

Icebreakers in the Classroom

There are many moments when we need to get to know new people or create a relaxed atmosphere. For example when a group of new volunteers are together for the first time, or when you teach a group of grown-ups who are a bit sleepy, or you want to energize the children in the class your teaching etc. etc.

To do so, you can use icebreakers: games and activities that don't last too long, but they keep everybody up and running!

1. The dolphin

Type of game	Group game, energizer
Description	Get attention from the group, make a group silent/quit
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

First you tell a little story about a fish that lives in the sea.

The story about the fish that lives in the sea:

Once upon when I was walking on the beach I heard a sound. SPLASH! I looked around at the sea to see what it was. But I saw nothing! And then I heard it again: SPLASH SPLASH. I turned around and I saw a big tale coming out of the water. It was a fish, a big fish that lived in the sea. He liked swimming and playing in the water. You now what fish this is? It is a dolphin. The dolphin likes to swim (movement 1) and he likes to jump (movement 2 and action 1). If you look very careful maybe you see the fish.

Look: now he is swimming (movement) and up he jumps (movement 2 and action 1) and jumping again (movement 2 and action 1) and jumping (movement 2 and action 1).

Movement 1: SWIMMING: Put your both hands together and move you hand in front of you as if there is a big fish swimming

Movement 2: JUMPING; move your hand up in a bow and down again, as if a fish jumps from the water

Action 2: CLAPPING. Every time you make the JUMPING movement the students clap their hands.

Next time you do this energizer, you don't have to tell the story, you only have to make the SWIMMING movement to get group quit and the JUMPING to get them clapping.

2. The horse

Type of game	Icebreaker, energizer
Description	Activate and get attention of a group
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Up to 150
Grade/age	Grade 5/6 or younger

Stand in a circle with the students.

- ☐ Ask the students: "Do you what a horse is?"
- ☐ Ask them: "Do you know what sound a horse makes?" (they probably would make a hihihhi sound)
- ☐ Ask them: "Do you know what sound a horse makes when he walks?"
- ☐ "No??? I will show you!"

Action, step 1

Stand in front of the group

- ❑ clap your hands 1x,
- ❑ slap your right upper leg once
- ❑ and then your left upper leg.
- ❑ Repeat this a few times, it will sound like a horse walking.
- ❑ Say to the group: "Do you know what sound a horse makes when he walks? Yes? Let's do it!"
- ❑ Do the action

Action, step 2

Now everybody knows how to make the sound, you have to move to.

- ❑ Ask the group: "Do you know how a horse moves?" "No? I can show you".
- ❑ First, step from your left to your right foot, jumping a little bit, when slapping you upper legs
- ❑ Make the HIIHHIHH horse sound now and then, while throwing your head in the back of your neck
- ❑ Repeat this a few times
- ❑ Say to the group: "Do you know how a horse moves?" "Yes? Let's do it"
- ❑ Do the action.

Action, step 3

Now everybody knows how to make the sound and how to move. It is time the horses run!

- ❑ Ask the group: "Do you know how a horses run?" "No? I can show you".
- ❑ Start stepping forward, jumping and walking like a horse does and making the sound by clapping and slapping your upper leg.
- ❑ Ask the group to follow you
- ❑ Walk around in a circle. Then say; "Horses, run!!!" and you start moving real fast, jumping, slapping your upper leg, making the hihihhi sound and run.

3. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 north, south, east, west

Type of game	Group game, icebreaker, energizer
Description	Activate a group
Necessary	Students
Number of people	As much as you want, we did it with 150 students!
Grade/age	Grade 5/6 or younger

You can use this when you want a big group to split up in smaller groups and you want them to go to different areas of your classroom or place. First make sure the groups are made.

Stand in a circle with the students.

First tell them a little story about travelling around the world. Seeing places, meeting people from everywhere. People who come from the south, east, north and west.

