

ICEBREAKERS & SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

Compiled by:

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Group Size

S – Small group (3-8 people)
M – Medium group (9-25 people)
L – Large group (26+ people)
P – Partner activity

Activity Type

B – Quick break between activities
C – Communication
F – Just for Fun
G – Get to Know Each other
T – Team Building

Beach Ball Brainstorming	Time: 5-10 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: B, F
Announce a topic (things associated with a season, a holiday, the course content, the company, etc.). Then pass around an inflatable beach ball. Have everyone stand and pass the ball. When someone catches the ball, they shout out something related to the topic and then toss the ball to someone else. If the group is small, they can pass the ball in a circle chain. This activity gets people up and moving, and is a fun one to do in the afternoon to break up a long session- it's guaranteed to wake everyone up!			

Bop-i-dee-bop-bop-bop	Time: 10-20 min.	Size: S, M	Type: C, F
<p>The group stands in a circle.</p> <p>Phase one: One person stands in the center of the circle. He/she moves from person to person in the circle saying, "Bop-i-dee-bop-bop-bop." Whoever the central person speaks to must say "bop" before the central person finishes the strange phrase. If they do not say "bop" before the central person is finished, they must then become the central person.</p> <p>Phase two: If the central person only says, "Bop-bop-bop-bop-bop" to someone in the circle, the person spoken to must NOT say "bop" before the central person is finished. Otherwise, he/she will become the central person.</p> <p>Phase three: If the central person says, "Elephant" to someone in the circle, he/she must form his/her arms into an elephant trunk. The person on either side of the "elephant" forms the ears. Elephant trunk: right arm straight out, left arm wraps underneath the right and honks the nose. Ears: arms make a C shape leaning toward the elephant.</p> <p>Phase four: If the central person says, "Kamikaze" to someone in the circle, he/she must form kamikaze eyes. The person on either side of the "kamikaze" forms the wings to the plane. Kamikaze eyes: form the A-ok sign with both hands, wrap the fingers under the chin, flip hands upside down so that you are looking through the circles formed by your fingers. Wings: arms at a diagonal with the low end closest to the kamikaze.</p> <p>Phase five: If the central person says, "Charlie's angels" to someone in the circle, he/she must point to the sky with his/her "gun" and take the Charlie's angels pose with bended knee. The person on either side must turn their back to the central "angel" and hold their "gun" up in front of their nose.</p> <p>Phase six: If the central person says, "Star Trek" to someone in the circle, he/she must stand tall and proclaim, "Beam me up Scottie." The person on either side of the Star Trekker wiggles their fingers up and down making space sound effects such as "doo da la doo, doo da la doo."</p> <p><i>You can make up as many more phases as you desire.</i></p>			

Diversity Bingo	Time: 15-20 min.	Size: M, L	Type: G
This activity works well with large groups (from 15-200 people) and gets people moving and interacting. Create a worksheet like a Bingo card (with space for 12-25 blanks). Ask participants to walk around the room collecting signatures from people who meet the criteria. Each person can only sign someone's sheet once. If people finish early, have them help others finish their sheets. Collect completed sheets and select a few to win prizes. The criteria you list can be easily adapted to any group. Here are some ideas- find someone who: is wearing contact lenses, has brown socks, saw a certain movie, has gone to Europe, has grandchildren, plays a musical instrument, has an unusual hobby, etc...			

