We tried 35 free word search makers: the best, and what we built

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We read 35 word search makers on 29 October 2026 and compared ads, sign-in, shapes, hidden messages and play. Here are the best ones and what we built.

The best free word search maker for most teachers is Word Search Labs if you want shapes and solving on screen with no ads, and Super Teacher Worksheets if you just need a clean PDF with a solution page. Puzzel.org is the one to try for a hidden message, and A to Z Teacher Stuff has the most options: 30 grid shapes, 15 fonts and sight-word lists. Peabody (peabody.kids) wrote this guide while improving its own word search maker, and Peabody is free through the end of 2026. Apart from our own word search maker, none of these are ours, and nobody paid to be listed.

Every fact about another maker was read from its own page on 29 October 2026. Prices and ads change, so check before you plan a term around one. "Ad code" below means the page's source loaded Google's ad scripts. We saw the code but did not test what shows on screen. The "who it suits" lines are our own view. We opened 35 makers; the full ranking of 20 is on our Top 20 list.

The quick answer

- Most options with no ads: Word Search Labs. Its page says free, no ads, no watermarks, no registration.
- Fastest clean PDF: Super Teacher Worksheets. Its FAQ says no membership is needed for unlimited word searches.
- A hidden message: Puzzel.org. The letters left over once every word is found spell a phrase, and that part is free.
- Shapes, fonts and Dolch lists: A to Z Teacher Stuff.
- Picture clues for young or ESL readers: Tools for Educators.
- A game on the projector, a secret message, and your words kept in your browser: our own word search maker, with no ads and no sign-in.

The top ten compared

A dash means the page we read does not mention it. "Ours" is Peabody's maker as it works today.

- Maker: Word Search Labs · Free?: Yes; Hidden and Private puzzles are for members · Sign-in: None · Ads: None, says the page · Shapes: Yes, or draw your own · Hidden message: — · Solve on screen: Yes

• Maker: Peabody (ours) · Free?: Yes · Sign-in: None · Ads: None · Shapes: Yes, 10 ready shapes · Hidden message: Yes, and it flies into place on the board · Solve on screen: Yes, on the board or from a play link
• Maker: Super Teacher Worksheets · Free?: Yes, no membership · Sign-in: Optional, to save · Ads: — · Shapes: — · Hidden message: — · Solve on screen: —
• Maker: Puzzel.org · Free?: Yes; shapes and clues are Premium · Sign-in: None to try · Ads: None, says the footer · Shapes: Premium · Hidden message: Yes · Solve on screen: Yes
• Maker: A to Z Teacher Stuff · Free?: Yes · Sign-in: None on the page · Ads: Ad code · Shapes: Yes, 30 · Hidden message: — · Solve on screen: —
• Maker: Dinogame · Free?: Yes · Sign-in: None · Ads: — · Shapes: — · Hidden message: — · Solve on screen: Yes
• Maker: WorksheetWorks · Free?: Yes · Sign-in: None · Ads: None, says the FAQ · Shapes: — · Hidden message: — · Solve on screen: —
• Maker: Teacher's Corner · Free?: Yes, with ads · Sign-in: None to make · Ads: Yes · Shapes: Yes · Hidden message: By hand (video) · Solve on screen: Yes
• Maker: Edu-Games.org · Free?: Yes · Sign-in: None · Ads: Ad code · Shapes: — · Hidden message: — · Solve on screen: Yes
• Maker: Word Puzzle World · Free?: Yes · Sign-in: None · Ads: — · Shapes: — · Hidden message: — · Solve on screen: —

What makes a great word search maker for a classroom

No ads, no sign-in, and words that stay private

Ads matter on a projector. Of the 35 pages we read, 16 say they carry ads, sell an ad-free plan or load ad code. Where your words go matters too. TheWordSearch.com publishes your puzzle on its site and tells you not to add personal information. Word Search Labs says a free Public puzzle is visible in search engines. Puzzle-Maker.com says the words you enter help build a database. 7ESL and Dinogame say the puzzle is made in your browser. Whatever you use, put vocabulary in the list, not children's names.

A real answer key and a clean sheet

Super Teacher Worksheets makes a PDF with a solution page. Word Puzzle World prints the key on its own page and gives you a PDF, a Word file or a copy to the clipboard, with paper size and margins you can set. WordMint puts PDF and Word export on a paid plan: $5.99 a month or $47.90 a year (as of 29 October 2026).

