

Community–Building Icebreakers

Icebreakers (sometimes called discussion starters, impact activities, or warmups) are an excellent way to build a classroom community. Among other benefits, they demonstrate that the instructor is interested in hearing ideas from students, and they begin to create student-to-student and faculty-to-student relationships. Use the three Rs when selecting an icebreaker:

- **Relevance** (it should be tied to your goals)
- **Relaxation** (students should feel comfortable participating)
- **Review** (students should articulate the learning, and you should tie it to the goals)

Here are four possible icebreakers to try:

“What I Want to Learn”

Write the following sentences on the board (or create some of your own):

- I want to learn...
- Something that would help me learn is...
- Something I would like the instructor to do is...
- Something I plan to do to learn is...

Give students a few minutes to write responses to the questions. Then ask students to introduce themselves and share an answer to one of the statements. Ask other students to raise their hands if the statement also applies to their learning. Collect the responses and let students know you will use the information to inform future class sessions.

“Quiz Show”

Write a fun quiz (pop culture items, well-known facts, etc.) about your topic area. Ask students to work individually for a few minutes to answer the questions. Then put students into small groups to finish the quiz and agree on the correct answers. Go through the quiz with the students, hearing their answers, giving correct answers, and connecting their current knowledge to topics you will cover this term. Discuss the difference between completing the quiz individually and with a team. Ask questions such as “What was the benefit of working in a group?” and “How can we use groups in class?”

“Collaborative Classroom Norms”

Assign students to teams of three or four. Ask them to introduce themselves to one another and then identify three ground rules for the class. Explain that “ground rules” are about behaviors and how we treat one another in the classroom. Have each group share their items. Write the items on the board and put checkmarks by items for each group who

repeats the same idea. Then have a classroom vote on which rules should be the official ground rules. Have a student write the agreed-upon rules on the board. Type them up and post them for students' reference.

“Problem Posting”

On the first day of class, ask your students to think about what problems they would like to solve in the course or what burning course-related question they would like to have answered (see our Problem-Posting Questions planning guide). Have them write responses for you to collect. Organize students into pairs and ask them to identify commonalities in their responses. Invite the pairs to share their commonalities with the class. Then, explain to students how the course will address the problems and questions they identified.