



Guess the Rule

One player questions the group and tries to discover the secret rule that everyone else is following when they answer.

Players 4–12 (best with 5–9)**Play time** 15–30 min**Materials** No materials**Movement** Seated

QUICK RULES

1. One player — the detective — steps out of earshot.
2. The group agrees on a secret rule for how they will answer questions.
3. The detective returns and asks anyone ordinary questions.
4. Everyone answers following the rule. The detective has three guesses to name it.

SET UP

1. Choose the first detective and ask them to step out of earshot for a minute.
2. The group agrees on a rule that controls how they answer — for example, 'touch your face before you answer' or 'answer as if you were the person on your left'.
3. Check that everyone can follow the rule easily. A rule that some people cannot do is a bad rule.
4. Call the detective back and seat them where they can see every player.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The detective asks any player an everyday question — "What did you have for breakfast?", "How did you get here?".
2. The player answers, following the secret rule. Answers need not be true if the rule requires otherwise.
3. The detective continues, addressing whoever they like, in any order.
4. If a player breaks the rule by mistake, anyone in the group may say 'slip' so the detective knows to ignore that answer.
5. At any point the detective may state what they think the rule is. They have three guesses.
6. If the detective is close but not exact, the group says "warm" and the guess is not used up.
7. After a correct guess, or the third wrong one, the rule is revealed. The player whose answer gave it away becomes the next detective.

HOW THE GAME ENDS

A round ends when the detective names the rule or runs out of guesses. Play until everyone who wants to has been the detective once. There is no overall score — but a group can count how many questions each detective needed and applaud the lowest.

PLAYING SEATED

Everyone plays seated. The detective only needs to be out of earshot for a minute while the rule is chosen — covering their ears and humming works if leaving the room is inconvenient.

TIPS FOR THE HOST

- Start with a visible rule — a gesture — before trying a verbal one. Gestures are easier to spot and make the first round a success.
- Steer the group away from rules that single anyone out or depend on personal details.
- If a detective is truly stuck after ten questions, have the group exaggerate the rule a little.
- Remind answerers to keep their replies short. Long answers hide the pattern and slow the game.

VARIATIONS

Two rules. Half the circle follows one rule and the other half a different one. The detective has to work out both rules and who belongs to which half. Use this only after a few ordinary rounds.

Detective pair. Two detectives leave together and may confer quietly while questioning. This suits new players and guests who would feel exposed alone in the middle of the circle.

STARTER IDEAS: VISIBLE RULES (START HERE)

- Touch your face before you answer.
- Cross your arms or legs while you answer.
- Look at the ceiling before you speak.
- Lean forward while answering.
- Nod once at the end of your answer.
- Pick up or touch an object while you answer.

STARTER IDEAS: SPOKEN RULES

- Every answer must contain a colour.
- Every answer must contain a number.
- Begin every answer with "Well".
- Answer as if you were the person on your left.
- Every answer must mention food.
- End every answer with a question.
- The first word of your answer must start with the last letter of the question.
- Answers alternate between true and obviously false round the circle.

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