

Literal Flow Test



The Rulebook

A parlour game by Gavin Cameron for four to seven players

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The phrase LITERAL FLOW TEST® is a registered trade mark

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Game Objective

The *Literal Flow Test* is a competitive parlour game for people who love to talk, sing, whistle, or generally make noise with their mouths.

You can go off-topic, you can repeat yourself as much as you like, but you stop scoring when you stop making a noise. With every second worth a point, the winner is the one who keeps going for the longest total time over four rounds.

If you're a fan of *Just a Minute*, *Whose Line is it Anyway?* or *Taskmaster*, this game is for you.

What You Will Need

Between 4 and 7 players

Two players will be required as a Judge and a Timekeeper, and the rest each become a Speaker. These instructions assume the maximum seven players are taking part.

Two Distinct Audible Signals

In these rules, the Judge blows a whistle and the Timekeeper rings a bell. However, alternatives (including verbal shouts) may be used. In any case, ensure the two signals cannot be confused for each other.

Clock or Stopwatch

The Timekeeper watches the clock for each of the rounds, and is responsible for awarding points. The clock needs to display one-second increments.

Calculator (optional)

The scores from each round need to be added together, so a calculator is recommended.

A Selection of Topics

A pool of 100 suggested topics may be found on page 9 of this rulebook, but players are urged to create their own. A minimum of four topics are required for each Speaker, plus one for a Tiebreaker.

Features Common to All Rounds

Direction of Play

These instructions use the following icons to describe the order of play:

↻ Forward

↺ Reverse

Before the game begins, players should decide who will be Speaker One, Speaker Two, and so on. These will remain consistent for the whole game.

In a Forward round, the Speakers play in numerical order; in a Reverse round, they play in reverse numerical order. This means the last Speaker in a given round plays first in the next round.

Topics and Hesitations

A new topic is drawn before each Speaker takes a turn. However, this should be considered a mere prompt. When a Speaker begins, there is no requirement to stick to the topic, and words or phrases may be repeated as often as desired.

It is also acceptable to sing, whistle or make other noises with the mouth. For simplicity, however, these rules refer only to speaking.

If a Speaker has hesitated or stopped, the Judge will sound the whistle to stop the turn. On the other hand, if the Speaker keeps going for the length of the round, the Timekeeper will ring the bell once time is up.

Time Limits and Scoring

In every round, the Timekeeper gives each Speaker a particular length of time to speak. This is denoted by the following icon, where n represents a number:

🕒 n seconds

No score is kept for Round One. In Rounds Two to Four, one point is awarded for each complete second that a Speaker speaks. Fractions of a second should be disregarded. A printable score card with a worked example appears on page 13 of this rulebook.

Rounds in Detail

Round One: Finding Your Flow

↪ Forward

🕒 60 seconds

This round is for warm-up purposes. The Judge does not participate, and the Timekeeper does not record a score.

A new topic is drawn for Speaker One, who is given an uninterrupted 60 seconds to speak. The Timekeeper rings the bell after 60 seconds to stop the turn.

The process is repeated for Speakers Two to Five in that order, drawing a new topic each time.

Round Two: Short Flow

↩ Reverse

🕒 90 seconds

A new topic is drawn for Speaker Five, who is given 90 seconds to speak.

If there is a hesitation before then, the Judge blows the whistle to stop the turn; otherwise, the Timekeeper rings the bell at 90 seconds. In either case, the Timekeeper records the number of seconds.

At the end of the turn, the process is repeated for Speakers Four to One in that order, drawing a new topic each time.

Round Three: Long Flow

↪ Forward

🕒 120 seconds

This is played almost identically to Round Two. The only difference is the opposite direction of play, and the increased time limit.

Round Four: Level Flow

↩ Reverse

🕒 Variable seconds

The maximum number of points that may be scored by a Speaker is 250, and this round offers the chance to catch up.

