

Ice Breakers

As the name suggests, these sessions are designed to "break the ice" at an event or meeting. The technique is often used when people who do not usually work together, or may not know each other at all, meet for a specific, common purpose. Ice breakers are an excellent tool when well designed and facilitated (think SIMPLE) and when there is "ice" to be broken. Otherwise, they can be perceived as a waste of time.

Consider using an ice breaker when:

- Participants come from different backgrounds
- People need to bond quickly to work towards a common goal
- Your team is newly formed
- People from a variety of areas and/or levels are participating
- The topics you are discussing are new or unfamiliar to many people involved
- As facilitator, you need to get to know participants and have them know you better

BEST PRACTICES:

- ✓ Avoid asking people to take a significant social risk
- ✓ Consider your participants and their personalities
- ✓ Consider if the ice breaker will help people feel comfortable, establish a level playing field, set a collaborative tone, etc.



Examples:

A Characteristic: in addition to the usual introduction elements, ask participants to assign themselves a descriptive adjective that begins with the same letter of their first name, e.g. Creative Carl, Enthusiastic Emily, Tactful Tracy.

The Little-Known Fact: in addition to the usual introduction elements, ask participants to share one little known fact about themselves. This "little known fact" becomes a humanizing element that can help break down differences such as grade/status in future interaction.

True or False: ask your participants to introduce themselves and make three or four statements about themselves, one of which is false. Now get the rest of the group to vote on which fact is false. As well as getting to know each other as individuals, this exercise helps to start interaction within the group.

Interviews: ask participants to get into twos. Each person then interviews his or her partner for a set time while paired up. When the group reconvenes, each person introduces their interviewee to the rest of the group.

The Human Web: this focuses on how people in the group inter-relate and depend on each other. The facilitator begins with a ball of yarn. Keeping one end, pass the ball to one of the participants to introduce him- or her-self and their role in the organization. Once this person has made their introduction, ask him or her to pass the ball of yarn on to another person in the group. The person handing over the ball must describe how he/she relates (or expects to relate) to the other person. The process continues until everyone is introduced.

Source and further reading: [MindTools Article](#)