

# ETpedia™

## Materials Writing

500 ideas  
for creating  
English language  
materials

Lindsay Clandfield and John Hughes

Series editor: John Hughes

[www.myetpedia.com](http://www.myetpedia.com)

**ENGLISH  
TEACHING**  
*professional*

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# 10 reasons for using this resource

## 1. Supporting day-to-day materials writing

All English language teachers need to create their own materials at some stage in their working lives. Sometimes it's a quick gap-fill exercise to check if the students remember what they did in the previous lesson, or it might be an end-of-term test. Teachers write worksheets to go with videos and songs, and some even write whole sets of materials for use during the term by all the teachers in a school. Or perhaps they want to write and publish their own materials to share with the rest of the ELT world.

Given the vast range of materials that ELT teachers produce daily, it's perhaps surprising that there is so little support and guidance in the form of books and online resources. We hope that this book in the ETpedia series of teacher resources will provide that support.

## 2. From basic principles to extensive materials writing

This resource contains 50 units, covering everything an ELT teacher needs to know about getting started with writing materials – from the basics of creating sentence-level exercises to ways of exploiting longer texts, creating entire worksheets and producing whole sets of lesson materials.

## 3. Units of 10

Each unit contains 10 points. These can take the form of tips, ideas, examples of question types or checklists of general guidelines. Why 10? Because we believe that a list of 10 provides enough information both to inspire you and encourage you to develop your skills further.

## 4. New teachers

If you are just starting out in English language teaching, you may not have the confidence to produce large amounts of your own material, and you may be teaching from a coursebook or materials provided by more experienced colleagues. However, you may still encounter occasions when you wish to try out your own ideas or produce some material to supplement your coursebook. You will find lots of ideas here to help you and provide you with the building blocks to start creating (and later sharing) your own classroom and self-study materials.

## 5. Experienced teachers

If you have been teaching for a while, this resource may both remind you of the techniques needed for materials writing and also give you some fresh ideas for developing your materials writing skills.

## 6. Studying for an ELT qualification

Perhaps you are planning to take the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), or studying for another teaching qualification, such as a CELTA or Cert TESOL. On these kinds of courses, you will need to demonstrate your ability to create some basic materials, such as grammar or vocabulary exercises. For teachers taking higher-level qualifications, such as the DELTA, Diploma in TESOL or even an MA with a component in materials design and development, this book will be an invaluable reference.

## 7. Published ELT materials writers

For people who already have their materials published and who earn money from writing, this resource offers a useful set of checklists which you can turn to when you're in need of a few extra ideas or looking for a quick alternative way to design an exercise. It will help to remind you of the key points that you need to bear in mind when starting out on a new writing project. In addition, you may want to create your own set of tips to refer to, using the 'Write your own tips' pages at the end of the book.

## 8. Teacher trainers

If you are a teacher trainer, senior teacher or director of studies who delivers staff training on a range of topics, then the ideas that this resource offers could form the basis for sessions related to materials writing. You could choose one or two lists of tips from a particular section as the focus for a single training session.

## 9. Additional photocopiables and quotes

At the end of this book, you will find an Appendix with additional photocopiable materials. These can be used as they are or adapted and developed to suit your own context. Throughout the book you will also find quotes from experienced writers, sharing their views, ideas and experiences on producing ELT materials.

## 10. More time

If you are familiar with the other ETpedia resource books, you'll know that the books aim to save you time. The one thing that all teachers (and full-time materials writers) say that they lack is time. We hope that by sharing this collection of ideas, based on our many years of experience of writing for our own classes and, later, as published authors, we can save you time when it comes to producing your own materials.

