



Icebreakers and Energisers

35 ways to improve your workshop, class, etc.

Compiled by Deirdre Hogan

Introduction

This section provides a range of icebreaker and energiser activities suitable for a variety of groups. They have been chosen to assist you in organising classes, workshops and events – there are a great many others available on the websites listed at the end.

When introducing these activities in your class or workshop, consider the following tips:

- 1. Know your participants** - before deciding on which activities to use, consider your audience and bear in mind factors such as age, cultural norms, familiarity with one another, purpose of the group gathering and physical abilities.
- 2. Know what you want to achieve** - consider the purpose of the activity – is it to help people to get to know each other, to encourage them to think as a team, to stimulate thought on a particular topic, or simply to add some energy to the group - choose or adapt the activity as required.
- 3. Start Simple** - a general rule of thumb, start with simple activities, e.g., those that are easy to perform, require minimal movement and little physical contact.
- 4. Adapt your Activities** - activities are flexible. You may wish to elaborate or simplify an activity. You may decide to keep the group as one or you may wish to introduce a sense of competition by dividing your participants into teams and offering a prize for the winner.
- 5. Be enthusiastic** - using an icebreaker well is like telling a story well. Be enthusiastic about it and get involved yourself. It is as important for the participants to be at ease with the facilitator as much as with each other.

The activities in this section are divided according to:

A: Introductory Icebreakers – activities to enable participants to get to know each other. These are particularly relevant for groups where participants are meeting for the first time.

B: General Icebreakers/Energisers - warm up activities for groups of participants who were previously acquainted. These activities ease participants into the workshop and help them to 'loosen up'. They may also be used during the workshop to inject some life into the group.

C: Topic Specific Icebreakers – games that may be used to introduce a new topic to the workshop.

Ways of Dividing Groups

Some activities may require your participants to work in groups. If you don't want to simply divide people according to their seating arrangement, try one of the following:



Ping-Pong Balls

Write 1, 2, or 3, etc., on the number of ping-pong balls, the highest number equating to the number of groups. Have participants randomly pick a ball out of a bag OR throw ping-pong balls into the centre of the group and ask each participant to pick one.

Count Off

Assign a number 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., to each participant. Form a group for each assigned number e.g., all 1's are in the same group.

Birthday Line

Ask everyone to form a birthday line beginning with the youngest and ending with the oldest – they must organise the line in order of day, month and year – ALL WITHOUT TALKING! Then divide up the line by numbers into the required number of groups.

Section A

Introduction Icebreakers

1. Introduction and a Smile!

Time: 5 – 10 minutes, depending on group size.

1. Ask participants to introduce themselves to the group and to give one other piece of information, e.g.:
 - Something embarrassing that happened them recently
 - The most recent thing that made them laugh
 - A snippet from their party piece (song, poem, dance, whatever) etc.

2. Introduce your Partner

Time: 10 – 20 minutes, depending on group size.

1. Ask participants to pair up with someone that they don't know – encourage movement.
2. Ask participants to find out a number of pieces of information about their partner e.g.:
 - Name
 - Occupation/role
 - Where they live
 - Favourite hobby
 - Major likes/dislikes
 - Greatest fear/ambition

Ask each participant to introduce his or her partner to the group.



3. Rearrange

Time Required: 3 - 5 minutes, depending on group size.

1. Ask participants to arrange themselves alphabetically according to their first name.

This could also be done using other determinants for example, according to:

- Height
- Number of letters in your name
- Birthday
- Length of thumb

4. Recall

Time Required: 5 - 10 minutes, depending on group size.

1. Ask participants to sit in a circle so that they can see each other
2. Ask the first participant to introduce him/herself by name and to state an adjective that best describes them
3. The next person must do the same for him/herself and then say also the first person's name and word. The third person has to do it for him/herself and for the second person, and the first person.

Alternatives:

- Stipulate that the word that a person chooses to describe him/herself must start with the same letter as their name
- Ask them to name the animal that they think they are most like
- Ask them to make a gesture (e.g., clap, wink, hop) when they introduce themselves.