The time limit for each Speaker is calculated individually. The points scored by each Speaker for Round Two and Round Three should be totalled, and that number is then deducted from 250.

For example, if one Speaker scores 73 in Round Two, and 83 in Round Three, this gives a total of 156. Deducting this number from 250 gives 94 seconds for Round Four.

Other than the variable time limit as described above, this is played in the same direction and manner as Round Two.

Whichever Speaker has the closest total score to 250 at the end of this round wins the *Literal Flow Test*. If there is a tie between the two top-scoring players, go to *Tiebreaking: General* below.

Tiebreaking: General

⤴ Forward

🕒 2, 3, 4 or 5 minutes

From this point onwards, only the tied Speakers take part. This takes a knockout format and no further points are scored.

The time allowed for the round depends upon the number of tied players: two minutes for two Speakers, three minutes for three Speakers, and so forth. Only one topic is drawn for the entire *Tiebreaking: General* round.

At any point during this round, the Speaker in play can decide to keep speaking or may call ‘Pass!’ and stop speaking. On a pass, the next Speaker must then immediately begin. Players may use as much or little of the allotted time as they wish, and there is no requirement to pass.

The clock keeps running if Speakers are eliminated for hesitation until only one Speaker remains in play. That Speaker then becomes the winner.

Example

In this example, assume a three-way tie with Speakers Two, Four and Five.

- At the start of the round, the three-minute timer begins and a new topic is drawn.
- Speaker Two speaks for around 30 seconds before calling ‘Pass!’
- Speaker Four immediately speaks for around 20 seconds before passing.
- Speaker Five speaks for around 45 seconds before passing.
- Speaker Two should begin to speak, but is eliminated after hesitating.
- Play immediately passes to Speaker Four, who speaks for around 35 seconds before hesitating.
- The clock stops and Speaker Five is declared the winner.

If there is no clear winner when time is up, go to *Tiebreaking: Word Association* below.

Tiebreaking: Word Association

↻ Reverse

🕒 2, 3, 4 or 5 minutes

Like *Tiebreaking: General*, one minute per player goes on the clock, and time starts when a topic is drawn.

The first Speaker in sequence needs to say a word associated with the topic, then play immediately passes to the next Speaker. That next Speaker then needs to say a word associated with the word said by the first Speaker, and so on.

The clock keeps running if Speakers are eliminated for hesitation until only one Speaker remains in play. That Speaker then becomes the winner.

Example

In this example, assume Speakers Two, Four and Five have survived the *Tiebreaking: General* round.

- At the start of the round, the three-minute timer begins and the topic 'Dessert' is drawn.
- Speaker Five says 'Desert'; Speaker Four says 'Sahara'; Speaker Two says 'Subsahara'.
- Play passes back to Speaker Five, who says 'Sahel'. Speaker Four hesitates and is eliminated.
- Speaker Two immediately says 'Africa' and Speaker Five says 'Nigeria'. The two Speakers then alternate with 'Aso Rock', 'Aesop Rock' and 'Hip hop' before Speaker Five hesitates and is eliminated.
- The clock stops and Speaker Two is declared the winner.

If this process does not produce a clear winner, it is for the judge to decide whether to award a joint victory for the winners, or to run another round of *Tiebreaking: Extra*.

Homegrown Rule Variations

When this game was staged for the first time, there was an impromptu suggestion that the audience should suggest the topics for Round Four rather than the judge picking from the pool. This was not part of the official rules, but the variation made it a more interactive show.

When enjoying the *Literal Flow Test* at home, players are encouraged to break away from the official rules and create their own homegrown variations.

For example:

- Banning players from saying a certain word.
- Rotating the roles to give every player a chance to act as Speaker.
- Removing the time limits on one or more rounds.

This is your game to enjoy as you see fit.

Suggested Topics

A pool of 100 topic suggestions, ranging from straightforward to abstract. Two freely-available sources of new topic ideas are the [Wikipedia Random Article](#) page and the [Wiktionary Random Entry](#) page.