*"I'm a big fan of the ETpedia books as they offer a wealth of information. They are very easy to dip into as a reference as they are clearly labelled and divided into different categories. Perfect for novice teachers finding their feet in the world of EFL, experienced teachers who need a quick refresher on a certain subject or even for teacher trainers to use during input sessions. All in all, the ETpedia books have quickly become an EFL teacher's best companion!"*

**Glenn Standish, Director of Studies, International House, Toruń, Poland**

# 10 ways to use this resource

This resource has been written for teachers who are writing materials to use with their own students, materials to be shared with and used by colleagues, or materials to be published online or in print. It can be read and used in different ways according to your needs, interests and level of experience.

## 1. Cover to cover

If you are new to the area of materials writing, you might be using this resource as an introductory text to the subject. If so, it's worth reading the book from cover to cover in order to get a thorough overview and grounding in how to write materials for English language learners and teachers.

## 2. Read a section

The contents page will direct you to different sections with groups of units. Some sections might not be immediately relevant to the type of materials you are working on, so ignore them for now. Other sections will be of instant relevance and will provide you with the key information you are looking for.

## 3. Go to the unit

If you are worried that your materials always follow the same patterns or use the same types of exercises, then go straight to the relevant unit and find nine other ways to structure your material.

## 4. Materials writer's block

You might be familiar with the term 'writer's block' in relation to novelists. However, there are also times when ELT materials writers simply cannot come up with the ideas they need. By dipping into the right section or unit, you should find the inspiration you're looking for.

## 5. Ability to evaluate materials

By learning the basics of materials planning and construction from this book, you will be better able to analyse published texts and decide whether they are suitable for your classes.

## 6. Supplement your coursebook

Many teachers find that they need to offer their students more practice than is found in their coursebook, or that the coursebook material needs to be adapted to suit their students' needs. You will find plenty of ideas in this book to help you write good supplementary exercises and to help you adapt existing exercises to make them more appropriate for your classes.

## 7. Develop new aspects of materials writing

If you have written worksheets or materials to be printed out and distributed to students, you might want to start thinking about developing other skills, such as writing for online materials. Take a look at Units 45 and 49 for this.

## 8. Writing for other teachers

You may want to share the materials that you have written for your students with other teachers in your institution. In this case, you will need to produce teaching notes and answer keys to accompany your materials. See Units 41–43 for more information on how to write for teachers.

## 9. Develop your skills

If you are at the stage where you feel you are ready for a greater challenge – perhaps to share your materials with the wider world and get them published – read the final section. This looks at ways to develop your skills and prepare your work for publication. There are also suggestions on how to set about getting published.

## 10. Write your own 10

ELT materials writing is constantly evolving, particularly in the area of online materials. As you explore deeper into the subject and expand your own skills, you are bound to come up with your own ideas and find aspects of materials writing for which you would like to make your own list of 10 tips. Add your ideas to page 183 and share them with colleagues who are also writing their own materials. You could even share them with the whole world by visiting [www.myetpedia.com](http://www.myetpedia.com) where we regularly post lists of '10 ways' from people who use the ETpedia books. Visit the website for information on sharing your ideas.

*"I frequently use the ideas in ETpedia as a kind of checklist when preparing my lessons."*

**Mario Lecluyze, teacher and teacher trainer, Belgium**

# 10 facts about the authors

## Lindsay Clandfield ...

- ▶ got his first piece of material published in 1999 in *iTs Magazine*, a Barcelona-based magazine for teachers. The magazine wasn't taking submissions, but he banged on the door in person several times with various worksheets until they gave him a chance.
- ▶ has written books for teachers, including *Teaching Online and Dealing with Difficulties*, published by Delta Publishing. His latest book is *Interaction Online*, written with Jill Hadfield for the Cambridge Handbooks series. He has also written coursebook material for OUP and Macmillan, and was the lead author for the adult course *Global*.
- ▶ has won several awards for writing, including the Ben Warren Award and two English Speaking Union awards, both of which earned him visits to Buckingham Palace.
- ▶ started an e-publishing venture called The Round (with Luke Meddings), in which authors self-publish e-books within a collective framework. More than 25 books have been published there and are available at [www.the-round.com](http://www.the-round.com)
- ▶ has experimented with all different kinds of content creation, from writing for blogs to podcasting to writing for apps. His most unusual writing was a series of books called *Extreme Language Teaching*, which included *English for the Zombie Apocalypse* and *English for the Alien Invasion*.
- ▶ can be found at [www.lindsayclandfield.com](http://www.lindsayclandfield.com), where he can be contacted for teacher training or conferences and where you can find all his writing.