5. Find Someone Who...

Time Required: 15 - 20 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials Required: A page with the table below for each participant.

1. Distribute a 'Find Someone Who' list to each participant.
2. Explain that each participant must find someone in the group that corresponds to the description on the sheet and write his or her name in the space provided. (Explain that they cannot repeat the same name on the sheet).
3. Specify a time limit (approx. 10 minutes).
4. If someone successfully completes the sheet, they must shout 'Finished!', alternatively the facilitator should shout 'Time Up' after the specified time. In this case the person with the most spaces filled wins.
5. Ask participants to sit in a circle and ask the winner to share the names on his or her sheet.



Find someone who...	Name
Wears glasses	
Walks or cycles to work	
Lives in bungalow	
Had orange juice for breakfast	
Is tallest in the group	
Reads a daily newspaper	
Has lived abroad	
Plays tennis	
Watches a named soap opera	
Knows all 7 dwarfs	
Is vegetarian	
Someone with three or more siblings	
Drives a black car	

6. Human Bingo

Time Required: 15 - 20 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials: One set of 'Human Bingo' cards per participant

1. Distribute a set of 'Human Bingo' cards to each participant.
2. Explain that each participant must find someone in the group that corresponds to the descriptions on the card and write his or her name in the appropriate box. (Explain to the group that they cannot repeat the same name on the same card).
3. Specify a time restriction (approx. 10 minutes)
4. If someone successfully completes either of the cards, they must shout 'Bingo!' Alternatively, the facilitator should shout 'Time Up' after the specified time - in this case the person with the most completed boxes wins.
5. Ask participants to sit in a circle and ask the winner to share the names on his or her sheet.

Sample Human Bingo Cards

Wears glasses		Had orange juice for breakfast		Has lived abroad
	Walks or cycles to work		Is vegetarian	
Knows all 7 dwarfs		Lives in bungalow	Is tallest in the group	



Watches a <i>named</i> soap opera		Is vegetarian		Is wearing something green
	Drives a black car			
Buys a daily paper		Lives in a two storey house	Is single	Is left handed

7. Find Me!

Time Required: 10 - 15 minutes, depending on group size

Materials: One card per participant

1. Distribute one card to each participant. The card should ask for 4 pieces of information – preferably one physical characteristic
2. Ask participants to complete the card
3. Collect cards from participants and redistribute. Ensure that everyone has another person’s card and not their own
4. Ask participants to find the person whose card they have and sit beside that person.

Find Me!

My eye colour is.....

My main hobby is.....

I live in.....

My favourite savoury dish is

Section B

Warm up icebreakers

8. All Change!

Time Required: 10 - 15 minutes, depending on group size.

1. Ask participants to arrange their chairs in a circle
2. As the facilitator, stand in the centre of the circle. Explain that the object of the game is to sit down or remain sitting but that individuals must change seats when the facilitator’s statement is true for them
3. Call out a number of statements e.g.,
 - All change if you’re wearing black shoes!
 - All change if you’ve ever dyed your hair!
 - All change if you’ve seen a *named* film!
 - All change if you’re single!
 - All change if you’re male!



4. When participants are comfortable with the game, sit on a seat left vacant during a 'change', thus leaving a participant in the centre to call out statements.

9. All Sit Down!

Time Required: 5 minutes

1. Explain that this is a trust game. Also explain that it is a physical game which involves touching, and that participants can opt out if they do not feel up to it or if it is culturally inappropriate
2. Arrange participants in groups of approximately eight, and remove any obstacles from around them. If safety permits, do not tell them exactly what is involved, so that it is a greater surprise
3. Ask participants to stand in a circle facing the back of the participant to their left
4. Ask them to simultaneously move inwards to make the circle as tight as possible
5. At this point ask them to sit down on the lap of the person behind them. If done well, this can hold stable
6. When they are sitting, ask them to start walking.

10. Are you Alert?

Time Required: 10 minutes

Materials Required: Tray with 30 random objects, worksheet for each participant.