Abandoned places	Favourite apps	New glasses	Storage
Abbreviations	Fire drill	Nom de plumes	Story time
Advertising	Fizzy drinks	Octopus	Summer
After the storm	Football	Off the hook	Tanks
Ancient Greeks	For the record	Our ancestors	Tension
Anger	Formal wear	Overthinking	The 1980s
Articulation	Future plans	Playing truant	Three o'clock
Artists	Game over	Politicians	Top 10
Avoidance	Going obsolete	Pop music	Trainers
Being a genius	Good news	Popular opinion	Trilogies
Bingo	Helium	Pronunciation	TV and radio
Catching up	Hyperbole	Proverbs	Underground
Charles Dickens	Hypnotism	Pyramids	Up in arms
Chips	In a mood	Rainbows	Waking up
Christmas	Industrial action	Receiving letters	Wasting time
Community spirit	International travel	Satire	Weather
Comic strips	Jargon	School or college	Weekends
Conversation	Just desserts	Second-hand items	What's on
Courts	Library books	Seeing the sea	Wikipedia
Dinosaurs	Livewires	Ships and boats	Windows
Drink of choice	Looking back	Silence	Wisdom teeth
Earning a million	Marketing	Sound effects	Work in progress
Earth	Mathematics	Space travel	Working out
Elections	Midsummer rain	Stand-up comedy	Yesterday
English language	Misinformation	Stop press	Zero tolerance

How This Game Was Created

From the outset of compiling this rulebook, there was always intended to be a section about how the gameplay was created.

However, this section has also proved to be more difficult to write than the rules because there was no single moment of inspiration that kick-started its development. So rather than attempt to build a definitive timeline, here are a few key elements that combined to create the *Literal Flow Test*.

Era of Creation

In hoping this game will still be available in years to come, there is also a risk that contemporary events are forgotten.

Take the name *Literal Flow Test* as a starting point. Anyone who lived during the COVID-19 pandemic will likely recognise the name as a pun on the *lateral* flow test, which can be used to detect the virus, and it is likely to sound dated in years to come.

However, this also neatly reflects the period in which the game was created. During 2020 and 2021, a series of temporary closures of business and leisure venues were ordered across the UK – and worldwide – to curb the virus. In the early days especially, the overarching message was that people should stay at home.

At this time, I worked for a government department. Having a combination of job security and nowhere to go in the evenings, I was left with a lot of introspective time indoors.

It has not been possible to narrow down when the phrase *Literal Flow Test* first occurred to me. All I recall is that name was devised before the gameplay, and the first draft of rules was created by late June 2021.

Primary Influences

The first and most obvious influence is the long-running BBC Radio 4 series *Just a Minute*. I have long admired the programme, and even attended recordings over the years. Yet the series suffers from a flaw common to many celebrity panel shows: that comedy and entertainment are valued more highly than a meaningful victory for any of the contestants.

Then I saw a TV programme that reformulated the accepted blueprint.

I had decided to watch *Taskmaster* for the first time. Despite already being a fan of its creator, Alex Horne, I had a preconceived notion this would be inferior to his stand-up comedy or his work with the Horne Section. I was soon persuaded otherwise, and I caught up with all 11 series available at the time.

I loved the simple and reusable premise of celebrities being challenged to carry out tasks, but I especially liked the idea that the points mattered. The winning contestant would receive prizes for both winning an episode and winning a series.

There were other influential sources, including the improv show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, the charity gambling programme *You Bet!*, and elements of the slam poetry scene. Notably, reversing the order of contestants in each round is borrowed from the annual Scottish Poetry Slam Final, where the method is used to combat ‘score creep’ from the judges.

With that in mind, the basic principles of the *Literal Flow Test* were beginning to take shape.