Directions that fit the child

Younger children do best with words across and down only. Super Teacher Worksheets offers Basic, Intermediate and Advanced; 7ESL offers Easy, Medium and Hard. Teacher's Corner lets you allow, require or exclude each direction, and Armored Penguin offers eight formats, including one with no crossing words.

Shapes

A heart, tree or pumpkin makes a puzzle look made for this week. A to Z Teacher Stuff lists 30. Word Search Labs lets you draw your own grid or upload a picture to use as the layout. BrightSprout has shapes too, but word searches are not in its free plan: unlimited word searches are $51 a year (as of 29 October 2026, on its pricing page).

A hidden message

When every word is found, the letters left over spell a riddle answer or a reward. Puzzel.org does this for free. Discovery Education's Puzzlemaker lists Hidden Message as its own puzzle type. Teach Starter says to write the message into the words box and mix up the words.

Clues instead of the word

Tools for Educators shows a picture for each word from a library of 2,000 or more images, or a definition, translation or gap-fill sentence. Edu-Games.org has a clues maker: the child reads a description, works out the word, then finds it.

Solving on screen

Fourteen of the 35 let students play the puzzle in a browser: Word Search Labs, Dinogame, Puzzel.org, Edu-Games.org, TheWordSearch.com, Teacher's Corner, JigsawMake and others. Check the free limits. Puzzel.org's free account covers 60 player sessions a month. None of the pages we read describes a layout made for a projector.

Word lists by grade

A to Z Teacher Stuff has Dolch lists up to 3rd grade, months, days and US states. SpellingJoy has 134 or more lists for kindergarten to 6th grade, though its page does not say whether the word search is free or on its $2.99-a-month plan.

Ten makers worth knowing

1. Word Search Labs. Rectangle or custom grids, ready shapes such as a heart and a pumpkin, eight directions, solving from a link, embedding, and PNG, SVG or text export. Limit: a free puzzle is public, the page does not mention PDF, and the answer key needs the passcode you set.

2. Super Teacher Worksheets. Three levels, a name and date header, alphabetised words and a printable PDF with a solution page. It recommends 20 words of 3 to 16 letters. Limit: no shapes, clues, hidden message or on-screen play are mentioned.

3. Puzzel.org. Free to build and play, no ads, a QR code for students and a free hidden solution. Limit: shapes, picture clues, team play and timers are Premium, and the free account has 60 player sessions a month.

4. A to Z Teacher Stuff. The longest option list: shapes, fonts, lowercase letters, 16 languages, presets and a bad-word filter. Limit: ad code on the page, and PDF is not stated.

5. Dinogame. Free with no account. Filler letters can come only from your own words, and the share link holds the whole puzzle in the address. Limit: print is two PNG pages, not a PDF.

6. WorksheetWorks. Its FAQ says worksheets are free, need no sign-up and carry no ads. You choose the grid font, case and directions. Limit: the word search page does not mention an answer key.

7. Teacher's Corner. Shapes, fonts, playable and shareable puzzles and a video on hidden messages. Limit: it is ad-supported, asks you to turn off your ad blocker, and its help text puts the free limit near 30 lines.

8. Edu-Games.org. A PDF in A4 or Letter with a highlighted solution page, and the clues version. Limit: ad code on the page.

9. Tools for Educators. Picture and definition clues, no account, no watermarks. Limit: three fixed grid sizes and ad code on the page.

10. WordMint. Fonts, images and a large library of ready-made puzzles. Limit: PDF and Word export need the paid plan.

Eight ways teachers use a word search

1. This week's spelling list. Type the words and print a different layout for each table.
2. Vocabulary preview. Students find the unit's key words before reading, then circle the ones they already know.
3. Early finishers. Keep a folder of printed puzzles on the current topic.
4. Sub plans. A word search with the key on page two needs no explanation. Add vocabulary practice for 3rd grade if the sub has time.
5. Sort and find. Hide nouns and verbs together and ask students to circle only the nouns. Any maker can do this: put both groups in the list and say the rule out loud.
6. A secret reward. Use a hidden message to deliver the answer to a riddle or the day's special job.
7. Centres. One station solves on a tablet or Chromebook, another prints.
8. Sight words. Use Dolch lists with younger readers, and pair the puzzle with sight-word

practice stories. Press "Make another" in our maker for a different layout per table.