1. Prior to the workshop, prepare a tray of 30 unrelated items and cover the tray
2. Inform the participants that they will have 1 minute to look at and remember the objects on a tray
3. Uncover the tray for 1 minute and cover again once the time is up
4. Distribute a worksheet with 30 rows to each participant
5. Ask participants to write down the items they remembered. Allow 3 minutes to do this
6. Ask individuals to state the number of items that they remembered. The highest score wins. Ask the participant with the highest score to call out his or her list. Offer a prize for the winner.

Alternatively (to 6), before disclosing the highest scores, give participants the option to pair up with one other random participant (assuming you have an even number). Explain to them that they will incur a penalty of 3 if they do join up and that they will share the prize if they win.

11. Count to 10!

Time Required: 2 - 5 minutes

1. Ask participants to stand in a circle.
2. Explain that the aim of this game is for the group to count to 10. One person must randomly call out '1'. Another must call out '2,' etc., but if two people call out the number at the same time, the group must start again from 1.
3. Continue until the group reaches '10'.



12. Last one Standing!

Time Required: 2 - 5 minutes

1. Ask participants to stand in a circle
2. Explain that the aim of this game is to be the last one standing. Participants must count in a clockwise direction from 1 to 10. Each participant may count one or two numbers. For example, the first participant might count '1', the second might count '2, 3', the third might count '4, 5' etc. The person who counts the number '10' is 'out' and must sit down.
3. Continue until only one person remains standing. This person is the winner.

13. Slapper!

Time Required: 5 minutes

1. Ask participants to kneel on the ground in a tight circle with shoulders almost touching and to place both hands on the floor in front of them
2. Then ask them to hook arms around the elbow of the people on either side of them, so that their left hand is in front of the person to their left and their right hand is in front of the person to their right - the two hands in front of each participant should now belong to the participants on either side of them.
3. Instruct participants as follows - Slap the ground with one hand, and moving in a circle clockwise, each hand slaps the ground in turn. Allow this to continue for a few rounds so that everyone has understood the game. Explain that if someone does not slap the ground when it is their turn or if they slap out of turn, they must put the hand behind their back and take it out of the game.
4. One at a time, introduce new rules giving each one a chance to develop before introducing the next one
 - two slaps of the ground causes the direction of rotation to reverse
 - no-one can 'two slap' if someone has 'two slapped' in the last three rounds
 - speed up the game
5. The last person left with two hands in the game is declared the winner.

14. How well do you know me?

Time Required: 25 – 30 minutes

Materials Required: A piece of paper for each participant and a score card (if alternative ending is used)

1. Distribute one piece of paper to each participant
2. Ask participants to write down two facts about themselves (preferably that they think no one else in the group knows) and one false statement about themselves. Each statement should start with "I", e.g., 'I have never been to Edinburgh', 'I have three brothers', 'I enjoy scuba diving'
3. Allow 3 minutes for this task
4. Ask each participant to read out his or her three statements. The group should discuss the statements and reach a consensus on the one that is false
5. Ask the participant to reveal the truth.

Alternatively, add a competitive element to the game. Distribute the card below and ask participants to mark the statement that they feel is untrue for each person. Ask participants to swap cards and mark each other's scores – the highest score wins.



Which Statement is Untrue?

Name:

	Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Score
Name 1				
Name 2				
Name 3				
Name 4				
Name 5				
Name 6				
Name 7				
Name 8				
TOTAL SCORE				

15. Mirror

Time Required: 5 minutes

1. Ask participants to divide into two equal groups and to make two lines that face each other
2. Explain that participants in the first group must copy the actions of the person they face in the other group (e.g. nodding, smiling, clapping, winking, dancing) as if they were a mirror image
3. Swap roles.

16. Catch the Chair

Time Required: 5 minutes

1. Ask participants to arrange their chairs in a circle and to stand behind their chair
2. Explain to participants to lean their chairs forward and instruct as follows:
 - If the facilitator claps once, move to the right and catch your neighbour’s chair
 - If the facilitator claps twice, move to the left and catch your neighbour’s chair
 - If someone’s chair falls, they must remove themselves and their chair from the circle; however the remaining chairs must not be moved and so the circle does not get smaller.