For instance, my game would recognise that speaking for longer is more challenging, so proportionately more points would be awarded for this. And unlike *Just a Minute*, there is no way for a Speaker to win back a turn after making a mistake, so the deviation and repetition restrictions were not included. To further differentiate the two games, a rule about making other noises with the mouth was added.

My format would also allow for a variable number of Speakers. This was at a time when contracting COVID-19 meant going into self-isolation, so there existed a real possibility that one or more people could be absent at short notice.

Staging the Event

In Summer 2021, the theatre producer JD Henshaw signalled his intention to start a Dundee Fringe. Named after its Edinburgh counterpart, but a fraction of its size, a variety of acts would descend upon a single venue in the city.

As I already ran an open-mic for writers called Hotchpotch, I was initially asked whether I would be interested in staging a poetry event. Instead, I pitched the game show, and he was willing to take a chance on it.

Being a untested format, the most difficult hurdle was finding people to take part, even before the problem of virus-related travel restrictions was factored in. We managed to stage a virtual rehearsal via Zoom, and that was instrumental in ironing out many of the first-draft inadequacies.

After some discussion, we set an audience age restriction of sixteen and above, allowing the Speakers some freedom to talk without worrying about a little swearing or the occasional adult theme.

The *Literal Flow Test* made its debut at Dock Street Studios in Dundee on 22 September 2021 with a line-up of five performers all accustomed to the stage. It was made clear to the audience that this was an experimental show with no guarantee of success, yet the real-world play helped to tweak the rules for the next time. There was even a small budget to share between the players, based upon ticket sales.

The second event took place on 9 December 2021 at a Christmas edition of the Dundee Fringe. This time, there was no problem finding Speakers. Interestingly, the debut had comprised four poets and a comedian; the second event saw the ratios reversed.

During that second event, we discovered a major mathematical flaw with the scoring system in Round Four. This caused the two top-scoring Speakers to end up in bottom place – a weakness now fixed in this version of the rules.

Fortunately, the two Speakers happened to be good friends with each other and were able to laugh about it afterwards. One of them even quipped, ‘I don’t care if I lost, as long as he didn’t win.’

Making the Rules Available

After the two events, I realised there might be some mileage in making the rules available for people to try at home. As such, I took the step of registering *Literal Flow Test* as a UK trademark and finding a suitable Internet domain.

The initial plan was to sell kits containing a copy of the rulebook along with the required equipment. I soon realised that people could use the stopwatch and calculator functions on a phone, and easily obtain or improvise a bell or whistle. So the product was eventually simplified into the rulebook you are reading today.

At the time of writing, the game is returning to the Dundee Fringe on 21 September 2022, at which point these rules will be made publicly available for the first time. I hope you have as much enjoyment in playing the *Literal Flow Test* as I had putting it together.

Gavin Cameron
September 2022

Scoresheet	Speaker One	Speaker Two	Speaker Three	Speaker Four	Speaker Five	Example	Reminders
Speaker names							
Round One (60s) ↻ <i>Speakers 1 to 5</i>	Not scored	Not scored	Not scored	Not scored	Not scored	Not scored	
Round Two (90s) ↻ <i>Speakers 5 to 1</i>	/90	/90	/90	/90	/90	73 /90	1s = 1 point; disregard fractions
Round Three (120s) ↻ <i>Speakers 1 to 5</i>	/120	/120	/120	/120	/120	83 /120	
Round Two + Round Three	/210	/210	/210	/210	/210	73+83=156 /210	Add R1 and R2 totals
Points Required to Reach 250						250-156=94	Subtract <i>Round 2+3</i> total from 250
Round Four (variable) ↻ <i>Speakers 5 to 1</i>	/	/	/	/	/	86 / 94	Example: Round 4 is 94s, Speaker lasts 86s
Round Two + Three + Four	/250	/250	/250	/250	/250	156+86=242 /250	Add totals from R1, R2 and R3
Tiebreak (30s) ↻ <i>Speakers 1 to 5</i>							'Sudden death'; no points kept

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