

# USING ICEBREAKERS AND ENERGIZERS TO SUPPORT ONLINE TEACHING



This job aid describes how use of icebreakers, warmers and energizers can enhance your teaching. It contains examples and guidelines for effective use.

This job aid will help you to:

- use best practices for development and delivery of icebreakers, warmers and energizers
- use techniques to improve learning, create a positive learning environment
- use these techniques to encourage active learning, interaction and engagement
- use these techniques to encourage the sharing of ideas, opinions and questions
- support group work
- recognize attention spans

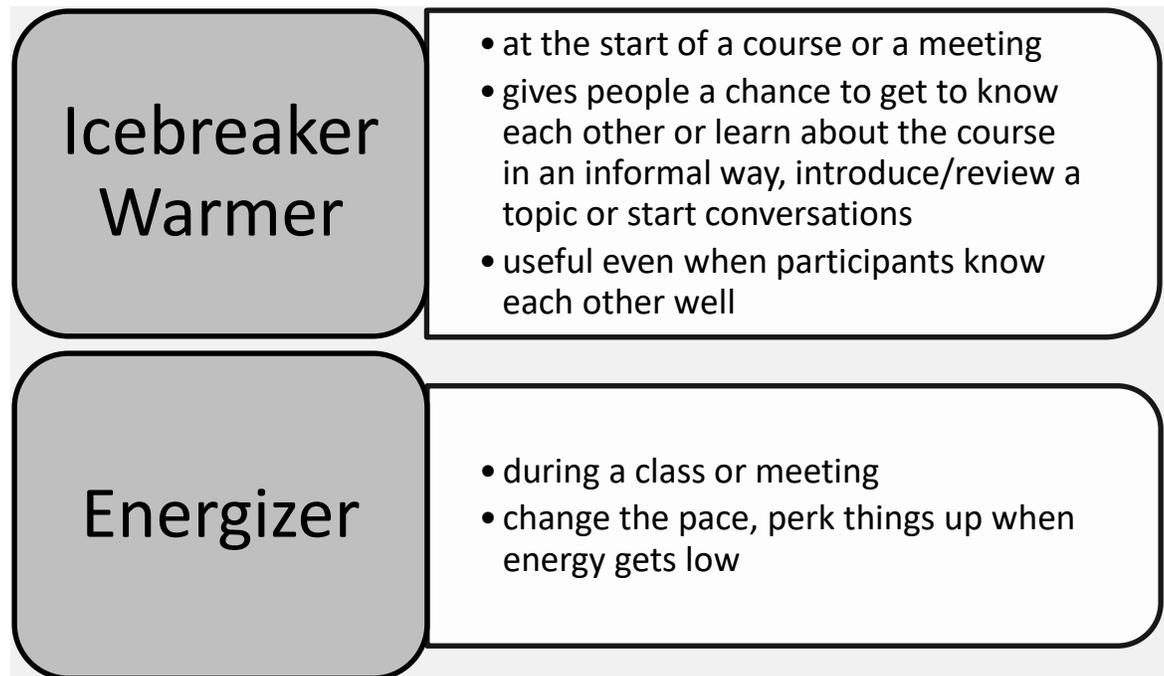
This job aid focuses on use in online courses but most activities work equally well in blended and face-to-face classes.



## Why use icebreakers, warmers and energizers?

Icebreakers, warmers and energizers are useful in all classes, provided they are used appropriately. They are short activities and experiences (2–10 minutes) that engage learners, support interaction and learning, and add variety and life to a class. Many of these activities require little or no special preparation but can make a big difference in the class atmosphere and teacher–student and student–student interactions.

Icebreakers, warmers and energizers can sometimes be the same activity or type of activity, so what do we mean by these terms? Basically, the difference is when the activity is done, and what the purpose is. For example:



Icebreakers, warmers and energizers are used to:

- improve learning
- create a positive learning environment
- encourage active learning / interaction / engagement
- recognize and 'restart' attention spans
- create an opportunity to share ideas and opinions or to ask questions
- improve work among group members

These activities have an impact beyond the class time in which they take place. Connections between the teacher and learners develop over time and make a difference in the learning environment. Such activities, and the chance to interact with others, align with

important elements of a good course (Chickering, 1991). A good course:

- encourages contact between students and faculty
- develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
- encourages active learning
- gives prompt feedback
- emphasizes time on task
- communicates high expectations
- respects diverse talents and ways of learning

## Key principles

Apply the following seven principles to the use of icebreakers, warmers and energizers.

