

# Icebreakers: Onsite and Online

---

Icebreakers are activities that help you and your students get to know each other and relieve tension and anxiety. With careful planning, icebreakers can also introduce some of the concepts or processes that you will cover in the course. Choose activities that you are comfortable with and that reflect the tone you want to strike in your classroom. Adapt any of the following icebreakers to suit your students, goals and teaching style.

## Onsite

- **Introduce Another.** Divide the class into pairs. Each person talks about himself/herself to their partner, sometimes with specific instructions to share a certain piece of information. For example, "The one thing I am particularly proud of is..." After five minutes, the participants introduce their partner to the rest of the class.
- **Character Descriptions.** Have students write down one or two adjectives describing themselves. Put these on a stick-on badge. Have class members find someone with similar or opposite adjectives and talk for five minutes with the other person.
- **I've Done Something You Haven't Done.** Have each person introduce himself or herself and then state something they have done that they think no one else in the class has done. If someone else has also done it, the student must state something else until he or she finds something that no one else has done.
- **I Have Something to Offer.** Put students in pairs. Give them 5 minutes to introduce themselves and tell each other one talent or possession they have that could be useful to the whole group. Afterward, ask each pair to introduce each other. (For example, "I have a degree in English and am a decent writer and proofreader if anyone needs help with that," or "I have a car and would be willing to schlep around equipment in exchange for someone's help with Art history," or "I have a digital camera and have studied photography and would be happy to help out if anyone needs help with images.") Ideally, follow up this activity with an assignment that encourages students to work together and use each other's skills and talents.

- **Find Someone.** Ask each student to write one to three statements about themselves on a blank index card. Example: favorite color, interest, hobby, or vacations. Distribute cards so everyone gets someone else's card. Have that person find the person with their card and introduce himself or herself.
- **Famous Person.** People write a famous name on a piece of paper and pin it on someone else's back. Each person tries to guess what name is pinned on his or her back by asking others around the room yes or no questions. Variation: Use famous place instead of famous person.
- **Common Ground.** Give groups (4-6 learners) 5 minutes to write a list of everything they all have in common. Tell them to avoid the obvious ("we're all taking this course"). When time is up, ask each group how many items they have listed, and ask them to announce some of the most interesting items.
- **Burning Questions.** Ask students to write one to three "burning questions" (explain the term if international students do not know the expression) that they may have about the course. Give students two minutes to write their questions. Have the students form pairs, introduce themselves and discuss their most pressing burning question. Tell the students to choose ONE burning question from their lists that they would most like to have answered immediately. Distribute colored paper to each pair and instruct the students to write the question they chose and post it on the wall. Reconvene the whole group for a class discussion and to answer as many of the "burning questions" as possible.
- **Talking About Art.** Bring in contemporary or historical artwork, objects, or books that relate to the projects you have planned for your course. Assign three roles to group members: writer, timekeeper, and speaker. Distribute the objects among groups of 3-4. Give each group one questionnaire for each object with questions. (The questionnaires are for notes only.) Student won't need to turn them in. Sample questions: When and where do you think the piece was created? What methods do you think were used to make this object? Name any major

artists whose work is similar. Give groups 5-8 minutes to answer their questions. Remind students that their opinions and speculations are important for this activity. Later in the course they will learn the correct answers to the questions. As the instructor, circulate and listen to each group's discussion. Join in when relevant. Finally, ask the "speakers" from each group to speak to the class about the objects based on their groups' responses.

**Online Icebreakers** (Many of the activities above can be adapted for online as well.)

- **Partner Introductions.** Pair off your students and have them interview each other by email. They then post an introduction of their partner in the thread. (This activity could easily be done in the Welcome thread at the beginning of the semester.) If there is an odd number of students, you can be the partner for the extra student. You should give students a list of a few questions they are required to ask—name, major, hometown, etc.—and then give them some flexibility by requiring them to ask at least 3 questions of their own choosing—favorite movie and why, or reason for pursuing this industry, for example.

- **Roster by Birthdate.** Students must create a list of all class members in order by birthdate (month/day). The trick is, they may not say the name of any month or any numbers. For example, if my birthday is March 15, I could say I am born on the Ides of the shamrock month; however, if my birthday in July 5, I cannot say "Independence Day plus 1" because that statement includes a number.

- **Toast to Yourself.** Have each student write and post a toast to himself or herself, as if they were at a dinner party. Students should emphasize personal strengths, accomplishments, and traits of which they are proud.

- **Name Acronym Review.** Each student posts his or her name and thinks of words or phrases that correspond with the letters of that name and relate to the topic the class has been discussing. (i.e. BILL—Balance of composition, Illumination source, Line quality, Layers of charcoal/ paint/etc).

- **Forced Analogies.** Post two seemingly unrelated nouns (Smurf and Jeans) and ask students to post as many similarities or connections between them as possible. Students should be encouraged to be both literal or concrete (both items include an S, or have 5 letters, or are blue) and figurative or abstract (both were socially popular in the 80's). Once students understand the activity, invite them to challenge the class by posting more pairs of nouns that seem unrelated.

For more activities to help you get to know your students go to **Learning Names.**

**Resources:**

Adapted from the University of Hawaii Faculty Development web site:

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/breakice.htm>



ACADEMY *of* ART UNIVERSITY

FOUNDED IN SAN FRANCISCO 1929 BY ARTISTS FOR ARTISTS

© 2009, Academy of Art University. Faculty Development: <http://faculty.academyart.edu>. 415.618.3855

**FACULTY  
DEVELOPMENT**