

Breaking the Ice to Build Inclusion: Creating Inclusive Icebreakers

By the Learning Design Team at the University of Exeter



Tips for making icebreaker activities inclusive

Without some consideration regarding its design, your ice breaker can end up being more of a barrier to learning than a benefit. The potential barriers will be different for each student.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can help you anticipate and address those barriers by designing flexible activities and learning environments that can be adjusted for each student's needs.

Multiple Means of Engagement

- Offering options for individual choice and autonomy.
- Provide relevance, value and authenticity.
- Minimise threats and distractions.
- Use topics for ice breakers that are likely to be of interest to a broad range of students.
- Foster a supportive, non-judgemental environment.

Multiple Means of Representation

- Present information in multiple ways.
- Ensure instructions are clear and understandable.
- Model the process before asking students to do it.
- Use open examples that are not based on a particular culture or assumption of knowledge.

Multiple Means of Action and Expression

- Allow flexibility in how students respond and engage with the ice breaker
- Provide tools and support to help students express themselves
- Provide opportunities for students to reflect on the activity and provide feedback

The Discuss a Concept Icebreaker

In the beginning...

Now I have introduced the concept, lets get into groups of six to discuss it and create your own text definition.

I find it hard to make my voice heard in a group.

I need more time to form my thoughts. I wish I'd had some warning!

A solution...

You can form groups of any size, work alone or create a model to illustrate your definition.

I hate forming groups. I never feel like anyone wants me to join them.

The Cocktail Introduction Icebreaker

In the beginning...

Imagine you are at a cocktail party. Circulate, shake hands and introduce yourself. Explain which cocktail you have and why.

I don't drink alcohol. What if people ask me why? I feel really anxious about this.

A solution...

Bring a physical object that represents you to share. Use these 'ask me about' stickers so you are in control of what you share.

I find small talk challenging and difficult to engage with.

We don't shake hands in my culture.

The Baby Photo Icebreaker

In the beginning...

Bring a photo of yourself as a baby and we'll guess who is who!

I can't access any baby photos of myself.

A solution...

Create a representation of yourself using a medium of your choice.

My gender is different in my baby photos.

My race is in the minority in this group. I feel othered.

For any enquiries, please contact the Learning Design team at the University of Exeter Learningdesign@exeter.ac.uk

Resources

For more information on Universal Design for Learning Principles please scan the QR code below:



To access and contribute to a growing Padlet resource on inclusive icebreakers please scan the QR code below:



For a text-only version of this poster, please scan the QR code below or email learningdesign@exeter.ac.uk.



Neurodivergence and inclusivity

Non-inclusive and inaccessible icebreakers can result in feelings of stress, anxiety, being scared, isolated, othered, unheard or unseen. This can then permeate the rest of the session and emotions within the group, resulting in individuals feeling unable to contribute and othered within the team.

Accessible and inclusive ice breakers will not only benefit those in the neurodivergent community but will have benefits for all. An accessible and inclusive culture is one in which everyone feels that they belong, through feeling safe in being themselves, and that their contribution matters.