Evolution	Time: 10-20 min.	Size: M, L	Type: F
<p>Good for a large group. For this game, everyone needs to know how to play the game Rock-Paper-Scissors, so make sure that everyone knows how this game works (Rock breaks Scissors, Paper covers Rock, and Scissors cut Paper). There are four levels of evolution to be demonstrated by the facilitator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Egg – Crouch down close to ground in a ball ▪ Chicken – Knees bent, flapping arms and squawking like a chicken. ▪ Dinosaur – Upright, with arms up as claws, roaring. ▪ Human – Hopefully, people know that one. <p>When game begins, everyone is at the starting point of evolution, the egg. They must find another egg and play Rock, Paper, Scissors until one of them wins. Whoever wins moves up to the next evolutionary level and finds someone at the same level as them. Whoever loses moves down an evolutionary level and does the same (if you're an egg, there's no moving down- you're as low as it gets). This continues until people reach the human level, at which point they exit the game and have "evolved." The evolved people form a circle around everyone else, until eventually everyone has evolved, except for one (or a few) people left in the center. They are given a round of applause and reminded that we need all the stages of creatures for the world to function!</p>			

Finish the Sentence	Time: 5-15 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: B, G
<p>Go around the room and have each person complete one of these sentences (or something similar):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The best job I ever had was... ▪ The worst project I ever worked on was... ▪ The riskiest thing I ever did was... <p>This is a good technique for moving on to a new topic or subject. For example, when starting a class and you want everyone to introduce themselves, you can have them complete "I am in this class because..." You can also move on to a new subject by asking a leading question. For example if you are instructing time management, "The one time I felt most stressed because I did not have enough time was ..."</p>			

Five Things About You or The 4 C's	Time: 10-20 min.	Size: S, M	Type: G, T
<p>This ice-breaker also is an easy way to get people talking and mingling more with each other, and it also allows the team members to see what they have in common. Have everyone in the group write down answers to five questions. Some ideas for questions are: favorite book, favorite make-believe character, most romantic moment, who you would want to have lunch with (dead or alive), favorite song, place you'd most like to visit, etc... The person running the game then collects all the papers and reads them aloud. Everyone must make guesses as to who they think wrote each set of five answers.</p> <p>or</p> <p>Have small groups where each person writes down on an index card his/her favorite: Color, Cuisine, Country to visit, and Closet Dream. The cards are shuffled and redistributed. Each person reads aloud the card they picked up and each person writes down their guess as to who wrote it. At the end, see who guessed the most correct responses.</p>			

Group Counting	Time: 5-15 min.	Size: S, M	Type: C, T
<p>Ask the participants to form a circle. Ask the group to count to 10 (or a higher number, depending on the size of the group) by means of random individuals saying each number in sequence. Explain these rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the person on either side of you just called a number, you may not call out the next number. ▪ If two people speak at the same time, the group must start again at 1. ▪ People must watch one another and silently figure out a strategy to accomplish the task. ▪ No words may be spoken, thus the only sound made should be of the numbers. <p><i>Variation:</i> Have the participants try the same activity with eyes closed- this makes it even more interesting...</p>			

Haiku	Time: 5-10 min.	Size: S, M, P	Type: B, F
<p>Describe what a haiku is. Haiku is an ancient style of Japanese poetry that consists of three lines. The first line is 5 syllables, the second is 7 syllables, and the last is 5 syllables (ex. "This is my haiku. It may not be very long. But isn't it nice?"). Have people partner up and take a few minutes to write a haiku, pertaining to whatever subject you assign. Encourage humor and creativity. Have each pair read their haiku aloud.</p>			

Human Knot	Time: 10-30 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: G, T
<p><i>Step 1:</i> Have participants come together in groups of up to 12. The participants should stand shoulder to shoulder in a circle facing each other. Ask participants to close their eyes and raise their right hands up into the middle of the group. With their eyes closed, ask them to grasp someone else's hand across from them. Then ask them to put their left hands into the center and grab hands. Remind them not to take the hand of someone directly next to them, and they should be holding hands of two different people.</p> <p><i>Step 2:</i> Have everyone open their eyes and then try to undo the "knot" without letting go until they form a circle. Remind students that they are allowed to rotate their grasp so no one hurts their wrist.</p> <p>Questions for afterwards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was it easy? Did you find yourself or the group becoming frustrated? ▪ How did you feel at the beginning of the activity? And how did you feel at the end? ▪ Did one person take the lead to give instructions? ▪ How did you go about getting "untied"? ▪ What did you learn overall about the group and about yourself? ▪ Does this activity remind you of anything? ▪ What can we do to help each other take risks? How can we help each other untie knots? <p><i>Variations:</i> Have people try to do the activity silently. Also, if a team has really been having trouble, you may allow them to make one "disconnect" and then "re-connect" to help them along.</p>			