- ❑ Ask the students: "Do you where the north is? And the south? And the east? And the west?"
- ❑ Start walking on the spot and count from one to seven, use your fingers: one, two, three, four, five, six, seeeeeven!
- ❑ Jump to the front, say : NORTH
- ❑ Jump to the back, say: SOUTH
- ❑ Jump to the left, say: WEST
- ❑ Jump to the left, say: EAST
- ❑ Ask them: "Do you where the NORTH is?"
- ❑ Jump to the front
- ❑ Ask them: "Do you where the SOUTH is?"
- ❑ Jump to the back
- ❑ Ask them: "Do you where the WEST is?"
- ❑ Jump to the LEFT
- ❑ Ask them: "Do you where the EAST is?"
- ❑ Jump to the RIGHT

- ❑ Now start counting 1 to 7 and jumping north, south, east, west
- ❑ Ask them: 'DO YOU KNOW WHERE TO GO? YES? LET'S GO!!!'
- ❑ Start walking in circles counting 1 to 7 and jumping forward, backwards, left and right.
- ❑ Do this for a few times
- ❑ If everybody knows the routine, let each group walk and jump to their own area using this way of moving

4. Get to know each other game

Type of game	Group game, icebreaker
Description	Remembering names and pronunciation
Necessary	Students
Number of people	As much as you want, but 15 people is the limit.
Grade/age	Grade 5/6

With this game the first student says his/her name and add what he/she likes, the second student has to repeat the previous name and what the person's likes and then add his/hers and so on and so on.

To make it more fun - it can be done with absolute beginners as well - the students not only say their names but have to add a movement.

For example.:

Student 1:

My name is Tom and I like to read a book make movement as if he reads a book

Student 2:

His name is Tom and he likes to read a book (movement of reading).

And my name is Joe and I like to play football (kicks his foot).

Student 3:

His name is Tom and he likes to read a book (movement of reading).

His name is Joe and I like to play football (kicks his foot).

and I'm Sue. I like to eat (pretend she is eating)

etc. etc.

This is fun if the students movements are funny - you may even let them think of it before start the game. Finally the Teacher has to repeat all the names and movement preferably not in the seating order.

5. The mixer, the toaster, the palm tree, the tuk-tuk and the elephant....

Type of game	Group game, icebreaker
Description	Make a lot of fun, work together, get a nice interaction
Necessary	Students
Number of people	As much as you want.
Grade/age	Any age

With this game the students have to do an impression of a:

- Mixer
- Toaster
- Palm tree
- Tuk-tuk
- Elephant

They always have to do it with three students.

- Mixer** The people on the outside take each other's hand, forming a 'bowl'. The person in the middle turns around and around.
- Toaster** The people on the outside take each other's hand, forming a 'bowl'. The person in the middle jumps up and down.
- Palm tree.** All three people put their arms in the air and move to left and the right, waving like palm trees in the wind.
- Tuk-tuk** The people on the outside take bent down a little bit and make a movement of WHEELS with their hands. The person in the middle holds the 'steering wheel' with his/her hands.
- Elephant** The people on the outside put their arms up and down their body, making the EARS of the elephant. The person in the middle makes an ELEPHANT TRUNK with his arms.

HOW TO PLAY:

- Make a circle with the students
- One students stands in the middle of the circle and he/she points at one of the students saying (f.e.) MIXER.
- The student has to make the 'MIXER' together with the two students on his left and right.
- When somebody makes a mistake he/she has to change place with the person in the middle, pointing out people and giving assignments.

6. The rabbit, the old man, the baby and the monk

Type of game	Group game, icebreaker
Description	Group-building, create a hilarious atmosphere, have fun
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Up to 20
Grade/age	Any age

With this game the students have to do an impression and the sound of a:

- Rabbit
- Old man
- Baby
- And a monk

- Rabbit** Put your two hands on top of your head, making rabbit ears. The sound is: SNUF SNUF.
- Old man** Put your hand behind an ear, trying to listen very well. The sound is: HUH???
- Baby** Put your arms in front of you, as if you hold a baby. The sound is: WEAH WEAH (crying baby).
- Monk** Put your two hands in front of you, make a circle with your arms. The sound is: OOOOOOOHHMMMMMM.

