

Icebreakers for Engagement

Using Online Icebreakers to Promote Interaction

In an online environment, human interaction does not just happen naturally. Your online students need a way to get to know you, the instructor, and others. There are several ways to encourage your students to interact with each other. Ice breakers can occur synchronously or asynchronously. The idea is to be creative and set several guidelines for students to follow in order to stimulate asynchronous discussions using the FOL discussion tool.

Below is a list of 8 common online ice-breakers that can be adapted to your course to get you started:

1. **Two Lies and a Truth.** Ask participants to list three interesting things about themselves. (I own two iguanas; I once shook hands with Tom Cruise; and I love to waterski.) Two must be lies and one must be true. Other participants must vote to determine which interesting thing is the truth. The participant with the most incorrect votes wins. Alternatively participants could be put into small groups and find out through teamwork what the truths and lies are. Another alternative game is three truths and a lie
2. **Childhood Dream.** Ask the participants to share their childhood dream (what they wanted to be or do when they grew up) and then ask them to reflect on how this correlates with their current aspirations. Source: (*ibid.*)
3. **Miscomm-puter-unication.** Ask the participants to share their most embarrassing mishap using a computer or mobile device. Share your own experience, for example, replying to the wrong person in an email. This will loosen them up and cause a few to chuckle before embarking on a whole new way of thinking...using technology instead of paper and pen. Source: (*ibid.*)
4. **Three words.** Ask participants to write a story together. The rule is that everyone is only allowed to put up three words. They are allowed to post again if at least one other participant has put up three words. At the end of the exercise you can summarize the whole story of even read it and post it as an audio file or a video. **Source:** [Online Facilitation](#) (N. White)
5. **Six degrees of Virtual separation.** Ask each participant to find out how he/she is linked to another participant through 5 others because they have some kind of connection. The solutions needs to be posted and should look like this: me > Jeffrey > Donna > Patricia > Hans > Sherry with an explanation of the connections. In finding the answers, participants have to interact and ask a lot of questions to each other. It may easily take a week. A shorter variation of this exercise may be to ask participants to find one other person they have some kind of connection with (a participant they did not know before). **Source:** CPsquare's foundations of [communities of practice](#).
6. **Personal Cards.** Ask students to make a card representing themselves using [Trading Cards](#). After making a card, students can post it online in a discussion forum. You can ask students to prepare a card about a specific aspect of their lives or their own style; for instance, ask them about their own communication or learning style. Alternatively, have students use [Adobe Spark](#), or [Microsoft Sway](#), two easy-to-use animated video and web story design apps, to share something about themselves.

KEY CONCEPT

Why Use Icebreakers?

“Ice-breakers are techniques and/or strategies used during the beginning of a class or unit to reduce tension and to immediately involve students in the class in a light and effective way. Online ice-breakers, specifically, include additional techniques that utilize various technologies to further develop a sense of community. Ice-breakers are especially important for online learners, because the face to face interaction is not readily available.”

Source: *Teaching with Technology* (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)

7. **What's on your reading list?** Ask participants to make a picture of some of the books they have recently read or are currently reading or use [GoodReads](#) to create and share a list of books. By sharing the books you are reading you tell something about yourself.
8. **Would you rather?** Ask participants some 'Would you rather' questions and let them answer them. After this, participants can make up their own would you rather questions. Come up with a list of "Would you Rather..." questions or use some of these:
 - Would you rather always win pie-eating contests or always win wheelbarrow races?
 - Would you rather be a deep sea diver or an astronaut?
 - Would you rather be able to hear any conversation or take back anything you say?
 - Would you rather be invisible or be able to read minds?
 - Would you rather be the most popular or the smartest person you know?
 - Would you rather give up your mobile device or your pet?
 - Would you rather never use the internet again or never watch TV again?
 - Would you rather not be able to use your phone or your e-mail?

Online Team Building Activity

From Northwestern's [The Importance of Icebreakers in Online Classes](#) (Distance Learning)

Human Scavenger Hunt. Here are the instructions for the activity.

1. Tell students to create an initial introductory discussion post in which they tell you and their classmates a bit about themselves (e.g., what they hope to learn in this course and how it might help their career goals, etc.)
2. Tell students to review their classmates' introductory discussion posts
3. Tell students to complete the [Human Scavenger Hunt Worksheet google doc](#)
4. Tell students to post the link to the completed [Human Scavenger Hunt Worksheet google doc](#) on the discussion board, along with a few thoughts about how they liked the activity and what they learned about their classmates through it.

Additional Resources

- [Ice Breaker Activities](#) (PDF) from the *University of Wisconsin*
- [Ice Breakers](#) (PDF) from *ION - Illinois Online Network*
- [Icebreaker Activities](#) from *Lansing Community College*
- [Icebreakers for the College Classroom](#) from *Faculty Focus*