Interview	Time: 10-30 min.	Size: S, M, L, P	Type: G
<p>Break the group into two person teams (have them pick a partner that they know the least about). Have them interview each other for about twenty minutes (You can prepare questions ahead of time or provide general guidelines for the interview). They need to learn about what each other likes about their job, past jobs, family life, hobbies, favorite sport, etc... After the interviews, reassemble the group and have each team introduce their team member to the group. This exercise helps them to learn about each other.</p>			

Let's Hear It For...	Time: 10-20 min.	Size: M, L	Type: G, T
<p>An activity to learn new things about each other and become more comfortable with one another.</p> <p><i>Step 1:</i> With the class in a large circle, the facilitator teaches a common movement: slap thighs twice, clap twice, snap twice, and yell out something (boo-yah, awww yeah, or whatever you'd like). Explain that this sequence will be done at the end of every item that is called out.</p> <p><i>Step 2:</i> Facilitator continues by explaining that he/she will call out, "Let's hear it for everyone who. . . (category)." Those people will run into the middle of the circle, form a small circle, look at each other and do the slap, clap, snap movement, followed by the chosen salutation. <i>Note:</i> If someone is the only one that fits into a category, they should run to the center and do it by themselves, and the rest of the group should be encouraging of them for their uniqueness!</p> <p><i>Step 3:</i> The facilitator calls out a few of these categories (i.e. has black hair, has a little brother, has traveled to another country, etc...) and then encourages others to call out categories. The categories can vary from low-risk to high-risk, depending upon the group of students.</p> <p>Discussion questions: Did you learn anything new about anyone today? Do you have something in common with someone that you did not know about?</p>			

Let's Make a Deal	Time: 10 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: F
<p>Divide into small groups. Make up a worksheet with 6-8 items listed that the team members would likely have with them (make 1 or 2 items more uncommon things). Assign a recorder, based on some criteria (i.e., person with the oldest car, whose birthday is next, who has the longest last name, etc...). The team gets points for each person who has these items. Only one of each item per person can be counted and the team with the most points wins. Your list could include: a photograph, a calculator, a pencil, more than 3 credit cards, an unusual keychain, something red, etc. Be sure to award a prize to the winners!</p> <p>or</p> <p>Start with the same situation as above, but this would be for a large group. Call out an item and the first person to run up and show it to you wins a prize.</p>			

Look Up, Look Down	Time: 5-10 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: B, F
<p>This activity works well to get a group to feel more at ease with one another. Have the participants form a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Explain that this is just a silly, fun game based on eye contact. Have everyone start each round looking down at the floor. Count, "One, two, three, look up!" and everyone must look directly into the face of another person. If two people make eye contact, they are both "out" and should step out of the circle. The tell everyone to "look down" and repeat the rounds in the same way, until there are only one or two people left in the circle. It should be stressed that "winning" this game depends entirely on luck; no skill or strategy is involved.</p>			

Mind-Reading Attention Getter	Time: 5 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: B, F
<p>This is for the entire group and helps stress listening and taking directions. Tell the group that you have ESP and can read their minds. To prove it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask each person to mentally think of a number from 1 up to 10. ▪ Take that number and multiply by 9. ▪ Take the result and add the number together (i.e. 72 = 7+2, 9 = 0+9). ▪ Take that number and subtract 5. ▪ Take that result and equate it to a letter of the alphabet (i.e., 4 = D). ▪ Think of a country beginning with that letter. ▪ Ask them to think of an animal that begins with the second letter of the country name. ▪ Then ask the group: <i>"How many people are thinking of elephants in Denmark?"</i> <p>This exercise works because any number they think of will result in the answer of 4, so the country will begin with D (Denmark is one of the few) and Elephants are typically used for E.</p>			

