

Ice Breakers

(from: TEDI, 2001)

If people are relaxed, trusting, informal, respecting of others, warm and collaborative, then this will support the learning process.

Establishing the sort of environment which supports learning does not happen automatically or easily. It takes work and it starts at the beginning of a course. The first meeting is the most important. It is where the tutor and students get to know one another, form first impressions and decide whether and how to make a commitment to fully participate in the rest of the semester. One of the main objectives of the first session is to begin the process of getting acquainted so that levels of anxiety can be reduced. It is the first step in establishing a positive learning environment.

Participants in a learning situation must feel secure and relatively free from anxiety, otherwise they will not be in a position to learn.

In the first session it is important to break the ice and allow the students to get acquainted. This is important even if everyone knows each other or if the students have been together in past semesters. Unless they are close friends, rarely do students know exactly what each one does, or their interests or hobbies. Icebreakers are a way to get the students introduced to each other and to the process of creating a positive climate for learning.

It is important to know a range of icebreakers so that the appropriate one can be selected for the group. There are lots of examples around. A small selection has been included in this handbook.

It is the role of the tutor to select the icebreaker carefully and not push the students to do anything that may cause them any embarrassment or create anxiety or mistrust.

Remember the purpose for using ice breakers. It is not to fill in time or because teaching guides tell you to use them. It is to create a positive atmosphere for learning.

Break the Ice – Some Ideas

(from Honolulu Community College, *Break the ice*)

Introduce Myself. Participants introduce themselves and tell why they are there. Variations: Participants tell where they first heard about the class, how they became interested in the subject, their occupations, home town, favourite television programme, or the best book they have read in the last year.

Introduce Another. Divide the class into pairs. Each person talks about him/herself to the other, 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 the other person 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 themselves 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/she finds something that no one else has done.

Find Someone. Each person writes on a blank index card one to three statements, such as favourite colour, interest, hobby, or vacations. Pass out cards so everyone gets someone else's card. Have that person find the person with their card and introduce themselves.

Famous Person. People write a famous name on a piece of paper and pin it on someone else's back. Person tries to guess what name is pinned on his/her by asking others around the room yes or no questions. Variation: Use famous place instead of famous person.

My Name. People introduce themselves and tell what they know about why they have their name (their mother wanted to name me after her great aunt Helen who once climbed Pike's Peak in high heels, etc.). It could be the first, middle or nickname.

How Do You Feel? Ask the students to write down words or phrases that describe their feelings on the first day of class. List the responses on the blackboard. Then ask them to write down what they think you as the teacher are feeling this first day of class. List them on the blackboard in a second column and note the parallels. Briefly comment on your feelings and then discuss the joint student/teacher responsibilities for learning in the course.