HOW TO PLAY:

- Make a circle with the students
- One students start, making the gesture and the sound to the person on his right.
- That person turns to his/her RIGHT neighbor and repeats that sound.
- The sound and gesture goes round the circle.
- Practice this a few times with all the 'figures'.
- Then somebody makes another 'figure' while the first one is going around. The second figure has to move in the other direction. To the left.
- The students can now expect a figure and a sound from the right AND from the left, and they have to be sure to pass the sounds and gestures in the right direction.

- After a while, teacher can add as much figures and sounds as he likes in the direction he likes.

7. Clap on THREE

Type of game	Group game
Description	Remembering, counting and action
Necessary	Students
Number of people	As much as you want.
Grade/age	Any age

Make a circle with your students

- One person starts, saying ONE
- The person next to him/her says: TWO
- The next person CLAPS HIS HANDS.
- The person next to him/her says FOUR
- The next person says FIVE
- The next person CLAPS HIS HANDS.
- Etc. etc.

The hand clapping is done when:

- The number can be divided by THREE, such as: 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24 etc. etc.
- The number has the digit THREE in it, such as: 3, 13, 23, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 43, 53 etc .

Try to play this game as fast as possible. After a while, when a person makes a mistake he/she has to leave the circle.

8. Heartbeat: reaction

Type of game	Group game, energizer
Description	A team building activity which is very nice to do on the first or second day of class with a high school students (ESL and other classes alike)
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

Form a circle, outside weather permitting, and hold hands.

- ☐ The object is to see how quickly they can "heart beat."
- ☐ They pass the beat by squeezing the hand to the left after they receive it from the right.
- ☐ We try it again throughout the year and see if we get faster.
- ☐ It is a lot of fun and the kids are usually cheering when we break our previous record.
- ☐ Some are squeamish about holding hands but with prompting I usually get 100% participation.



9. Special pictures

Type of game	Group game, energizer
Description	Get attention from the group, make a group silent/quit
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

- ❑ Give each person a blank piece of paper, which is folded twice so there are four sections.
- ❑ Ask everyone to imagine that they have brought 4 of their favorite photos from homes, which represent events, people or places that are important to them for whatever reason. They can write or draw this on the paper.
- ❑ The other members of the group then have an opportunity to practice their questioning skills to find out more about the pictures, by asking questions about the pictures (which they can not see)
- ❑ You'll find you learn a great deal about the other members and what is important to them in, in a very short time.

10. Find the Person

Type of game	Group game, energizer
Description	Get attention from the group, make a group silent/quiet
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

- ❑ Hand out three to five small pieces of paper to each student.
- ❑ Ask them to write something about themselves on each piece of paper (e.g. "I have a dog named 'Biffie'." "I was born in 1974 in Germany.").
- ❑ Encourage everyone to write something specific about him or herself.
- ❑ For example, they should not write, "I have three children". They should write, "My three children's names are ~~~."
- ❑ When they are all finished, they should fold their papers and put them into a hat.
- ❑ Then each volunteer draws the same number of papers as he or she put in, taking care not to draw their own.
- ❑ Upon completion of the draw, each student is required to find the writer of the papers in their possession.

11. Penguin game

Type of game	Wake up/warm up
Description	Get attention from the group, make a group silent/quit
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

- ❑ Everyone stands in a circle
- ❑ The leader asks: “Do you know how a penguin moves? No? I can show you!”
- ❑ He/she shows the act of a penguin, which is achieved by slapping the thighs (upper leg) alternately with the hands and waving the body to the right and the left.
- ❑ Everyone moves in a circle, waving his/her body and slapping his/her thighs. Walking like penguins.
- ❑ The leader or individuals call out the various actions.

ACTIONS:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> LEFT/RIGHT SLALOM | action of skiing to the left or right |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PASSING A ROUGH CROWD | shake a fist in the air and roar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PASSING A POSH CROWD | hands in the air to the left side of the body and clap lightly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> POLAR BEAR | hands in the air, jumping back as if scared |
| <input type="checkbox"/> JUMP | jump as if on ski's |

12. Wizards, dwarfs and elves

Type of game	Energizer, teambuilding
Description	A very hilarious game, teambuilding, communication
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

This game is similar to the SCISSORS-PAPER-STONE game, except you use teams and your whole body.