## John Hughes ...

- ▶ remembers writing his first ELT material in 1992 on a course preparing him to teach for the first time. The worksheet was a set of job adverts adapted from a newspaper, and the students had to find key vocabulary and then practise interviewing each other.
- ▶ was first published in magazines such as *English Teaching Professional* and *Modern English Teacher*. He had a regular advice column for ELT teachers in *The Guardian Weekly* for a number of years.
- ▶ published his first teacher's book in 2002 and is the author and co-author of classroom and self-study materials including *Business Result*, *Business Focus*, *Successful Meetings and Presentations*, *Oxford EAP A2 (Oxford)*, *Life*, *Practical Grammar*, *Spotlight on FCE*, *Success with BEC Vantage*, *Total Business 2*, *Aspire* (National Geographic Learning) and *Telephone English* (Macmillan).
- ▶ runs training courses in ELT materials writing and offers consultancy in developing in-house materials to language schools and organisations.
- ▶ wrote the very first ETpedia title for Pavilion Publishing. He is the series editor for ETpedia resource titles. In 2016, with co-author Robert McLarty, his book *ETpedia Business English* won The David Riley Award for Innovation in Business English and ESP.

## Thanks and acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Helena Gomm, Emma Grisewood, the team at Pavilion Publishing, and all the English teachers and materials writers who shared their thoughts and expertise.



# 10 types of writing exercises

The types of writing exercises you will write and set for your students will often depend on the type of examination they are preparing for or the type of writing they may need to do in their professional or academic lives. These types of writing can be broadly categorised into three types:

- ▶ discursive/academic writing: *for and against essays, articles giving an opinion, etc.*
- ▶ correspondence/professional writing: *letters, emails, short reports, etc.*
- ▶ fictional and descriptive writing: *short stories, news articles, people and places, etc.*

There are different ways to write exercises for all of these and if you are writing exam practice exercises, you will need to simulate the style of the questions in the exam. 1 to 4 below are examples of how you might write a question for discursive writing. Example 4 is also useful for students who need to write for their working lives, and 5 to 7 are also aimed at this type of student. The final three examples are suggestions for ways to write exercises for stories and descriptive writing.

## 1. A *for and against* question

This is a popular type of question in exams. It gives the students a topic to discuss. The topic shouldn't require any specialist knowledge, and the students have to be able to think of some points for and against, before giving their own view at the end. Make sure when writing this type of question that you choose a topic that all the students are likely to know something about.

**Write an essay discussing both these views and give your own opinion.**

Some people believe social media is an effective way to communicate news and information, and bring people together. However, others feel it contributes to social problems such as bullying and stress-related illnesses.

## 2. Giving an opinion on a statement

Unlike the previous question, the next example gives the students less guidance on the structure of the writing. The focus is on them giving their opinions and providing supporting reasons. Again, the question needs to be on a topic which the students can easily come up with ideas on – otherwise, there's a danger that they will lose marks for lack of subject knowledge, rather than being judged on their language use.

