

TEAM BUILDERS & ICE BREAKERS

The following are instructions for team building activities you may consider using at the start of meetings or as energizers with students.

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

SUGGESTED ICE BREAKERS FOR WEEKS 1-3

1. **A Truth and a Lie (30–45 minutes)**

Have each member introduce themselves by stating their name plus one truth about themselves and one lie. After each person makes their statements, allow for a quick open conversation where everyone questions each other on their two statements. The idea is to convince the other members that your lie is actually a truth, while guessing the truths or lies of the others.

After the questioning period, vote as a group on each member's statements. Points are awarded for each lie guessed right or for stumping other members on your own lie. This exercise helps to get to know your coworkers better and encourages group interaction and communication.

Optional: Increase the difficulty by having two truths and one lie, or two lies and one truth. Remove the open conversation segment if time is constrained.

2. **Categories (15–30 minutes)**

Divide the group into separate teams of about five people. Try to make sure they are not with people they already know well. Instruct each team to talk amongst themselves and find out at least six things they have in common with each other. You may consider not allowing teams to use simple things like physical height, hair color, clothing worn, etc. Limiting the similarities to non-physical things helps people learn more about each other and engage in active, more meaningful conversation. The game is played as a race and each team is competing come with their six similarities before the other. The game ends once each team has come up the six things they have in common.

You can repeat this activity with different people in the groups or make different group sizes.

3. **"Have you ever?" (15–30 minutes)**

This game follows similar principles as musical chairs. The person in the middle who is it begins with the question: "Have you ever: ____?" The blank is to be filled in with something that holds true for the person who is it. Examples are: "traveled abroad"; "been to rock concert"; "seen the ocean". Everyone who the statement holds true for, must exchange places with another person. The person who is it must move to a spot as well. One person will not be able to find a spot. He or She is then it. Repeat game as much as desired. This is a good way to introduce people to each other in a way that shows their experiences in the past.

4. **Data Processing (15–20 minutes)**

Divide the group into smaller groups. Then have each group process each of the following data by having them either line up according to the order or to make a list of the people in the correct order. You can play as many rounds as you like. Each means by which the data is processed is one round. You can also come up with your own data.

Examples:

Alphabetical by best friend's first name

Alphabetical according to favorite food

Length of hair

Shoe size

Birthdays

Numbers in last name

Length of thumb

This can be a good game to introduce everyone to interesting things about all participating.

GENERAL ICE BREAKERS

5. **Poker Tower (15–30 minutes)**

Distribute a pack of poker cards and a pair of scissors to each group of two to five members. Instruct them to build the tallest poker tower using *only* the scissors and cards given to them. This will stimulate creativity and team bonding, as the team figures out how to build the tower with the limited material available.

6. **Legoman (30–45 minutes)**

This problem solving activity requires little more than a couple of sets of children's building blocks. The instructor will build a small sculpture with some of the building blocks and hide it from the group. The participants should then be divided into small teams of three to six. Each team should be given enough building material so that they can duplicate the structure the instructor has created (specific size and color included). The instructor should then place their sculpture in an area that is an equal distance from all the groups. One member from each team can come up at any point of time to look at the sculpture for as long as they want and try to memorize it before returning to their team.

No paper, pen, or cameras are allowed to be brought to the sculpture. After they return to their teams, they instruct their teams about how to build an exact replica of the instructor's sculpture. Meanwhile, another member from each team can come up for another sneak peek before returning to their team and trying to recreate the sculpture. The game should be continued in this pattern until one of the team's successfully duplicates the original sculpture.

This game will teach participants how to strategize, communicate effectively and problem solve in a group.

7. **The Mine Field (15–30 minutes)**

The idea behind this exercise is to improve team members' trust, their relationship, and to communicate in a more effective way. You will need an open space such as an empty room or hallway in which you will distribute 'mines' that are placed haphazardly around the area. The mines can be cones, balls, bottles etc. Team members are paired into teams of two. One team member will be blindfolded and the other can see and talk, but is not allowed to enter the field or touch their partner. The challenge is for the blind-folded person to walk from one side of the field to the other, avoiding the mines by listening to the verbal instructions of their partners.

Optional: Have more than one pair walking through the mine simultaneously, so the difficulty of focusing and listening to the right instructions increases.

8. **Win, lose or draw (15–30 minutes)**

This is another classical team game, which can be very easily executed. You need paper, pen, and a flipchart/whiteboard. Think of items that fit into certain categories. These can be generic or specific to the team. For example, generic categories include food items, places of interest, idioms. Team-specific categories include computer technologies for computer scientists, business ideas for start-ups, school and students or teachers.

Split the group into two teams. Each team takes turns to play. The team that is playing will nominate an artist, who will draw a "list" of items to draw. The only hint to his teammates will be the category name. They then have one to three minutes to draw the items on that list, without writing nor speaking. Switch around to another team after the time limit. Swap artists with each round, and repeat for four to five rounds. Collate the final results to find the winning team.

9. **Zoom! (30 minutes)**

This is an activity designed for smaller teams. It requires the wordless, picture book entitled, "Zoom" by Istvan Banyai. This book features 30 sequential pictures that work together to form a narrative. The book should be fairly easy to find at a local library. Hand out a copy of a picture to each participant, making sure a continuous sequence is being used. Explain to the participants that they can only look at their own pictures and must keep their picture hidden from other participants. Time should be given for the participants to study their pictures because each picture will contain important information that will help the participants solve the problem of putting them into order. The ultimate goal is for the group to place the pictures in sequential order without looking at one another's pictures. The participants can talk to each other and discuss what is featured in their picture. This activity brings coworkers together and gets them communicating with the common goal of solving a problem, but it also allows for leaders to emerge and take control of the task.