To be a wizard

Stand tall and wave a magic wand (imaginary of course!) across your body, while saying: 'Tling tling'.

To be a dwarf

Crouch down, palms facing upwards and wriggle your fingers, while saying 'Pidallah, pidallah'.

To be an elf

Jump from one leg to the other with bent knees, move your arms up and down in the air at the same time, while saying: 'Huma, huma'.

Yes it looks and it sounds funny, that's the point, soooo....

Form two teams. They should stand in two lines facing each other. A line is drawn where each team stands (or marked out with t-shirts/sticks) and another line one meter behind.

- ❑ Each team decides as a group which action to carry out: a wizard, a dwarf or an elf.
- ❑ Everyone counts 1, 2 and 3 and does the action
- ❑ WIZARDS beat ELVES, ELVES beat DWARVES, DWARVES beat WIZARDS

So, if team 1 are ELVES and team 2 are DWARVES, the DWARVES start to run to the line behind them. The ELVES have to catch as many dwarves as they can before they cross the back line. The dwarves who got caught join the winning team.

13. Human snap

Type of game	Communication
Description	
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

Aim

The aim of this game is to find the partner or partners belonging to your group.

How to play

- ❑ Cards are made with pictures of something that makes a noise or can be acted out.
- ❑ E.g. in a group of 21, three cards each are made for; cat, dog, mouse, rabbit, horse, cow and pig.
- ❑ The cards (papers) are handed out to the group so that no one can see what the other has. Individuals then act out the picture/word in order to find their partner.
- ❑ Team players may not communicate in words.

Variations

Groups of object

Rather than every one in a group being the same animal, groups can be made of objects.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Car	Cat	Tree
Bus	Dog	Flower
Train	Mouse	Bush

Clearly variation in difficulty are possible. It is ease to be a cat, bet less so to be a bush!

Splitting groups into pair using opposites

Where pairs are to be formed, opposites can be used.

For example:

- ☐ up and down,
- ☐ cold and hot
- ☐ or identified pairs as cat and mouse
- ☐ fish and chips etc.

Splitting groups into pair using famous couples

A more complex game uses famous couples, like Charles and Diana, Romeo and Juliet. Individuals have to think of a characteristic of the person to act it out. Here it is only fair to let people speak!

14. Penny in the slot

Type of game	Energizer/teambuilding
Description	
Necessary	Students, enough to form two teams
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

Aim

The aim is to drop an object in a bucket or cup.

How to play:

- ☐ Teams are formed and sit in rows, with a bucket/cup placed a few meters in front of them.
- ☐ Each team-leader (standing in front) is given a penny (a coin).
- ☐ They place the coin between their bum cheeks (Yes! You are reading this right: do this neatly please!) and must try to run/walk with the coin there to the **cup**.
- ☐ To score a point they must release the coin so it lands in the cup.
- ☐ They then pick up the coin and give it to the next person in their team.
- ☐ If you drop the coin or miss the cup you simply pick it up and give it to the next person in line, but you don't score a point..
- ☐ First team to get 5 points wins.

15. Treasure?! Hunt

Type of game	Teambuilding/icebreaker
Description	
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Unlimited
Grade/age	Any age

Aim

To find all the items on the list.

How to play

Each team is given a list of objects to find.

They will either give each person an object to find or all look for everything and try to coordinate the activity.

Do not guide them!

Variations

The game can be made shorter by have them looking for things near to them, for example::

- ☐ Lighter
- ☐ Flower
- ☐ Old shoes
- ☐ Etc.

Or the game can take half a day/full day if the teams are give a transport budget and have to find things from neighboring towns and villages.

The game is made more interesting by including items such as:

- ☐ The shopkeepers first name
- ☐ An European business card
- ☐ The signature of a petrol pump attendant
- ☐ A dog paw print
- ☐ A pair of shoes from the beach
- ☐ A leaf that not green, brown or yellow (ingenious ideas are also welcome, they can paint a leaf blue for instance).
- ☐ The hair of an old woman (grey) – maybe a little bit difficult in Thailand!
- ☐ Toe nail clippings
- ☐ Etc.