**Students should be allowed to choose all the subjects they study in school. Do you agree?**

## 3. Giving an opinion with prompts

For lower levels, you can write questions which also provide the students with a framework to structure their writing. Try to keep the prompts as brief as possible so they are easy to understand. Avoid long complex sentences in the instructions as this will make it a reading task rather than a writing task:

**In the future, more people will work from home than travel to work. Do you agree?**

**Write about the following points in your essay:**

Commuting time to work

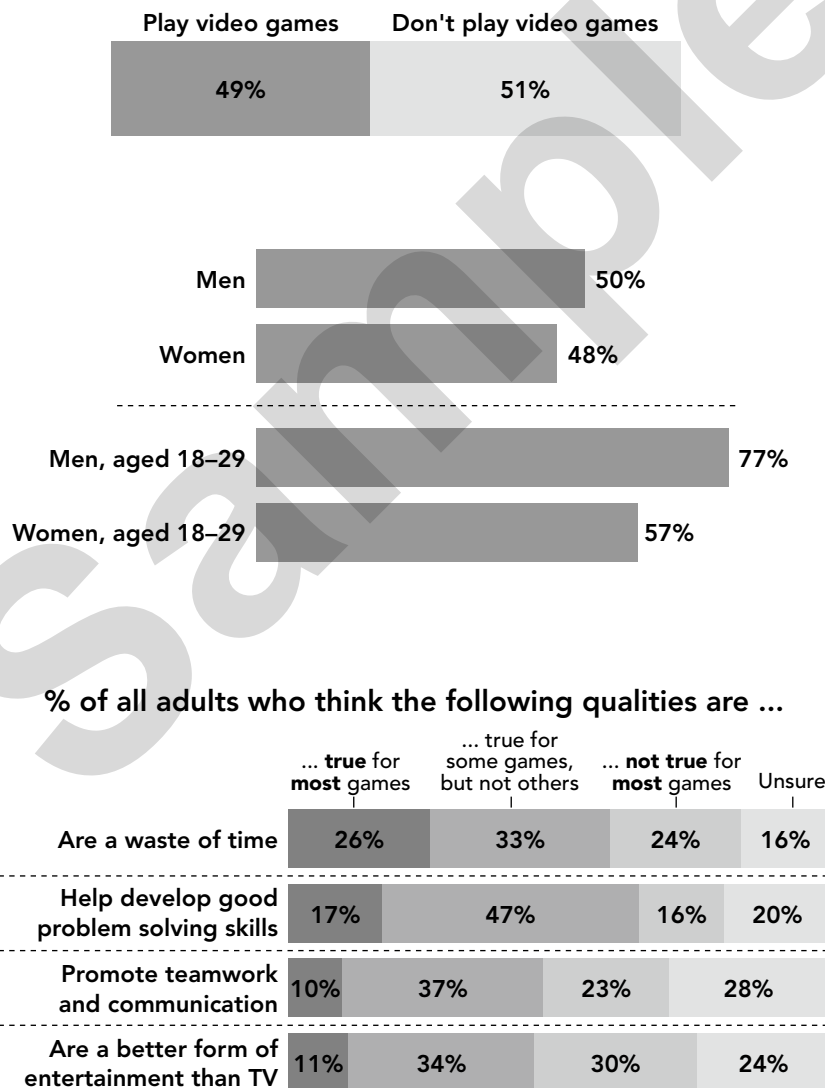
Internet access and online communication

Your own idea

## 4. Providing visual information

Examination such as IELTS and materials designed for professional or academic English often include exercises where the students need to interpret graphs, charts or tables and integrate the information into their answer to the question. Here is an example of the sort of exercise you might write. Note that it's worth looking out for any kind of visual information on recent research in a newspaper or creating your own graphs and charts based on recent findings in a survey.

The charts below show the results of a survey in the USA into online gaming. Summarise the main information in each chart and discuss the findings, including your opinions on online gaming.



Source for all three is <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/12/15/gaming-and-gamers/>

## 5. Provide a reason to respond

For writing exercises that involve correspondence and transactional communication, provide the students with an email (or letter) similar to the example below. Make sure that the level of the English in the question doesn't challenge them too much: the aim is not to test their reading level but to get them to produce a piece of writing. The content also needs to demand a response from the student, so it needs to provoke in some way or even ask questions that need answering.