17. Marooned!

Time Required: (approx.10 minutes)

This activity promotes teamwork and problem solving.

1. Divide the group into teams of 6 participants
2. Instruct teams that their ship is sinking off the coast of a remote island. There is little chance of rescue and no time to call for help. Each person may take one item to shore, to aid their survival
3. Groups must make a list of their 6 items and defend their choices
4. Groups then explain their choices to each other and to the other team
5. You may introduce scenarios and ask the teams to respond for example, “On Day 3 one of the camp, members fall ill due to over exposure to the hot and humid conditions. How might you use your provisions to help him/her,” or “ It’s Day 4 and you still haven’t been able to find any food on the island. You can hear an underground stream however, but as of yet haven’t been able to get fresh water from it. Can you use your listed items to reach the water?”

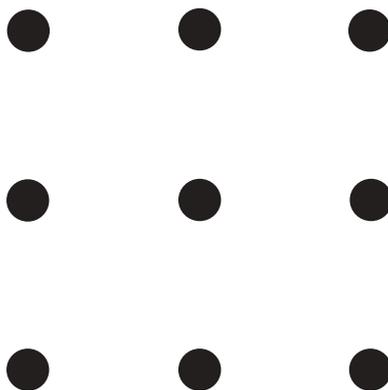


18. The Nine Dots Puzzle

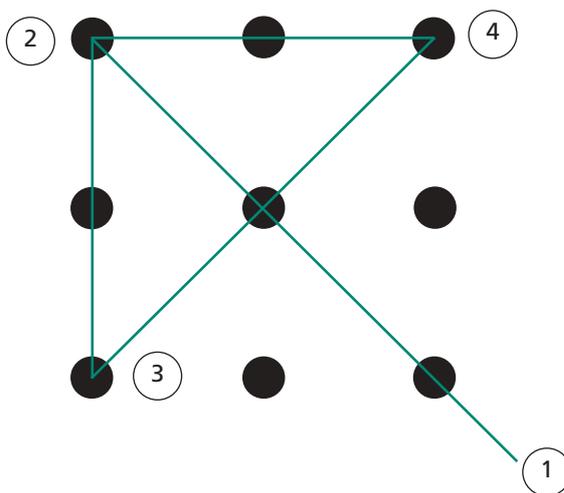
Time Required: 5 minutes

Materials Required: One 'Dots' page and pencil per participant.

1. Distribute a 'Dots' page to each participant
2. Ask participants to connect all nine dots with four straight lines drawn without removing the pencil from the page.



Solution:



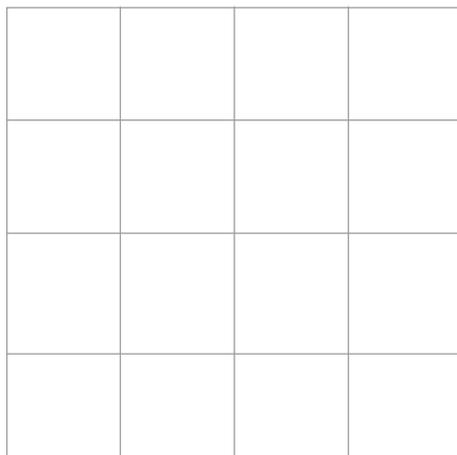


19. Count the Squares

Time Required: 5 minutes

Materials Required: One 'Squares' page

1. Distribute a 'Dots' page to each participant
2. Pose the question, 'how many squares can be made out of the following shape?'



Solution: 16 (x1 square) + 9 (x4 squares) + 4 (x9 squares) + 1 (x16 squares) = 30

20. Chinese Dragons

Time Required: 5 - 10 minutes

1. Divide participants into two equal teams
2. Instruct each team to form a line, with each person holding the waist of the person in front of them. The person at the top of the line represents the Dragon's head; the person at the end of the line represents the Dragon's tail
3. The person at the head of each team must try to attach to the end of the other team's tail, which then becomes their new head
4. The team with the longest line after a certain time wins.

