



Secret Word Detective

Slip your secret word into ordinary conversation without being caught — and catch other players slipping in theirs.

Players 4–12 (best with 5–8)**Play time** 20–60 min**Materials** No materials**Movement** Seated

QUICK RULES

1. Everyone gets a different secret word.
2. Carry on a normal conversation, and work your word in naturally.
3. If you think you heard someone's secret word, call "Detective!" and name it.
4. Right — you score. Wrong — the person you accused scores.

SET UP

1. Give each player a secret word. Whisper it, show it privately in the host view, or hand out folded paper slips.
2. Use words that are unusual but not impossible to say at a party — 'lighthouse', 'trampoline', 'marmalade'.
3. Explain the time frame: the game runs quietly through the next course, or for about twenty minutes.
4. Make sure everyone knows the challenge call — "Detective!" — and what happens after it.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The conversation continues as normal. The game runs in the background.
2. Each player tries to say their secret word aloud, in a natural sentence, without anyone noticing.
3. A player who suspects that someone has just used their secret word calls 'Detective!' and names the word.
4. If the accusation is correct, the detective scores two points and the caught player's word is retired.
5. If the accusation is wrong, the accused player scores one point and the conversation carries on.
6. A player who uses their word and is not challenged before the conversation moves on has 'landed' it. They keep this to themselves until the end.
7. Each player may make at most three accusations in a game.

8. When time is up, everyone reveals their word and says when they landed it. Each landed word scores three points.

HOW THE GAME ENDS

The game ends at a time announced beforehand — when the plates are cleared, or after twenty minutes. Everyone reveals their word, landed words are confirmed by the table, and points are totalled. The highest score wins the title of chief detective.

PLAYING SEATED

Played seated, in the background of a meal or a conversation. No step requires moving — the host can whisper each word, or show it privately on a phone.

TIPS FOR THE HOST

- Match the difficulty of the words to the group. Regular players can cope with "periscope"; new players need "umbrella".
- If accusations are flying wildly, remind the table of the three-accusation limit.
- Keep the main thing the main thing. If the game is strangling the conversation, shorten it.
- Avoid secret words connected with sensitive subjects. Everyday objects and foods are safest and funniest.

VARIATIONS

One spy. Only one player has a secret word, and nobody knows who. That player has to say the word three times before the time is up. Everyone else gets a single accusation to name both the spy and the word.

Secret phrase. For experienced groups, replace the word with a short phrase — "in this economy" or "as my grandmother used to say". A phrase is harder to hide, and much funnier when it lands.

STARTER IDEAS: GENTLE (FIRST GAME)

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|------------|-----------|
| ▪ umbrella | ▪ ladder |
| ▪ sandwich | ▪ blanket |
| ▪ bicycle | ▪ penguin |
| ▪ lemon | ▪ bucket |

STARTER IDEAS: SNEAKY

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|--------------|-------------|
| ▪ trampoline | ▪ avalanche |
| ▪ marmalade | ▪ harmonica |
| ▪ lighthouse | ▪ windmill |
| ▪ periscope | ▪ kangaroo |

Times are editorial estimates, not test results. Editorially checked for clarity and consistency. We do not claim group playtesting for this page.