**Your customer service department receives this email from a customer.**

Dear Sir or Madam,

I would like to complaint about the service I recently received at your branch in Oxford. On Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> at 10am I stood in a line of customers and waited 30 minutes to purchase some items of clothing. When I finally reached the counter, the sales assistant offered no apology. In addition, I had a question about how to wash the wool sweater and the assistant was unable to advise me. In total, it took me an hour to purchase the goods, which I think is unacceptable.

**Write a reply (about 120 words) and give reasons for the difficulties.**

## 6. Prompts for an email

This next example is to get the students to write a short email. It is designed for lower-level students who need to learn how to write basic correspondence. It's useful to use bullet points, as shown in this example, as they provide the students with a structure to follow and the key points to include in their writing. It also allows you to mark it more easily because you can check that they have included each point.

**You are organising a training day for 10 employees. Write an email to your assistant with the following points:**

confirm the room number and the date

ask your assistant if the participants have completed the pre-course questionnaire

also ask the assistant to contact catering about providing lunch, tea and coffee during the day

## 7. The structure of a report

This is an example of where the materials writer guides the students towards structuring their writing in a certain way. The task is to write a report, and the instructions tell the students to organise their response by first writing about each of the three options given and then writing a recommendation. Note that this kind of exercise is based around a topic where the students can use their own general knowledge, so it isn't testing any kind of specialist background knowledge:

**A local council has some money to invest in a local community facility. They have asked you to consider three different types of facility, report on each one, and make a final recommendation. Here are the three options: a swimming pool, a small theatre or a library.**

## 8. Sentences in a story

If you are creating an exercise in which the students are going to write a story, you might give them just the title of the story and ask them to start writing. However, a good alternative is to provide a sentence that must appear in the story. Here are two examples of rubrics which provide the sentences to appear at the beginning and end of a story:

**Write a story of between 140 to 190 words starting with the sentence: I'd left my house in a hurry that morning and forgotten to lock the front door.**

**Write a story of between 140 to 190 words ending with the sentence: After everything that had happened on the journey, it was a relief to see my friends waiting on the platform.**

## 9. Prompts for a story

Like the example of an email writing task in 6, bullet-point prompts can also direct the students to include certain language, and also provide some structure to their writing. Here is an example of how this might be done for a story.

**Write a story about your first day at school. Your story must include:**  
 a particular school subject  
 a surprise

## 10. Create a context to respond to

In this question, the writer wants the students to produce a piece of descriptive writing. As with some of the earlier examples in this unit, the question is designed around the idea of creating a context which demands a response. In this case, it takes the form of an advert:

You have seen this announcement in a student magazine. Write your description.

# Travel story competition!

**This month we have a story competition. Write a description of something that happened to you on your summer holidays.**

**The winner will receive a £20 book token.**

# 10 tips for creating board games

Board games occupy a special place in materials writing. They can be a lot of fun for the materials writer to make, and they are very popular with teachers and students. Additionally, with modern software it's easy to make simple but good-looking boards. There are a few things you need to know when embarking on creating a language learning board game, though, and it's also useful to see what kinds of games have been produced before. Here are 10 ideas for board games.

## 1. The basic board

The simplest board for a language learning game is a series of squares going around the page to form a rectangle, with a different task on each square. Make sure your squares are big enough for you to write tasks on them! You can find an example of a board like this on page 170.

## 2. The snakes and ladders board

Instead of a basic board, this time create a grid of squares. As in the children's game snakes and ladders, include snakes (the head on one square and the end of the tail on another square lower down) and ladders (joining a lower square with a higher square). Then add different tasks to various squares on the board. As in the game above, the students move around the board and do the task they land on. If the player lands at the bottom of a ladder, they go up to the top and do the task. If they land on a snake's head, they go down to the tail and do the task there. You can find an example of a snakes and ladders board on page 172.

