match factual information with one of six countries in Asia. The structure and aims of this activity seemed well-matched for a course I was teaching called Studies in Multicultural Economies. At the time we were learning about Laos and its five neighboring countries: Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. My approach was to get students to propose facts for each country via e-mail, and then the best eighty facts were used for the game. This Framergame requires a bit more preparation than the others, as well as a game board, cards with individual facts, game pieces, a feedback sheet and die. For ESL/EFL classes, I would choose a theme or issue that involved from five to eight categories. Although most factual information should be true for only one of the categories, there will likely be items that fit into more than one category or possibly all categories. See Appendix 4 for more ideas and a set of generic instructions for conducting the game.

### ***Group Grope***

This is the Framergame that I have the most experience with. It is also one of the easiest to prepare for and conduct. This is basically a shell to promote brainstorming on a specific topic or issue. I have used this to solicit student-generated objectives for Business English class as well as suggestions for reducing our global footprint in teacher-training courses. Generic instructions can be found in Appendix 5, but I will offer a brief overview of how I conduct these sessions using the Business English example listed above.

First, when participants enter the room I pass out three index cards and ask them to write an objective they would like to set for the term. If participants seem to be struggling with this I explain that this is something they want to be able to do when they finish our course that they can't do now. Then, I collect all the cards, shuffle them and redistribute three cards to each

member, mixing in a few of my own examples. I then have participants mingle and trade cards among themselves, trying to get cards that reflect their preferences. They are also allowed to swap cards with cards that I have prepared and placed on display somewhere in the room. The next step is to organize their cards in order of their preference. Participants are then instructed to form groups of three or four, and then need to select the three cards that best reflect the group's preferred objectives for our class, again putting them in order of preference. At this stage, I pass out poster paper and markers, and announce that each group needs to prepare a visual representation of their objectives. No text is allowed on the posters. Groups then discuss (and often struggle with) how to best complete this task. Completed posters are then displayed around the room and participants view the posters prepared by other groups and try to decipher what the objectives are. Finally, each group presents their poster with the objectives they selected. Again, it is important to debrief participants after they complete the task. This debriefing gives participants a chance to reflect on the experience, share what they learned as well as struggled with, and suggest how to improve the activity.

### ***Take Five***

Although this is probably the easiest Framedgame to prepare for, I still have but limited experience using it. It is basically a brainstorming activity that can be used to generate ideas, solutions, etc. The one setting where I tried this was a recent sample lesson I taught for a group of first and second-year high school students. I was introducing the topic of global footprint (the area of land required to produce what we consume as well as accommodate our waste) and wanted to conclude the lesson by inviting students to come up with their own suggestions for how to reduce the size of our own global footprint. My approach was as follows: (1) I first asked students to independently write down as many ideas as they could in two minutes. (2) I then asked students to put their notes away and form groups of three. (3) Next, I instructed the teams to spend five minutes compiling a group list of suggestions, sharing their original lists but also generating more ideas. (4) Teams were then instructed to choose the best five items and prioritize them. (5) I then had teams call out their best suggestions as I recorded them (with slight rewording) on a piece of paper viewed via overhead camera. (6) After we had a common list of ten suggestions, I asked teams to discuss among themselves and choose the best suggestion from the common list. (7) At this time, I explained the scoring system (each team's score will equal the number of teams selecting the same suggestion, e.g. if 3 teams choose the same item, each of those teams gets 3 points). (8) Teams wrote down their choice on a piece of scrap paper and passed them to me. (9) I announced each team's choice and there were two teams with the same answer (We should walk or ride our bicycle whenever possible). The other four teams all had different answers. Thus, I crossed out this suggestion on the common list and awarded two points to both of these teams. The other four teams got one point each. (10) We continued with successive rounds until we had crossed out the top five suggestions. (11) I tallied up the scores and we congratulated the top teams. (12) I explained that we would also award points for items on their original lists if they were in among the top five we selected (5 points if they had the top selection, 4 points for the second-ranked selection, etc.). (13) I asked students to reflect on the list of suggestions and the activity. My first question was which of these suggestions are easiest to follow.

As with the other Framegames, Take Five has both training and testing applications. Again, readers are directed to Appendix 6 for generic directions and other ideas.

**Matrix Games**

Thiagarajan (2004) reminds us that Matrix Games, “are well-suited to exploring interrelationships among ideas.” Again, as with Take Five, this is another Framegame that I am still getting acquainted with. The one context where I have used Matrix Games is a teacher-training workshop in the Philippines on aligning learning objectives, instructional strategies and assessment. I was introducing the work of Anderson, et al (2001), and wanted participants to explore the intricacies of matching these three dimensions of the teaching craft. The matrix we used was the taxonomy table proposed by Anderson, et al (Table 1). I roughly followed the generic instructions outlined in Appendix 7, with successive rounds for learning objectives, instructional strategies/activities and assessment.