21. Human Knot

Time Required: 10 – 15 minutes

1. Divide participants into groups of 6-8 and ask them to stand in a tight circle facing each other
2. Instruct participants to close their eyes, put their arms out in front of them and to grab two other hands from the circle
3. Whenever everyone has two hands, they should open their eyes. The group must now unknot itself without breaking any hands.



22. One Word Story

Time Required: 10 – 15 minutes

1. Ask participants to stand in a circle facing each other
2. Begin a themed or random story by telling the first few lines. Instruct participants to continue the story by each person in the circle adding one word
3. Continue going around the circle until the story comes to a natural end.

23. Wink!

Time Required: 10 – 15 minutes

Materials Required: Playing Cards – one for each participant but including one ace (detective) and one joker (winker).

1. Ask participants to sit in a circle facing each other
2. Instruct participants that the person with the Ace is the Detective and the person with the Joker is the 'Winker'. Explain that the objective of the game is for the 'Winker' to wink at the other participants without the Detective seeing them
3. Ask each person to draw one card
4. The game is played until the 'Winker' removes all players without being caught by the Detective, or until the Detective identifies the 'Winker'. If the Detective misidentifies the Winker, he/she loses the game.

24. Syllables

Time Required: 10 – 15 minutes

1. Divide participants into two teams
2. Ask each team to identify a number of 3 or 4 syllable words (one for each person on the team)
3. Within each team, the participants divide up according to the number of syllables in the words chosen, for example, "In-for-ma-tion" and one syllable is assigned to each subgroup
4. Team A says their first word simultaneously. Team B must identify the word. They may hear the word twice in order to make their decision
5. In turn, Team B says their first word simultaneously. Team A must identify the word
6. The team that identifies the most words wins.

Topic Lead-Ins

Topic lead-ins can:

- Indicate participants' knowledge or feeling towards the subject
- Identify learning needs and expectations
- Encourage the sharing of information



General

25. Word Tree

Time Required: 5 - 10 minutes

Materials Required: Flip chart or board

1. Generate a list of words related to the topic of the workshop, e.g., in a Poverty workshop, ask participants to give key words relating to "Cause or Effect of Poverty." Participants may suggest: 'war', 'trade', 'hunger', 'corruption', 'disease', etc.
2. Write all suggestions on the board, clustering by theme where possible. You can use this opportunity to introduce essential terms or to focus the workshop on specific areas.

26. Multiple Choice Quiz

Time Required: 5 - 10 minutes

Materials Required: Multiple Choice Questions

1. Put together a Multiple Choice Quiz prior to the workshop
2. Distribute and allow participants time to complete it, either individually or in teams
3. Check the answers with the group on completion or at a later stage in the workshop.

27. Ball Brainstorm

Time Required: 5 -10 minutes

Materials Required: A light ball e.g., beach ball

1. Announce the topic or question you wish to introduce
2. Instruct participants to throw the ball randomly to each other. The person who catches the ball must make a statement about the topic/question before throwing the ball again.

28. Exploring Through Questions

Time Required: 5 - 30 minutes – depends on questions

Some broad ranging questions posed by the facilitator can serve to identify participant learning needs and goals, encourage the sharing of information and resources, and/or surface resistance to learning.

Participants can respond to questions randomly or in order. Try to ensure that everyone in the group makes a contribution.

Examples of generic questions:

What are your expectations of this session?

- How would you personally define the topic?
- What positives can we assume about the topic?
- What negatives can we assume about the topic?



Theme Related

29. Where in the World! (Adapted from One World Week DEFY Resource)

Theme – Interdependence/Consumption

Time Required: 20 - 25 minutes

Materials Required: Large sheets of paper, one map of the world, coloured tags (3 colours), prepared list of products and where they are produced

1. Divide participants into 3 groups and assign topics:
 - a. Food
 - b. Clothes
 - c. Recreational Products
2. Ask each group to consider the products they use (according to their group category) and where they or their raw materials originate from e.g.:
 - a. Chocolate from Ghana (Cocoa) and Ireland (Sugar); Tea from India
 - b. Runners from Thailand, Cotton T-Shirt from China
 - c. MP3 Player from Japan; Football from Pakistan
3. Allow 10 minutes for this activity
4. Ask a member of each group to present their results. Where producing countries are unknown look for suggestions from other participants
5. Ask another member of the group to tag countries listed on the world map. Use different colour tags for each group.