## 3. Dice or no dice

Many traditional board games are designed to be played with dice. This poses two problems for using them in language learning. First, teachers may not always have dice with them in class, or enough dice for all the groups. Second, this means that you need to have far more squares and tasks for the students to do as they may quickly 'pass over' a key square by rolling a five or six. To get around the dice problem, you could design your board game so that the players use a coin to determine how far they move. Heads means move one square, tails means move two squares.

## 4. Counters

You don't need to make elaborate counters for students to cut out and use in a board game. Students will happily use whatever they have to hand as a counter to move around the board. This might be a ring, a piece of rubber or a small coin. If your board game has squares for players to move through, make sure they are big enough for any one of these unconventional counters.

## 5. Rules

A good language board game will often have simple rules (eg Throw a coin. Move around the board. Answer the questions). Put these on the actual game board itself, perhaps in the corner or in the middle so that everyone can refer to them as they play. You may have slightly more detailed rules or explanations for the teacher on a separate document.

## 6. Game-like elements

Once you have your board, and before you add tasks to the squares, you can add various special squares that are typical of board games. These include things like *Miss a turn*, *Go*

again, Go forward 2 squares, Pick up a card (if your board game also has cards), etc. Don't have more than three or four of these, especially on a small board. You want to ensure that the students will land on plenty of language tasks.

## 7. Board games for vocabulary

For a vocabulary board game, you can put categories or pictures of categories (eg food, drinks, sport, jobs) on various squares. When a student lands on a square, they have to say one or more words in that category. Alternatively, set a mini-challenge on each square for students to answer (eg *Name three things you need to take with you on holiday*). Be careful with questions that have only one possible answer (eg *What is the opposite of happy?*) as this means that that square will only be a challenge for the first person to land on it; subsequent players who land on it will already know the answer.

## 8. Board games for grammar

Instead of vocabulary questions, a grammar board game will have grammar questions on the squares. Again, try to have questions that might yield many correct answers (for example: Name three irregular past tense verbs) rather than only one. Another option would be to have different categories on the board such as *Correct the sentence*, *Change the verb tense*, *Complete the gap* or *Choose the correct answer*. Then for each category, have a list of questions written on a separate worksheet. When a student lands on a square the teacher (or another student) chooses a corresponding question from the category on the worksheet. The advantage of this type of board game is that teachers can customise it by creating their own examples based on grammar they have done in previous classes.

## 9. Board games for speaking practice

In this type of board game, each square contains a simple speaking task. These could be discussion questions (eg *What do you like doing in your free time?*), instructions to tell a short anecdote or descriptive tasks (eg *Tell us about your last holiday* or *Describe a close family member*), or mini role plays (eg *You are in a clothes shop. Ask for something in a particular size and colour*).

## 10. Other variations

You can make your board game more interesting by giving the board a theme, such as a town map or a racing track. For a town board game, draw (or find online) a blank map of a town and include various different buildings such as a post office, a train station, a hotel, a souvenir shop, a bank and a police station. For each building, create a list of two or three tasks relating to it. This could be a vocabulary task (*Name three things you can buy in a post office*) or a short role play (*Go to the ticket office and buy a return train ticket to London*). The students move their counters around the town, and when they land on a place, the teacher gives them one of the relevant tasks.

For a racing game, create a board that has several different routes with different starting points. Imagine, for example, a circular race track with four or five lanes or a straight running track with different lanes. Divide the lanes up into squares and assign a challenge for each square. The students then each stay in their own lane and move forwards, or stay put, depending on whether they answer the challenge correctly.