Name Aerobics	Time: 10-15 min.	Size: S, M	Type: C, G
<p>Break into small groups. Instruct each participant to think of a name he/she would like to be called and think of how many beats or syllables are in the name (i.e., Pamela would be three beats, Pa-me-la). Take a moment for each person to create a series of movements so that there is one distinct and repeatable movement for each beat in his/her name. Instruct one participant to begin with his/her name and movements. The entire group then repeats the name with the same movements. The second participant follows with his/her name, then the group, and so on. Follow this pattern until everyone in the group has participated and the group has followed.</p>			

Name Mob	Time: 5-10 min.	Size: M, L	Type: G
<p>Works well for a large group. To get to know names, tell everyone that they have 5 minutes to learn as many names as possible. No other information is needed- the point is just to go around and try to learn as many names as you can. You'd be surprised how many names you can learn in such a short amount of time!</p>			

Post-It Mingling	Time: 10-20 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: C, G
<p>Give each participant a Post-It note on which to write their name and a question that they would like to ask others in the group. Ask them to stick the Post-it note to their chest. Once everyone is finished writing, have the group mingle in the room, introduce themselves to each other, and spend time answering each other's questions. Questions can really reflect each person and can range from "Where were you born?" to "What is your favorite food?" to "Do you agree with the death penalty?", etc...</p>			

Silent Alignment	Time: 5-10 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: C, G, T
<p>Ask participants of the group to line up in a straight line, according to their height. However, they need to do it in complete silence. Once this is done, have people line up according to birth date (in silence, again). You can also try other variations, such as alphabetical order of names, social security number, etc... be creative!</p> <p><i>Other variations:</i> An option for this activity is to blindfold some (or all of) the participants, in addition to muting them. Timing this exercise adds another challenge.</p>			

Stable Atom, Stable Matter	Time: 10-30 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: F, T
<p>PART 1: STABLE ATOM</p> <p>Everyone gets into a tight circle (there needs to be an even number of people). Tell everyone that they are all "electrons". Everyone proceeds to look at the person across from them, the person to their right and the person to their left. Then, focusing at the ground as neutral, it is explained that on the count of 3, they are to look at either the person right, left, or across from them. If they make eye contact with the person they look at (i.e. they choose each other), then both people yell BOOM! In this case, the atom was unstable and exploded. The atom is stable when no one yells BOOM. Then the group is on the same page and ready to move on to....</p> <p>PART 2: STABLE MATTER</p> <p>Still in the circle, each "electron" picks 2 other "electrons" in the group (silently). One of these "electrons" is your EXPLODER. The other "electron" is your PROTECTOR. When the activity begins, the goal is that your PROTECTOR person must physically stand in between you and your EXPLODER for you to be stable. On the count of 3, every one disperses and tries to stabilize themselves. You have stable matter when everyone in the group has accomplished this. <i>Note:</i> Sometimes there is NO solution (ie. people have picked each other or there is a triangle that cannot be solved). This is okay! You can always pick new electrons and do the game again...</p>			
Stand Up/Sit Down	Time: 5-15 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: G, T
<p>Ask a series of questions. Questions may range from low-risk to high-risk, depending on the readiness of the group. Explain that everyone who answers "yes" stands up, while everyone who answers "no" or chooses not to answer remains seated. The facilitator may also participate. <i>Sample questions:</i> Low-risk: Who has been to New Jersey? Who has worked at McDonald's? Who is left-handed? High-risk: Who knows someone who is in a gang? Who has committed a crime? Who has betrayed a friend? Who owns a weapon? <i>Note:</i> It is very important to discuss confidentiality prior to the activity, and process the disclosure that occurs after the activity.</p>			
Team Brainstorming	Time: 10-15 min.	Size: S, M	Type: F, T
<p>Divide into small groups. Ask teams to list: things that are round, things associated with a holiday, things that are red, things you can make out of tires or coat hangers, excuses for speeding, etc... No discussion, just list items! Assign a recorder to keep track, and the team with the most wins.</p>			
Two Circles	Time: 15-45 min.	Size: M, L	Type: G
<p>Good for a large group. Divide everyone into two circles, one inside the other, with the circles facing each other. The circles need to have the same number of people- each person should be facing a partner. Read aloud a question/topic and the partners have 2 minutes to answer to each other (1 minute per person). After the two minutes are up, have one circle rotate to the next person and repeat. This can go on as long as you'd like, and each time, you get to meet someone new.</p> <p><i>Some sample questions/topics:</i> Hometown, Family, Previous school, Previous job, Favorite movie, Favorite TV show, Favorite music group, Favorite food, Happiest day of your life, Best vacation, What brought you here, Best friend, Best teacher, How you celebrate holidays, Personal goal</p>			
Two Truths and a Lie	Time: 10-20 min.	Size: S, M	Type: G
<p>This is a fun game to play for introductions. Each person introduces him or herself, then follows with three comments about his/her life, two which are true, and one which is a lie. Everyone then has to guess which ones are the truth and which is the lie.</p>			
What's Different, Partner?	Time: 5-10 min.	Size: P, S, M, L	Type: B, F
<p>Partner up and choose a "changer" and an "observer." The observer looks at the changer as the two stand still, facing each other for a minute. Then they turn back-to-back and the "changer" changes five things (i.e. taking off jewelry, unbuttoning a collar, rolling down a cuff, etc.). The two face each other again and the "observer" must decide what has been changed. Afterwards, switch roles. This icebreaker gets people to interact with a new person and helps them feel comfortable and part of the session. It also shows how observant we really are.</p>			