**Table 1. The Taxonomy Table (Anderson, et al, 2001)**

The Knowledge Dimension	The Cognitive Process Dimension					
	Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Factual Knowledge						
Conceptual Knowledge						
Procedural Knowledge						
Metacognitive Knowledge						

I will leave it to the reader’s imagination to think of possible ESL/EFL contexts where Matrix Games might come in handy. Again, I believe this and other Framegames are an excellent vehicle for getting learners to “learn by doing.” Also, we should again recognize the various applications for both training and testing.

**Conclusion**

The point that hooked me on Framegames was the flexibility. All of these shells can be modified to accommodate different numbers of participants, learning objectives, time allotments, areas of the curriculum (as main component, as warm up, filler, or wrap up), etc. The relative ease of plugging in content also makes Framegames an attractive addition to the busy teacher’s toolbox.

The mission that I set for myself in writing this paper was to outline the various Framegames in a way that would intrigue readers to experiment for themselves or at least compel them to research the topic further. I would never try to tell participants how to do something when I

could show them. We didn't have that luxury here in these pages. My parting advice is to get acquainted with the various Framergames but jumping right in. It might not come off perfect the first time, but you should go away with ideas for improvement. Each successive attempt will bring more insight as well as confidence. Eventually you should be able to instinctively match new learning challenges with an appropriate Framergame and plug in your content before you can say Sivasailam Thiagarajan.

## **References**

Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Airasian, P. W., Cruikshank, K. A., Mayer, R. E., Pntrich, P. R., Raths, J. & Wittrock, M. C. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Longman.

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## **Biographical Statement**

Brent has been tutoring and teaching ESL and EFL for approximately two decades, first in Hawaii and then in Japan and other parts of Asia. He is currently in charge of the Business English program for the Faculty of Economics at Kobe Gakuin University. He has two masters degrees from the School of Education at Indiana University: one in Language Education and the other in Instructional Systems Technology. His current research interests include curriculum development, language-learning motivation and problem-based learning. He can be contact at [bjones\\_jp@yahoo.com](mailto:bjones_jp@yahoo.com).

## **Appendix 1. Why use framergames? (Thiagi, 2004)**

*New content* – Off-the-shelf instructional games rarely provide the exact content you need. You can plug your own content into the framergames.

*Certainty* – Designing a new game is an unpredictable adventure. Framergames are a field-tested procedure that ensure successful outcomes.

*Involvement* – Players can load their own content into a framergame. This helps them gain an intimate understanding of the content.

*Learning task* – Most training objectives can be classified into types such as concepts and procedures. Framergames exist for each type of learning.

## Appendix 2. Framegames by Thiagi – CLASSIFY (Thiagi, 2004)

CLASSIFY games can be used with different types of instructional objectives such as:

- to make fine distinctions among items
- to check an item against required criteria
- to review different steps in a process
- to select the most appropriate solution

### *Generic Instructions*

1. Assemble game materials (e.g. job aids, list of items, Facilitator's Master List, Team Record Sheet)
2. Explain the classification scheme (e.g. what categories will be used).
3. Distribute the items to be classified.
4. Demonstrate the task.
5. Form teams.
6. Explain the rules.
7. Explain the scoring system.
8. Begin the first round.
9. Monitor the teams.
10. Announce the official response.
11. Award points.
12. Continue the game.
13. Coordinate an intermission.
14. Conclude the game.
15. Debrief the players.

*Item Classification.* This involves placing similar items into different concept categories.

*Criteria Check.* This involves identifying standards or criteria that are not met by particular items.

*Process Review.* This involves choosing the step of a process to which various items belong.

*Solution Selection.* This involves choosing the best solution for various problem situations.

### **Appendix 3. Framegames by Thiagi – ENVELOPES (Thiagi, 2004)**

Two key elements of ENVELOPES are:

- two or more teams solve the same problem
- another team compares and evaluates the different solutions

#### *Generic Instructions*

1. Prepare the envelopes.
2. Prepare the rating scale.
3. Organize the participants into groups.
4. Seat the teams.
5. Brief the participants.
5. Distribute the stimulus envelopes and response cards.
6. Conduct the first round.
7. End the first round.
8. Conduct the second round.
9. Repeat the procedure.
10. Ask the teams to evaluate the response cards.
11. Ask the teams to announce the results.
12. Identify the winning team.
13. Debrief the participants.
14. Assign follow-up activities.

Possible objectives for ENVELOPES include:

- ABSTRACTS. Produce standardized summaries of readings.
- USES. Identify creative uses for common objects.
- MEETING MANAGEMENT. Effectively handle disruptive participants.
- TEAM PERFORMANCE. Make creative team presentations.
- COMPLAINTS. Select the most cost-effective response to a customer complaint.
- ANALOGIES. Create graphical analogies to explain complex concepts.
- SALES PITCH. Position different products to appeal to different market segments.
- ASSUMPTIONS. Examine basic assumptions behind different work processes.
- TRAVEL ENGLISH. Write short paragraphs for travel brochures.