## Unit 34.2: Blank Snakes and ladders board game

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### How to play

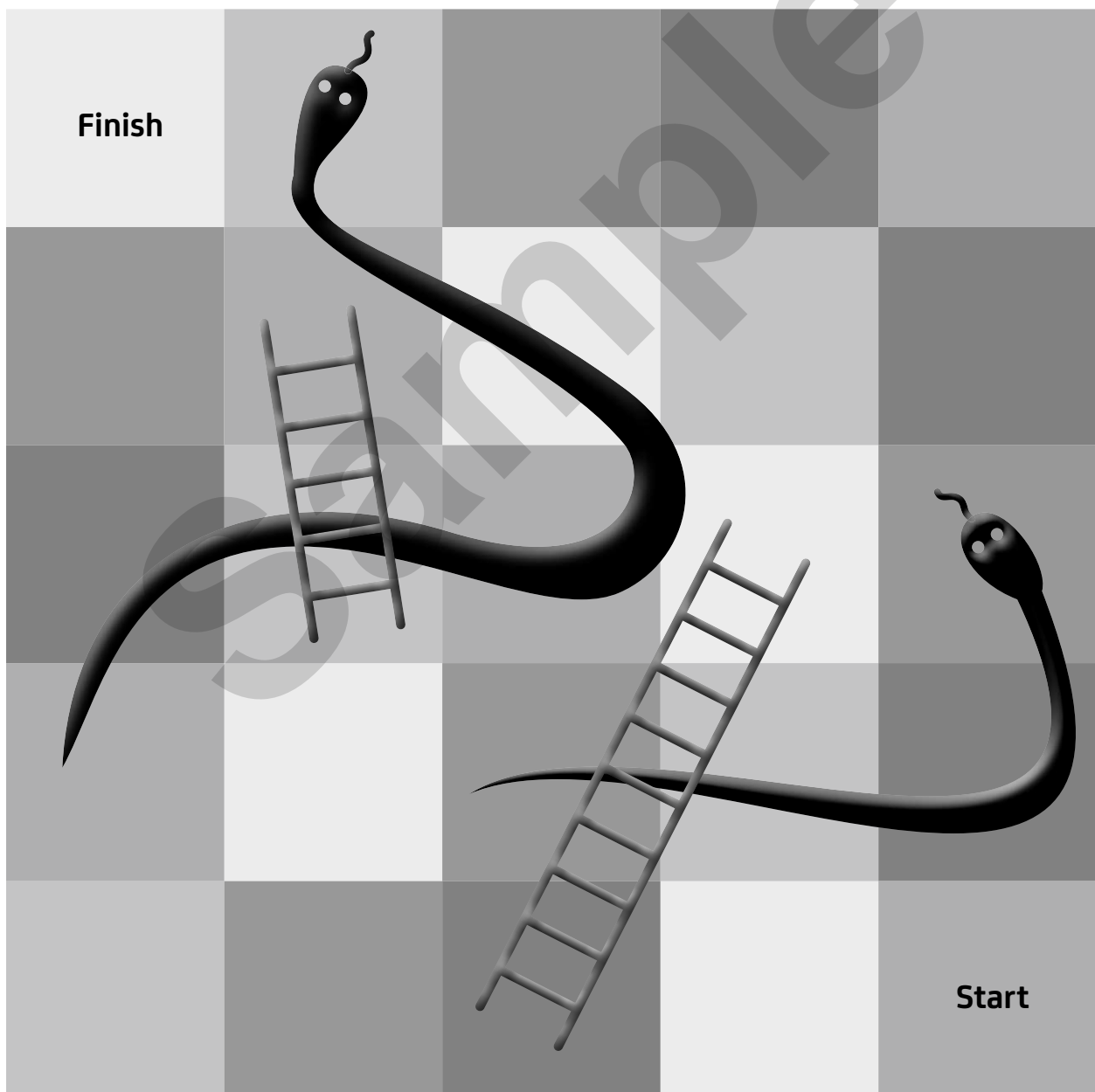
Toss a coin to move around the board.

Heads: go forward 1 space.

Tails: go forward 2 spaces.

If you land on a ladder, go up the ladder.

If you land on a snake, go down the snake.



You may photocopy this page.