Wizards, Elves, and Giants	Time: 10-20 min.	Size: M, L	Type: F, T
<p>This is a group tag type of activity. Everyone needs to know three type of characters, with motions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Wizards</i>- evil looking, hands out in front, "magically" wiggling fingers. ▪ <i>Elves</i>- squat down and dance around.. ▪ <i>Giants</i>- make yourself tall, arms reaching in the air. <p>Ask everyone to divide into two groups. Explain that this is like rock, paper, scissors: Wizards beat Giants, Giants beat Elves, and Elves beat Wizards. As a group, each group decides which character they will all be (in separate huddles, like football teams). They then come together and face each other (again, like football teams would). The facilitator counts to three and each group all forms their position at once. En masse, the "winning" group chases the "losing" group and tries to tag as many people as possible before they cross a predetermined line. Anyone they tag becomes part of their group, and the activity repeats. Keep going back and forth until a final person stands or until they tire out.</p>			

Zoom	Time: 10-20 min.	Size: S, M, L	Type: C, F, T
<p>Ask participants to form a circle. Explain that a person starts the game by saying Zoom, and turning their head to the right at the same time. Then the next person to the right does the same. The Zoom travels around the circle, very quickly. Then, anyone may stop the process by "putting on the brakes" – turning their head in the opposite direction and saying Mooz (Zoom backwards). This changes the direction until someone again "puts on the brakes" and then says Zoom to switch the direction again. Ask someone to start. <i>Note:</i> "Putting on the brakes" is a form of personal expression- the traditional method is to slam on the brakes with one's foot as if driving a car, and making a very loud, obnoxious screeching sound. Be creative!</p>			

Ways to partner up

- Find someone you don't know.
- Have everyone throw their shoe into a pile and then everyone finds another person's shoe.
- By finding someone with the same eye color, shirt color, favorite food, etc...

Ways to divide into groups

- Count off by numbers – for four groups, have people count off by 4, etc...
- By birth month – good for breaking into 2, 3, 4, 6, or 12 groups.
- By how many siblings you have, people with same hair color, eye color, etc...