 Why Use Icebreakers?

**Centre for Teaching Innovation**

Icebreakers are activities designed to help people get to know one another. They can also be designed to allow students to become acquainted with course content and expectations.

Icebreakers have several benefits in the classroom. They can:

* Help to create a relaxed environment where students share ideas and participate more fully in the class.
* Encourage students to share ownership for the learning environment of the class.
* Build rapport among students and foster a productive learning environment.
* Prepare students for [collaborative group work](https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/engaging-students/collaborative-learning).

Considerations for Using Icebreakers

* What do you want to achieve with an icebreaker? Do you want to set the tone for the learning community or lead into course content in engaging ways?
* Think of your population in choosing or designing an activity. This includes group size, demographics, levels of knowledge, extent to which they know each other, reasons for being in your class, and more. For example, larger classes might need a simple activity and new classes may require a low-risk activity.
* Think through the activity ahead of time and adapt it accordingly. Will the space you have suffice? Do you have all needed supplies? Would the activity lead to issues of confidentiality? Does the activity accommodate varying abilities?
* Icebreakers do not always go exactly as planned. Flexibility and willingness to learn are part of building a positive and open learning community.

Getting Started with Icebreakers

* Introduce the activity to the group and explain your justification for using it.
* Establish a symbol for when the activity is over, such as ringing a bell, clapping, or turning off the lights.
* Help students find a partner. Do not assume that everyone will match up easily as some students are shyer than others, some may be resistant, or there may simply be an odd number in the class. It is often easier to count off students.
* Announce when the activity is halfway finished. That way if only one student talked, the other will have a chance to participate as well.
* Debrief by asking a few pairs to share with the group what they learned about their partner, or one thing they discovered that they have in common with each other.

References

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