This exercise will stimulate conversation on the consumption and interdependence between countries. Ask participants for other ways in which countries are interdependent, e.g., tourism, destruction of environment, etc..

30. First Impressions (adapted from Failte)

Theme – Identity and Belonging

Time Required: 15 - 20 minutes

Materials Required: Pictures of people of various ages, origin, ethnicity, etc., (avoid well know people), pens

1. Prepare by sticking the pictures to the top of a piece of paper, leaving plenty of space underneath
2. Ask participants to sit in a circle. If there are more than 10 participants, divide them into two circles. Ask them to look at the picture and write down their first impressions at the bottom of the page, and to fold the bottom of the page so that their words cannot be seen
3. Pass pictures around the group quickly – don't give people too long to think, encouraging people to be honest. Repeat until each person has seen each picture. Unfold the paper and let everyone see and compare 'first impressions'.

Discuss the first impressions. Did people have similar first impressions or different ones? What surprises were there, and what was not a surprise? What did people base their first impressions on? Has anyone ever had a wrong first impression of a group member, or he or she of someone else? How would that feel?



31. A Charter of Rights (taken from Failte)

Theme – Human Rights

Time Required: 60 minutes

Materials Required: Poster paper and markers, blue tack, copies of the Declaration of Universal Human Rights

1. Divide the group into groups of four or five
2. Ask them to identify a chairperson and a reporter
3. Give each group a sheet of paper and a marker. Ask each group to imagine that they have been given the task of drawing up a Charter of Human Rights. Ask them to list out the rights that they would include. Give them 25 minutes for this activity. Put each group's charter on display and give the groups time to circulate and see each other's charter.
4. Discuss the charters. Were there differences? Which rights were obvious to all or most people? Which ones did they argue over?
5. Give each group a copy of the Declaration of Universal Human Rights and ask them to identify the differences between the rights they had listed and those in the Declaration. Were there any they were surprised to see in the Declaration, or any they felt were missing (look specifically at the social and economic rights, from Article 23 onwards)? How can they account for the differences?

32. Know Your Place (taken from Failte)

Theme – Discrimination and Equality

Time Required: 20 minutes

Materials Required: A pack of cards or labels with the numbers 1-10 written on them, blue tack, post paper and a marker. This game needs at least 20 people to work well

1. Stick a card or a label to the forehead or the back of each participant without letting them see their number
2. Explain that they are now in a hierarchical society. Each person treats 'lower' people with disrespect and 'higher' people with respect. The greater the difference in position, the greater the degree of disrespect/respect. Decide (apparently arbitrarily) that Aces are actually number 1, and are the lowest position of all
3. Participants are to interact with each other on the basis of where they think their position is in relation to each other but ARE NOT ALLOWED TO TALK. All interaction is non-verbal. The purpose of the game is to find one's place in society
4. Allow participants to play the game for 10 minutes. After 2 minutes quietly take 1 or 2 people with high number cards outside the door 'for a moment'. Tell them that they are suspended from the game and must stay outside until it is finished
5. After 10 minutes of play, ask participants to line up in order of where they think they are in the hierarchy. Allow them to look at their cards. Begin to discuss the activity.

Discussion: Did people line up in roughly the correct order? How did they know where their place was in the hierarchy? How did those at the bottom and the top feel about their treatment? How did they feel about the position or treatment of other group members? How do those with Aces feel, given that their status was arbitrarily decided?

Did anyone notice those who had been put outside the door? How do those at the bottom feel about those even more excluded than themselves? How did those who were put outside the door feel about the change in their status?

Did everyone play by the rules? Why do people play by rules that are unfair to them?