

# Icebreakers

Icebreakers are fun, introductory activities that help set the tone for a training and engage participants from the get-go. Icebreakers can also introduce participants to the topic and ensure everyone's on the same page about the goals of the training.

## Why do we need icebreakers?

Trainings can be intimidating for those with particular threat models. Icebreakers help participants relax and feel safe in their environment. Unfortunately, icebreakers and activities are often the first things to go when a trainer is strapped for time. Don't make this mistake! Icebreakers introduce participants to others in the room and build trust among the group so they feel comfortable participating later in the training. When learners are relaxed, they learn better.

When prepping for an icebreaker, be mindful of:

- Space
- Mobility
- Language barriers
- Cultural differences

*For more in-depth information about things to consider with interactive exercises, check out [LevelUp](#).*

Whether you choose to use one of our suggested icebreakers or create your own, remember to use icebreakers that are low-pressure and make participants feel successful. There shouldn't be a right or wrong way to answer or participate. LevelUp has an great [list of icebreakers](#) you can reference. To help kick off your training, here's are some of our favorites below:

## 1. Two Truths and a Lie

The object of this game is for participants to get to know each other by guessing whether or not "facts" about other participants are "truths" or "lies."

### Instructions

*Have participants pair up with someone they don't know OR have everyone face each other in a circle.*

- Ask participants to say two true things about themselves and one false thing.
- Give them a few minutes to think about it.
- Once they are ready, everyone takes turns saying two true things and one lie about themselves.

Those who are not speaking must guess which are the truths and which one is the lie.

*Trainer's Note:*

The group version of this works best with a smaller number of participants (10 participants maximum). If you have a mixed group of participants who are not versed in one language, you could have them pair up with a fellow participant who speaks the same language, but you don't want them to pair up with someone they already

know. This activity also works for participants who have problems with mobility as this won't require them to move.

## 2. My Name Is

The object of this game is for participants to get to know each other's names through repetition.

### Instructions

*Have participants sit in a circle.*

- The first person states their name, or pseudonym, and a type of food that starts with the first letter of their name. ("I'm Akiko and I choose Apricots!")
- Moving clockwise, the person sitting the left of the first person has to repeat what the first person said (their name and the food that starts with the first letter of their name) and then state their own name and a type of food that starts with the first letter of their name.
- Repeat the steps above until the game reaches the first person again, who now has to repeat everyone's name in the circle and their corresponding food. If people stumble, encourage the rest of the group to help!

*Trainer's Note:*

This icebreaker is good for participants who don't know each other and have problems with mobility. Trainers who want to get to know participants' names may also find this icebreaker helpful. This is best for medium-sized groups. If the group is too small, the icebreaker won't be challenging, but if it's too large, it may take up too much time.

## 3. Line-up According To...

The object of this game is to have participants arrange themselves in the provided space according to certain facts about themselves.

### Instructions

- Have everyone stand in a line or in a "U"-shape, so they can see each other (it can be against a wall if you choose).
- Put some thought into what you're asking participants to reveal about themselves.
  - Do not ask participants to reveal facts about themselves that they would consider too personal, private, or otherwise more than they would choose to reveal.
  - Examples of basic facts you can use: shirt color, shoe size, how long it took them to arrive at the training, how many pets they've lived with, or participant heights.
- Participants can speak with each other as they go about the exercise. Keep in mind that what you might consider an acceptably public fact is not always necessarily the same for an at-risk participant, particularly if they do not know and trust everyone in the room.

*Trainer's Note:*

This may not be appropriate if you have participants who have problems with mobility. Also make sure that you have enough space for this activity.

## 4. Animal Sounds

The object of this game is for participants to find the person in the room with the same animal as them by making the sound of their assigned animal and finding the other person in the room making the same sound.

### Instructions

*Before the training, write or type the names of different animals (preferably one that makes a distinct sound!) on a piece of paper. Be sure to write each animal down twice. Cut the paper into pieces so that only a single animal appears on each piece. Fold the pieces in half.*

- Distribute one piece of paper to each participant. They can look to see what animal they received, but should keep it a secret from the rest of the group.
- When the trainer says go, participants should walk around the room and make the sound of their assigned animal until they find the other person in the room making the same animal sound.
- Once they find their partner, participants should introduce themselves and tell each other what their favorite animal is.
- Repeat this icebreaker several times so participants have a chance to learn the names of fellow learners.

List of possible animals:

Cat

Horse

Duck

Snake

Elephant

Sheep

Dog

Monkey

*Trainer's notes:*

This icebreaker is best for large groups (20+) and requires an even number of people, so trainers or helpers should be prepared to participate. You can make this icebreaker more challenging by requiring people to close their eyes while trying to find their partner. However, this may not be appropriate if you have participants who have problems with mobility. Also make sure that you have enough space for this activity.

## 5. The Wind Blows

The object of this game is to get people who have things in common to identify each other by moving to each others' seats.

### Instructions

*This needs a big space and chairs in a circle. There should be one chair per participant, but no chair for the starter. (Most of the time, the starter is you, the trainer!)*

- You, as the starter, will stand in the middle of the circle and say: “The wind blows for people who...”
  - Think about something that you like or something that is true of you and end the sentence with this. For example, if you like strawberry ice cream, you could say “The wind blows for people who...like strawberry ice cream!”
- Everyone who likes the same thing (including yourself) or shares the same quality will have to stand and transfer seats.
- By the end of one round, one person will be left standing. That person will be the one to start the next round by saying “The wind blows for people who...”.

*Trainer’s Note:*

This may not be appropriate if you have participants who have problems with mobility. Also make sure that you have enough space for this activity. Ensure that your training space doesn’t have hard floors that can cause chairs or participants to slip, as this may cause some participants to fall.

## **6. The Question Web**

The object of this game is for participants to ask each other questions while keeping track of a physical object that, over time, creates a web of connection between the individuals in the group.

### **Instructions**

*You will need a ball of yarn for this exercise. Have everyone standing (or sitting) around in a circle.*

- The starter will direct a question to specific person.
  - To do so, they must throw the ball of yarn to the person to whom the question is directed; but, the asker must keep holding the end of the yarn.
- Once the first person has asked the question and has thrown the ball of yarn to the person the question is for, the responder must answer the question while holding onto the yarn ball.
- Then, they must ask another person a question by throwing the yarn ball to that person, while holding onto their portion of the yarn.
- The steps above repeat until either a certain period of time has elapsed, or until everyone has had at least one turn to both answer and ask a question. At the end of this game, you will have a web of questions and answers!

*Trainer’s Note:*

This would work for participants who have mobility issues. In order to set an example of the questions to ask (particularly to avoid asking questions that would be considered too “prying,”) co-trainers or the trainer and a willing participant can ask the first two questions, to illustrate the type of questions to ask. Keep in mind too that this exercise might require basic literacy in a common language among participants.

## **Additional Resources**

- Visit [LevelUp](#) for more interactive activities.
- Check out [Aspiration Tech's Group Exercises](#).
- The [Wilderdom](#) offers a range of icebreakers, games, and activities.