16. Side slide

Type of game	Energizer/icebreaker
Description	Concentration and can be used practicing colors, fruit etc.
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Maximum 20
Grade/age	10 years and older

Like fruitsalad except you are move one place to the right instead of finding a new chair.

The group sits in a circle on chairs.

They are given various names, like colors, fruit etc.

They must be in an irregular distribution, so play **Alphabet people** to middle them up.

A caller calls out the names that have been chosen, for example: blue, green, yellow and red.

When your color is called you move one place to the right. **If someone is sitting there you sit on top of him or her.**

Only the person on top can move, so if a 'red' sits on a 'blue' that sits on a 'red' that is sitting on the chair only the top red can move.

The first person to get back to his/her original chair wins, even if they are sitting on 10 people!

17. Alphabet people

Type of game	Icebreaker/middler
Description	Get to know each other, practice the alphabet, communication game
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Up to 25 people

Grade/age	From 10 years up
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Without leadership the group puts themselves in alphabetical order of their names, either in a circle or a line.

The game can be continued using:

- ☐ Place of birth
- ☐ Mother's name
- ☐ Home town (if from different places)
- ☐ Street you live in
- ☐ Etc.

18. Straw Towers

Type of game	Teambuilding, communication
Description	Can be used on environmental project (used straws)
Necessary	Students
Number of people	Enough to make teams (about 6 people a team), number of teams unlimited.
Grade/age	12 years and up

Aim

Build a tower, the tallest!, and use up all the plastic straws from the refuse!

How to play.

Teams are made of equal numbers and given an equal number of straws.

The team is given 3 minutes to make the tallest tower they can build.

No glue or sello-tape or strings or anything other than straws may be used.

Don't tell them this but they can tie the straws and/or put straws inside other straws

The winner is the team with the tallest tower – obviously!

19. Egg and spoon

Type of game	Group game
Description	Energizer, teambuilding game
Necessary	2 spoons, 2 eggs (or ping-pong-balls)
Number of people	2 teams of 5/6 people
Grade/age	Any age

Aim

Pass the egg as fast as possible, using only the spoon in your mouth.

How to play

- ☐ You need 2 spoons and 2 eggs (or ping-pong balls)
- ☐ Form two teams (5 to 6 people)
- ☐ Make a start and a finish, set a route.
- ☐ Students take spoon in mouth with the ping-pong-ball. They can not touch the ball or spoon with their hands!
- ☐ Students walk as fast as they can from start to finish, following the route
- ☐ If the ball drops they have to start all over again
- ☐ If student 1 of a team is finished, student 2 takes over the ball and spoon, and walks the route
- ☐ etc. etc.
- ☐ The team who finishes first, wins.

20. Clap your hands (knees-hands-left-right)

Type of game	Get to know each other game.
Description	Game you can use to practice the names of the participants of your class, workcamp or seminar
Necessary	A number of people who do not know each other to well.
Number of people	Up to 20
Grade/age	10 and up.

Aim:

Get to know each other and remember all the names of the persons in your group.

How to play:

- ❑ Make a circle of persons, facing each other.
- ❑ Each student tells his name one time, loud and clear.
- ❑ Then practice with everybody the routine of clapping:
- ❑ Clap your hands one time.
- ❑ Put the thumb of your right hand over your shoulder (as if you are hitch hiking).
- ❑ Then put the thumb of your left hand over your left shoulder.
- ❑ Repeat this several times. Clap, right, left, clap, right, left.
- ❑ One student begins, everybody claps his hands, thumbs right: the student says HIS OWN NAME and then, thumbs left THE NAME OF ANOTHER PERSON.
- ❑ For example: when the first person name is PETE, the routine will be: clap, PETE, JANE..... then JANE calls her name (JANE) and the name of the next person. And so on, and so on.
- ❑ In the mean time the handclapping goes on

Variation:

- ❑ Instead of names, you can also use:
- ❑ Thai numbers (for an English speaking group)
- ❑ The countries of the participants (if from different countries)
- ❑ And so on.....