#### **Appendix 4. Framgames by Thiagi – GENERIC BOARD GAME (GBG) (Thiagi, 2004)**

GBGs can be used to create instructional games that deal with processes (e.g. step-by-step procedures) or categories (e.g. concept learning, fact review, solution selection).

##### *Generic Instructions (Categories version)*

Materials – Game board, Game cards, Game pieces, Feedback sheet, Die

1. Set up the game board.
2. Select the first dealer.
3. Deal the cards.
4. Determine the category for the round  
(dealer roles die).
5. Select cards.
6. Begin card display.
7. Move the piece.
8. Encourage objections.
9. Persuade the player.
10. Challenge the card.
11. Continue after the challenge.
12. Continue the first round.
13. Continue the game.
14. Conclude the game.
15. Debrief the players.

GBGs can be played by individuals or in teams. You can set a time limit and the player (or team) that has moved furthest along the game board wins.

## **Appendix 5. Framegames by Thiagi – GROUP GROPE (Thiagi, 2004)**

The GROUP GROPE Framegame is used to elicit responses to some prompt. After brainstorming for as many responses as possible, individuals choose the best responses. Teams are then formed and work together to prepare some graphical representation of their top three responses.

### *Generic Instructions.*

1. Give each participant four blank cards and ask them to write responses to the prompt. After 5 minutes, collect the cards and mix them with your prepared cards.
2. Randomly distribute three cards to each participant. Ask everyone to study the items on the cards and to arrange them in order of personal preference. While participants do this, spread the leftover cards on a large table.
3. Ask participants to exchange the cards they don't like with those on the table. Allow a couple of minutes for this activity.
4. Ask participants to exchange their cards with each other. Every participant should exchange at least one card and may exchange any number. Stop this activity after 3 minutes.
5. Ask participants to form teams. There is no limit to the number of participants who may join the same team, but no team may keep more than three cards.
6. After an appropriate pause for the teams to discuss and discard, instruct each team to prepare a graphic poster (without any text) to reflect its three final cards.
7. After a suitable pause, ask each team to read its three final cards and present its poster. Comment on each presentation. If appropriate, identify the best presentation and give an award to the team that created it.

## Appendix 6. Framgames by Thiagi – TAKE FIVE (Thiagi, 2004)

TAKE FIVE games can be used for a variety of purposes, and is well-suited to teamwork, testing and training. Some specific uses in teamwork situations include:

- Problem solving
- Forecasting
- Policy formulation
- Strategic planning
- Change management

Specific uses of TAKE FIVE games in testing situations include:

- Constructing tests and other data-collection instruments
- Collecting information from focus groups
- Conducting a needs analysis
- Operationalizing abstract concepts and soft skills
- Gathering inputs from stakeholders

Two ways in which TAKE FIVE can be used to help players achieve training goals are:

- To structure an activity through which players learn from one another
- To review and reinforce principles and procedures learned through other methods and media

### *Generic Instruction*

1. Brief the players
2. Begin with individual brainstorming.
3. Form teams.
4. Assign teamwork.
5. Ask the teams to narrow down their lists.
6. Prepare a common list.
7. Ask the teams to select the best idea.
8. Explain the scoring system.
9. Conduct the first round.
10. Award points.
11. Rank the top idea.
12. Continue the game.
13. Break ties.
14. Conclude the game.
15. Award scores for the original lists.
16. Debrief the players.

TAKE FIVE games can be shortened or lengthened to match the allotted time.

## **Appendix 7. Framegames by Thiagi – MATRIX GAMES (Thiagi, 2004)**

MATRIX GAMES are well-suited to exploring interrelationships among ideas.

### *Generic Instructions*

1. Get ready. Prepare a transparency or game board showing the matrix with labels for its columns and rows, as well as examples of different types of statements.
2. Organize the players. You will need at least 3 players. This game can also be played in teams. Two individuals (or teams) compete against each other, and the third one acts as a judge. Each team selects a symbol.
3. Explain the object of the game. The first team to occupy all the squares on any row, column, or main diagonal wins the game. If neither team can achieve this, the team with the most squares wins.
4. Specify the statements.
5. Begin the game. Decide which team goes first. Ask this team to select any square and to write down an appropriate statement on a piece of paper. The opposing team also writes down its statement for the same square.
6. Ask for the judging team's decision. If there is no challenge, the judging team decides whether the statement is acceptable or not. If the statement is acceptable, place the team's symbol in the selected square. Otherwise, leave blank.
7. Continue the game. Alternate between teams, asking them to select squares and to write down appropriate statements.
8. Conclude the game. The game ends when one team occupies all the squares in a row, column, or main diagonal.

Why? Training, Testing, Teamwork

When? Before training, during training, after training

What? Concepts, People, Solutions, Events

How? Comparison, Cross impact, Cause-effect relationships, Selection, Perceptions.