How to choose

- Need a PDF in two minutes? Super Teacher Worksheets or Word Puzzle World.
- Want a puzzle that looks made for this week? A to Z Teacher Stuff or Word Search Labs, for shapes, or ours for a pumpkin or a heart with a secret message.
- Want children to solve it on a device? Word Search Labs, Dinogame or Puzzel.org, or ours on the projector or from a play link.
- Teaching vocabulary or ESL? Tools for Educators or Edu-Games.org, for clues; ours prints definition clues from "word: clue" lines.
- Worried about ads on the projector? WorksheetWorks, Puzzel.org, Word Search Labs, or our own maker.
- Worried about where the words go? Use one that makes the puzzle in your browser, and keep names out of every list.

What we built and why

Our word search maker is at teach.peabody.kids/make/word-search. Reading 35 makers showed us what to build, and as of 29 October 2026 it works like this:

- Play on the board. One button puts the same puzzle on the projector as a game. Drag across a word, tap its first and last letters, or use the arrow keys and Space. Each word found is stamped with a highlighter that draws on and plays the next note of a scale, so a finished puzzle has played a little tune. H lights the first letter of a word still hidden, A shows the answers, R makes a new layout and T runs a timer. A play link opens the puzzle straight onto the board on a Chromebook or tablet.
- A secret message. Type a short message and its letters fill the first squares no word uses. On paper, the letters nobody circles spell it, and the answer key rings them. On the board, when the last word is found the other letters fade and the message flies into a row, one letter and one note at a time.
- Sort and find. Add look-alike words to leave alone and a rule such as "Circle only the animals". They hide in the grid and the word bank too, so children read before they circle, and on the board a look-alike wobbles instead of counting.
- Shapes. A pumpkin, heart, star, circle, diamond, tree, house, apple, cat face or triangle, with the outline drawn on the sheet. Our Halloween puzzle opens as a pumpkin and our Valentine's Day puzzle as a heart.
- Lists and clues. Start from the Dolch lists by grade, months, days, number words, shapes, colors, the fifty states or our 40 topic lists, and keep a random handful so each group gets a different set. Write "word: clue" lines to print the clues in the bank instead of the words.

- The basics. Up to 40 words, grids from 8 to 25, Easy, Medium or Hard, a lowercase switch, a word bank in ABC order if you like, a name and date line and an answer key, on US Letter or A4. The maker checks the whole grid so each word appears exactly once and the filler has no unsuitable letter runs.

Everything is made in your browser. The list travels in the part of a share or play link after the #, which browsers never send to our server, and nothing is scored or sent when children play. It is free, with no sign-in and no ads, and Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

It has limits we would rather say plainly. You cannot draw your own shape or upload a picture, as Word Search Labs lets you, and you cannot embed the puzzle on a class website. There is one capital-letter font, with a lowercase switch, and no team scoreboard. That is why Word Search Labs stays first on our Top 20 list and ours is second.

If your class also needs something to read, try Peabody's free stories. The full ranking, with what each maker's page says about price, ads and limits, is on our Top 20 list of word search makers.

Questions

What is the best free word search maker for teachers?

For the most options with no ads, Word Search Labs: its page says it is free with no ads and no registration, and it has shapes and online solving. For a plain PDF with a solution page, Super Teacher Worksheets. For a hidden message, Puzzel.org.

Can I make a word search with a hidden message?

Yes. Puzzel.org does it for free: the letters left over once every word is found spell a word or phrase. Puzzlemaker lists Hidden Message as a puzzle type, and Teach Starter says to write the message into the words box. Ours puts the message in the first leftover letters and, on the board, flies it into place when the last word is found.

Which word search makers let students play on a computer or tablet?

Word Search Labs, Dinogame, Puzzel.org, Edu-Games.org, TheWordSearch.com, Teacher's Corner and JigsawMake all say students can play from a link. Look at the free limits before you plan a lesson around one. Ours plays on the projector or from a play link, with no account and no player limit.

Is it safe to type student names into a word search maker?

We would not. Some makers publish the puzzle on their site, one says free puzzles show up in search engines, and one says the words you enter help build a database. Use vocabulary words, not names, and prefer a maker that builds the puzzle in your browser.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/best-free-word-search-makers