First Day of Class: 32 Icebreaker Activities

Excerpted from CLEAR Course Design Institute: TREE Engaged Learning Module

1. "Sharing Course Trepidations" In pairs or small groups, have students share their trepidations about the course. This may be particularly helpful in a course associated with high anxiety, such as math or writing. Follow this up by either having students introduce each other and/or by asking the groups to share what they consider to be their most significant concerns or fears regarding the course. As the groups share, the instructor can validate and address their concerns as appropriate.
2. "Simple Self-Introductions" In a class where speeches or oral presentations are expected, have students take turns introducing themselves by giving their name, major, and perhaps a reason for taking the class (aside from fulfilling a requirement).
3. "Draw a Picture of a Significant Event" Have students draw a picture of a significant event that has occurred over the past six months and then have them share it with a partner. Following this activity have the students introduce each other and briefly share the significance of their partner's picture.
4. "Draw a picture of why taking class" Have students draw a picture, symbol or cartoon illustrating why they are taking the class. Students can share these in small groups or in pairs. Follow up by having students introduce each other and briefly share about their partner's picture.
5. "Common Sense Inventory" Assemble five to 15 common sense statements directly related to the course material, some (or all) of which run counter to popular belief or prejudice. For example: "Suicide is more likely among women than men." Individually, have students mark each statement as true or false and then share their answers in small groups. Allow students to debate their differences. Instruct the groups to reach consensus and have a presenter from each group share their response to at least one question. Either provide the correct answers or take the cliffhanger approach and let the class wait for the correct answers to unfold throughout the semester. (Nilson 1998) If you take the cliffhanger approach, you might consider readministering this inventory at the end of the semester as a method of reviewing and/or reflecting on the course.
6. "The Circles of (student's name)" Have students draw a large circle on a sheet of paper and other smaller circles radiating from it. Students write their name in the central circle and names of groups with which they identify (e.g., gender, age group, ethnic, social, political, ideological, athletic, etc.) in the satellite circles. Then ask students to move around the room to find three classmates who are most and/or least similar to themselves. This activity helps students appreciate the diversity in the class. (Nilson, 1998)
7. "Syllabus Icebreaker" Have students get into groups of three to five and introduce themselves. Following introductions, have each group generate a list of five to eight questions they have about the class. The instructor then hands out the syllabus and the groups go over it together to answer their questions. Upon completion of the

small group activity, the class then reconvenes and the groups ask any questions that were not addressed in the syllabus.

8. "Getting To Know Each Other Through Writing" In a writing class, you might have students spend 20 minutes getting to know each other through writing, without speaking.

9. "The M & M Breaker" When students enter the classroom, they take an M & M. When they introduce themselves, what they share is dependent on the color of their M & M. For example, a red one might mean they share what they hope to get out of the course. On the lighter side, a red one might mean they share a recent accomplishment or success.

10. "Something you want to learn" Have students complete a form with spaces for "something you already know about the subject," "something you want to learn," and "something that could happen in this class that would make it possible to learn what you need to learn." Have each student introduce her/himself and share something from the form. Collect their forms, and when possible, address their needs.

11. "Who's In Our Group?" or "People Search" Have students take approximately 20 minutes to mingle around the room, meeting briefly with as many students as possible. Give the students a list of statements and as they mingle have them identify a person to pair with a statement. Write his/her name next to it. They can use only one person per statement. Ask each student to briefly share a little about his or her experience with the statement selected. The statements can be designed to reflect the course content, such as "Find someone who has taken a related course" or "Find someone who knows the order of the planets." The statements can be statements unrelated to the course, such as "Find someone who is wearing shoes without laces" or "Find someone who likes spaghetti with clam sauce." You can grant a prize, such as candy, to the student(s) who gets the most statements completed in the allotted time period.

12. "Identification" Have students get into pairs or groups of four. Tell them to (individually) look in their purse/wallet/briefcase to find something that is significant to them. Each participant shares with his or her group members or partner why the item is significant. The exercise continues until all partners or group members have shared. The class then resumes and class members are asked to introduce their partner or one person from their group, and share something significant about them.

13. "Dinner Plans" Have each person complete the following sentence: "If I could have dinner with any person, living or dead, it would be_____ because_____." (From: http://www.resultsthroughtraining.com)

14. "I'm Unique" Ask each person to share one thing that makes him or her unique. This can be incorporated into a classroom exercise for learning names - connecting the uniqueness to the name. (From: www.resultsthroughtraining.com)

15. "The Magic Wand" You have just found a magic wand that allows you to make any three changes you want. How would you change yourself, your job, or any other part of your life? Have students discuss why it is important to make the change. (From: http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/icebreak.html)

