

Holiday parties have a way of turning a simple game night into a cheerful traffic problem. Someone is looking for a drink, someone else is asking what the rules are, the NFL game is about to start, and a few people would rather chat than sit down for a long round. The best party game isn't necessarily the cleverest one—it's the one that fits the room, the group, and the evening's natural pauses.

For many gatherings, the choice comes down to *Codenames* or *Wavelength*. Both are easy to bring out, work well with a crowd, and give people plenty to talk about. But they ask for different kinds of attention. *Codenames* rewards careful listening and word associations; *Wavelength* invites the whole group to debate where an idea falls on a spectrum. Here's how to choose between them, make either game work at a holiday party, and keep drinks and game pieces from becoming part of the same mess.



The quick verdict

Choose *Codenames* if your guests are ready to split into teams, listen closely, and stay engaged through a sequence of clues. Choose *Wavelength* if you want a more conversational game that can tolerate interruptions and gets people laughing about how differently they interpret the same prompt.

Party consideration *Codenames* *Wavelength* Best fit Guests who enjoy team play and word clues Guests who like opinions, discussion, and playful disagreement Attention required Higher: clues and guesses build on what came before Moderate: discussion can be lively, though the group needs to follow the reveal Handling interruptions Pause between turns; clue-giving needs focus Easier to dip into conversation, but a reveal is best enjoyed by everyone together Holiday-party strength Creates a clear team-versus-team activity Gets a mixed group talking quickly

Codenames group size: when teams make the difference

Codenames works by dividing players into two teams. Each team's spymaster gives a one-word clue and a number, and teammates use that clue to identify words on the table. The appeal is in the shared logic: everyone is trying to understand the clue, but people can make wonderfully different connections.

The **Codenames group size** question is less about finding a magic number and more about whether you can form two reasonably balanced teams. With a small group, the game can feel focused and personal. With a larger crowd, teams create room for people to confer, but you'll want everyone to be able to see the word grid and hear the clue. If a dozen guests are spread around a living room, the table may become a stage rather than a place everyone can participate from.

For a holiday party, set expectations before the first clue. Ask teams to keep their discussion at a conversational volume, make sure the spymasters can be heard, and give people permission to watch a round before joining. A clear viewing spot helps guests who are standing with a drink or stepping in from another conversation stay included without crowding the board.

Wavelength interruptions: a better fit for a lively room?

Wavelength asks players to interpret a clue in relation to a hidden position between two opposing ideas. [dining room game night](#) A clue might point toward one end of a spectrum, while the rest of the group debates where the clue belongs. That open-ended discussion is a natural match for a party: people can explain their reasoning, tease one another about their interpretations, and get to know how friends or relatives think.

Wavelength interruptions are often less disruptive than interruptions during a clue sequence in *Codenames*. A guest can miss some of the debate and still enjoy the reveal when the dial is shown. But "more interruption-friendly" doesn't mean "no attention needed." If half the group wanders off right before the reveal, you lose the shared payoff. Try to keep each round moving and invite people to rejoin at the next prompt rather than stopping every time someone gets pulled into a side conversation.

For a group with different ages, game experience, or tolerance for rules, *Wavelength* can be the easier starting point. The conversation explains much of the game as you go. *Codenames* may be the better choice once guests have settled in and are ready to concentrate for a longer stretch.

Use football as the event clock

If the holiday get-together includes an NFL game, let the broadcast organize the evening instead of competing with it. People naturally pay more attention before kickoff, during breaks in the action, and at halftime. The exact rhythm varies, so treat the game as a flexible event clock rather than promising a specific number of rounds.

- **Before kickoff:** Set out a short game window while guests arrive. *Wavelength* is a good warm-up because its discussion makes it easy for newcomers to join.
- **During play:** Let football take priority if that's why people gathered. Keep game components together and don't expect players to follow a demanding clue while everyone is watching a big moment.
- **At halftime:** Offer a planned game window. If the group wants team competition, start *Codenames*; if the room is still in mingling mode, bring out another round of *Wavelength*.
- **After the game:** Choose based on who remains and how much energy the room has. A small, attentive group may enjoy a focused game; a shifting crowd may prefer conversation and quick rounds.