Optional: Draw up your own pictures to accommodate the team size and difficulty level.

TAKING A BREAK

1. Helium Stick (15 minutes)

This is a quick game that serves well as an ice-breaker or a short break. A long thin stick is required. Be sure to call the “stick” a “Helium Stick” when you introduce the exercise.

Place your group in two lines facing each other. Have each person hold the index finger of their right hand chest high. Place the helium stick on top of the outstretched fingers. The challenge is to lower the stick to the ground while keeping everyone’s fingers touching the stick. If anyone’s finger loses contact with the helium stick, you must start again. At first the stick will seem to rise (hence the name Helium Stick). In fact, it is simply the upwards pressure of everyone’s fingers causing the stick to go up instead of down. Once everyone relaxes they can easily lower the stick to the ground. This usually takes ten minutes of laughter and a leader to complete.

Optional: Swap the helium stick for a helium balloon for a smaller team.

2. Talking in Circles (30 minutes)

This is a highly challenging game only recommended for teams who love challenges. Place everyone in a circle around a long piece of string that is tied at its ends to form a circle. Have everyone grasp the string with both hands and hold the string waist high. Without letting go, the team will have to form shapes with the string; a square, a triangle, a figure eight, a rectangle, etc. Repeat the game but with everyone’s eyes shut! This will require everyone to communicate clearly and listen well. Make the shapes progressively harder and periodically have them stop and open their eyes to see their progress.

3. Human Knot (15–30 minutes)

This brain teaser is funny and really works on teambuilding, problem solving and communication. No materials are needed. Recommended group size includes a wide range of 8–20 people. Instruct the participants to stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Tell everyone to put their right hand in the air and grab the hand of someone standing across the circle from them. Now tell everyone to put their left hand in the air and grab the hand of a different person. Someone needs to check that everyone is holding the hands of two different people and that no one is holding the hand of someone who’s standing directly next to them. The objective of the game is to untangle everyone without letting go of their hands. If the chain is broken, participants will have to start over.

Note: Sometimes more than one circle will form. This game requires casual clothing, and is not recommended for team members with physical limitations. This game will rely heavily on teamwork and communication.

4. Salt and Pepper (15 minutes)

This activity is fun, excellent for energizing your team, and also great as a quick ice-breaker exercise. It is simple to set up and suitable for a wide team size of 10–40 people (ideally even numbered). As a facilitator, think of pairs of things such as, salt and pepper, yin and yang, shadow and light, peanut butter and jelly, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, male and female, and so forth. Write each item on a piece of paper (i.e. salt on one piece and pepper on another), and tape one paper on the back of each person, making sure they can’t see it. When the game starts, everyone must walk around asking yes or no questions in order to find out what word they have taped to their backs. Once they figure that out, they need to find their other pair. Learning how to ask the right questions is the key.

Optional: The two will then sit down and learn three to five interesting facts about one another.

5. **Celebrate Today (10 minutes)**

This exercise is a quick and easy energizer. Tell participants: You've heard the statement, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow a mystery, today is a gift. That's why it's called the present. So, let's celebrate today."

Almost every day of the year has something to celebrate, from National Trivia Day on January 4, to Farm Animals Awareness Week on Sept 17.

You have three minutes to come up with a special day for today. Divide participants into groups, and give them about three minutes to come up with a special day, based on the season, day of the week, or anything else. Each group reads out the name of the day, and briefly explains how they came up with the name.

SKILL BUILDING

1. **Re-Focusing—Brain Break!**

In this brainstorming exercise, the group is presented with an object (try to keep it relevant to the lessons) and the group is challenged to write down alternate uses for the object. Have students think outside of the box!

2. **Skills to Go (10 minutes)**

This activity helps you build team identity and spirit by helping members identify and share their skills. Ask participants to write their names on the card. Below that, they write two specialties or skills they bring to the team. e.g. organizational skills, creative ideas, good writing skills. Participants hold their cards in front of them and walk around the room. As they circulate, they engage each other in conversation about their skills. Following the activity ask students "What did you learn from each other?" What new strengths did you discover in your team mates? How can this help you work together more productively?

3. **Five Fast Ways to Accomplish the Impossible (5–10 minutes)**

An energizer to get people moving around and having fun. Before the training, think of some fun concepts that your group can relate to. Write one concept on each flip chart, using a different colour for each: red, green, blue, brown or black. Here are some concepts to use or adapt to your group. Think of five fast ways to:

- Cook a low-calorie holiday meal
- Create a company video for YouTube
- Distract a crying child in a shopping mall
- Learn how to speak survival Japanese
- Persuade a stranger to donate money to your favourite charity
- Have fun in your own city/town with less than \$20

Put one of the markers on each table. Table groups go to the flip chart that has a title of the same colour, and have to think of five fast ways to accomplish what is written.

4. **How to Lose Friends and Alienate People (15 minutes)**

This simple energizer combats the afternoon blahs and gets everyone laughing. You will need a small soft ball to toss. There is a very famous book called "How to Win Friends and Influence People" (by Dale Carnegie). Let's take a few minutes to think of the opposite. What do people do that make them lose friends and alienate people? Have everyone stand in a circle or in several small circles. A group leader tosses the ball, and the person receiving it has to come up with one way to lose friends and alienate people. That person tosses the ball to someone else, who comes up with another way to lose friends and alienate people. Continue as time permits.