16. "Marooned" Break class into groups of 4-7 and tell them "You are marooned on an island. What five (you can use a different number, such as seven, depending upon the size of each team) items would you have brought with you if you knew there was a chance that you might be stranded?" Note: they are allowed five items per team, not per person. Have each group report their five items and briefly share why they selected those items. This activity helps them to learn about another person's values and problem- solving styles and promotes teamwork. (From: http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/icebreak.html)
17. "Finish the Sentence" Go around the room and have each person introduce him/herself and complete the following statement: "I am in this class because . . ." (From: http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/icebreak.html)
18. "Familiar & Unique" Break the class into groups of four (ideally by counting off). Each small group must come up with four things they have in common (all working full-time, all single parents, etc.). Then they are asked to share something unique about themselves individually. The group shares their familiar and unique features with the rest of the class. A master list can be made on the board for the class to look at and discuss if appropriate. (From: Victoria Meyers at Grand Rapids Community College in Michigan)
19. "Learning from Experience" Have participants introduce themselves and explain one thing they have learned the hard way about the subject you are covering. Post their learnings on a flip chart and refer to them as appropriate throughout the class/semester.
20. "Questions" Have each student write a question they want answered about the class on a Post-it note. Have them introduce themselves and their question. Post all questions on a wall chart. During, at the end of the first class, or at the onset of the next class session, address any questions that were not addressed during the first class.
21. "Collective Knowledge" Working in teams, have students introduce themselves and then, as a group, identify three ground rules for the class. Have each group report out (sharing only what they have that is different from what the previous groups reported). As the groups report, reach consensus as a large group regarding the adoption of the various ground rules. If you have a computer/projector in your classroom, you might type and edit these as they are reported. Bring a copy for each student to the next class session. Consider reviewing and/or modifying as the need arises. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)
22. "Charades" Have the class work in teams of four to five. Instruct the teams to identify one type of person they all find difficult. Then have the team act out that type of person while the rest of the class tries to guess what they are acting. This can be a fun activity and can lead to a short discussion about needing to keep a sense of humor when dealing with difficult people. This might be a good lead-in activity to #21 above. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)
23. "Who Can Develop?" Have participants identify someone who has contributed to their growth and development as a student. As they introduce themselves, have them explain their relationship to the person that contributed to their development.

(From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at
http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

24. "Developing Yourself" Have each person introduce him/herself and share one action they have recently taken to develop themselves (other than signing up for this class). This can be done as a large group or in small teams. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at
http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

25. "First Job" Have participants introduce themselves, sharing their name and something they learned on their first paying job. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

26. "Brain Teaser" Use a quiz as an icebreaker. Ask questions that we should all know but may not. Ask members to answer individually, and then give them a few minutes to work in small groups to finish answering the questions. The groups should be able to answer more questions than any one individual. This is a good demonstration of synergy and can lead into a discussion of the concept. Sample questions: What are the names of the planets, starting from the one closest to the sun? What is the most populous state in the U.S.? What eight states begin with the letter "M"? (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

27. "Good or New" Ask each person to share something good or new they have experienced in the last 24 hours. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

28. "My Slogan" Explain that many companies have slogans or "mottos" which reflect their values. For example, Ford Motor Company uses the slogan, "Quality is Job One." Ask each student to write (or borrow) a slogan to describe him or herself and share that with the class. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

29. "The Best Team" Have each person share a description of the best team they have ever been on and why it was the best. Post characteristics on a flip chart. Debrief this exercise by having the class identify ways to maximize the "best team" characteristics. This icebreaker would be particularly appropriate in a class where teamwork is expected. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

30. "Three Truths and a Lie" Give each individual a 3x5 card and instruct them to write four statements about themselves (one statement should be false, while three should be true). Explain that the goal is to fool people about which one is false. Allow five minutes to write statements; then have each person read the four statements and have the group guess the lie. Award a prize to the individual who makes the most correct guesses. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

31. "Guess Who?" At the onset of the class session, have each participant complete and return a 3x5 card with two to three statements about him or herself. For example: Favorite type of food, best all-time TV show, last movie you saw, last book you read, dream vacation, etc. During the first (or following) session, read the clues and have the rest of the class guess which person is being described. (From: Results Through

Training, RTTWorks at
http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

32. "Something New" On the second day of class, ask each person to share one thing they learned about someone in the class during the previous class session. Have the rest of the group try to guess who is being described. (From: Results Through Training, RTTWorks at
http://www.rttworks.com/images/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML)

To aid in learning students' names, consider using a "naming cycle" where students introduce their partner and recall the names of the students previously introduced. This is an excellent, but time-consuming way to learn everyone's name. At the conclusion, introduce yourself after you have recalled the names of all of the students. Remember...

- At the conclusion of an icebreaker activity, introduce yourself and how you wish to be addressed. Briefly, share your background and personal philosophy on learning and teaching. Avoid saying things like "This is the first time I have taught the course," or "I was only asked to teach this course a week ago." While true, these statements make it difficult to create a positive environment.
- Debrief at the end of icebreaker activities (or any activities) by asking your students what the value of an icebreaker activity is and sharing your rationale for the activity. This is also an opportunity to remind them that their fellow students are valuable resources.

References

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First Class Ice Breakers Using Mobile Devices

Cell Sharing

- Ask participants to locate a photo, song, or video from their mobile device that best represents them.
- Each person then shares his or her media and the reason it was selected.

- For photo or video sharing: Pass the device around so all students can view the image or use a webcam to project the image onto a larger computer screen or whiteboard.
- For sharing of music: Attach portable speakers to assist with the sharing of songs so others can hear them.

Student Reflections about Cell Sharing

Several students stated that this was their favorite activity of the class.

I thought it was awesome that you wanted everyone to show the class a picture or type of music that had meaning to us. By doing this we got to see and learn a little bit more of our peers.

We did a photo/audio thing which was my favorite activity because we got to learn a little bit of everyone's lives

Question Selector

- Participants use a random number picker to select a number from one to 145.
  - Online
    - http://andrew.hedges.name/experiments/random/
    - http://www.mathgoodies.com/calculators/random_no_custom.html
- They then answer the question that corresponds with their number on http://www.teampedia.net/wiki/index.php?title=Question_Cup
- Answers are posted on a Sticky Note Board such as Wallwisher or Wifitti.
- The answers can be projected on a whiteboard (if done face-to-face) or students can view the answers via their own computers (face-to-face or virtually).

Texting Interviews

- Randomly pair students (can be either face-to-face or virtually).
- Ask them to develop questions that they would ask to help them get to know someone better.
- The pairs text their questions and answers back and forth.
- Interviewers summarize what they found out about their partners and posts their partners' names and this information on a Sticky Note Board such as Wallwisher.