This is one of the most useful rules for the **best party word games**: don't ask a game to hold attention during the very moment your guests came to watch or celebrate something else. Plan around commercials and halftime, but don't assume every guest will want to play through them. A good host makes the activity available, not compulsory.

Contain the party to one room

In a small apartment or a busy family home, scattering the party across several rooms makes it harder to get a game going. Keep the essentials in one main room: seating, the screen if you're watching football, food, drinks, and a clear place to play. Guests can still move around, but the action has a home base.

A sideboard is useful for keeping party supplies within reach without putting everything on the game table. Use it for snacks, napkins, extra coasters, and a cooler for drinks that don't need frequent trips to the kitchen. Put a small, visible sign or simply tell guests where drinks belong. When the game is on the table, the table should hold the game—not an open can hovering over the cards.

And yes, give coats a spot as soon as people walk in. A chair that's supposed to be for players can disappear under winter layers before the first clue is given. Once the entry is sorted, it's easier to guide guests toward the main room and keep the party together.

Spill-proof drink strategy for game tables

Neither game needs a drink beside the cards or pieces. A little prevention saves a lot of cleanup—and saves everyone from discovering that a snack has greased up the cards halfway through a round.

1. **Create a drink zone.** Put the cooler or drink station on the sideboard, a counter, or another surface outside the playing area.
2. **Use coasters as a real system.** Keep a stack where guests can see it, and place a few on nearby surfaces before people arrive. Coasters are not decoration; they're part of the setup.
3. **Choose stable cups.** If you're serving drinks in glasses, keep them away from the board. Lidded cups can reduce splashes, but they still don't belong over cards or game components.
4. **Keep food separate.** Put greasy snacks and dips on the sideboard or a designated food surface, with napkins close by.
5. **Make the rule friendly and clear.** "Let's keep drinks on the sideboard so the game stays dry" sounds welcoming and gives people an easy alternative.

If you're using a dedicated game table, the same rule applies. A larger play surface is helpful, but it doesn't make the board spill-proof. Keep drinks at the edge of the party zone, not over the game.

Where a dedicated table fits in

The Dresden, a board game dining table from Bandpass Design, is an option for hosts who want a surface designed around playing and dining. A dedicated table can make it easier to give a game its own space while the rest of the room handles food and conversation. That can be especially appealing when a holiday gathering combines dinner, board games, and a football watch party.

One practical detail to note: the scraped text available for this post lists no prices for The Dresden table or any other products. Don't assume or repeat a price based on incomplete listing information. If cost matters to your planning, check the current product listing or contact the company for up-to-date details.

Which game should you bring out?

Choose Codenames when...

- Your guests enjoy wordplay and team competition.
- You can give players a reasonably focused stretch of time.

- The group is large enough to split into teams, but small enough that everyone can see and hear.
- You want a structured activity during a planned window, such as halftime.

Choose *Wavelength* when...

- Your guests are still arriving, mingling, or moving between conversations.
- You want a game that sparks discussion without asking everyone to solve a shared word grid.
- Your group enjoys explaining opinions and discovering where friends disagree.
- You want to start with a low-pressure round before deciding whether the room is ready for something more focused.

The best holiday-party answer: keep both options flexible

If you already own both games, there's no need to declare one the universal winner. Start with *Wavelength* when guests are arriving and the room is still settling. If the group becomes more focused, switch to *Codenames* for a team game during a natural break in the NFL action. If attention is divided, put the game away without making anyone feel they have to finish a round.

For a single-game choice, match the game to the attention span you expect. *Codenames* is stronger for a group that wants a sustained team activity. *Wavelength* is stronger for a mixed crowd that would rather talk, laugh, and dip in and out of play. Both can be among the **best party word games** for a holiday gathering when you give them the right time window.



Most of all, set up the room to support the evening: keep everyone in one main space, use football as a natural clock, protect the game from drinks and snacks, and make the rules easy to follow. Then the games can do what they're best at—give people something fun to share between the food, the conversation, and the next big moment on screen.