1. **Encourage contact between students and faculty**—Use a variety of activities that allow students to speak amongst themselves and to communicate with the instructor (for example, breakout room discussions for small groups, responding in chats, writing ideas on the slide or 'whiteboard,' turning on microphones and making a comment or asking a question, polls and voting).
2. **Develop reciprocity and cooperation**—Use activities in the main space and in breakout rooms to give learners time to speak with each other and to share their ideas, comments, opinion, concerns and questions.
3. **Encourage active learning**—Use both fun AND purposeful activities, as appropriate to your context (for example, fun...what is your favourite food, do you like cats or dogs better; purposeful...what resources or websites will be useful for assignment 1, which method to calculate best route do you think is easiest).
4. **Give prompt feedback**—After course questions are asked or ideas discussed, ask a learner to identify a 'correct' answer (if there is one), or to share a summary of good ideas or a resource to review if learners need information.
5. **Emphasize time on task**—Keep activities short so they enhance the class but do not divert energy and resources away from important topics and tasks.
6. **Communicate high expectations**—Share the expectation that learners will pay attention, engage, participate in activities and stay involved, and that the value of this is improved learning. Following this up by using icebreakers, warmers and energizers communicates that you care about learning and are making an effort to create opportunities for students to engage and intentionally including activities that support learning.
7. **Respect diverse talents and ways of learning**—Every class is made up of a diverse group of learners, so vary the types of activities to ensure everyone gets to do something they might like (for example, talk, write, draw, search, ask questions).

## Online use of icebreakers, warmers and energizers

The principles described in this job aid also apply to blended and face-to-face courses. Keep in mind that delivery will depend on the tools available to you within your course or on the Internet.

The LTC can help you with best practices and technical assistance with educational technologies. You may want to work with an Instructional Design Consultant to assist your planning. Contact your school liaison for more information.

## Types of Icebreakers, Warmers and Energizers

Plan for 2–10 minutes for each activity. These can be done with the whole class or in breakout rooms.

Remember that instructions for breakout room activities must be very clear. Check that learners know what to do before sending them to a room as it is often hard to communicate with individual learners once they join their breakout room.

### Course Level

- Getting to Know You
  - Ask learners to share something they have created in a discussion forum or in a group (the item is created independently prior sharing so give advance notice):
    - a poster with images related to favourite quote, place and food
    - a 'play list' of music they like or would like to share
    - a list of three interesting or unusual things 'about me'
- Getting to Know the Course
  - Learners do something and then share their learning or what aspect of the course they feel will be interesting or useful:
    - a scavenger hunt related to course contents + sharing
    - cruise through the course materials + sharing
    - a quiz about the course syllabus + sharing
    - draw up a list—what they know / what they want to learn + sharing

### Class or Meeting Level

- Warmers
  - Provide an activity for learners to do during waiting times such as before a lesson begins or while waiting for some members to complete a task:
    - Share line drawings or interesting images for annotation and 'colouring'
    - Ask learners to draw course-related items from memory (on paper)
- Check In: How Are You?
  - Provide an image and ask learners to annotate it, respond in chat or turn on their

microphone. For an anonymous alternative, ask learners to choose but not to share:

- emojis of a variety of emotions
  - photographs of places/animals/colours/weather conditions
  - words that express emotion (smile, laugh, cry, jump, crash, sleep, shiver)
- Ask learners to go to the Internet and find something that expresses how they feel. To make this easy, provide a link to a page of images or quotations—share the link or copy/paste a quote in the chat.
- This or That
    - Provide contrasting images and ask learners which they prefer. They can annotate the image, respond in chat or turn on their microphone. For an anonymous alternative, ask learners to choose but not to share. Examples:
      - ice cream vs. pizza, cats vs. dogs, action vs. comedy (movies)
      - famous artists/sportspeople/places
      - contrasting items in the course: choose two topics or two special terms/practices/pieces of equipment/possible jobs after graduation
  - Writing/Reflecting/Thinking/Brainstorming
    - Provide a question/prompt and 30–60 seconds to write or draw and then share:
      - a useful resource or resource needed for an assignment
      - three ideas everyone should take note of or terms everyone should know
      - two to three topics you want to know about or questions to ask
      - a personal highlight of the lesson or a personal definition of a concept
      - the key ideas in the video/reading/infographic
      - the steps in a process or flow chart
      - a diagram of a heart, piece of equipment, room
      - how you might use the information in the class/course/module/activity
      - how you're managing with the assignment—successes? challenges?
  - Go Away and Come Back
    - Provide a question/prompt and two minutes to find a resource and then share:
      - Which page/document in the course provides information about x?
      - What is a reliable website for getting information about x?
      - Which government agency is responsible for x? Where can you find information about important policies, rules, regulations?
      - Find a job description related to the course/field that appeals to you
      - Find a video that is 5–10 minutes maximum that explains...
      - Find a resource in the BCIT library useful to the learners in this course.

Goals for Students	Goals for Instructors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in multiple, positive interactions with classmates and instructors</li> <li>• Be an active (rather than a passive) learner</li> <li>• Learn in a positive environment</li> <li>• See the subject as accessible, understandable, and enjoyable</li> <li>• Have contact with the instructor</li> <li>• Recognize the instructor as supportive, interested and available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a student-centred classroom</li> <li>• Foster a supportive and active learning environment</li> <li>• Bring their experience, professionalism, and knowledge of their subject AND learning to their students</li> <li>• Demonstrate that learning can be an enjoyable experience</li> <li>• Ensure learners know you are available and approachable</li> <li>• Demonstrate 'teacher presence' — "I'm here, I care, I'm with you"</li> </ul>

## Integrating Icebreakers and Energizers in Online Teaching Checklist

Use the following checklist to ensure use is appropriate and effective:

Resilience—I have:

- A troubleshooting list of what to check when issues arise
- A backup plan in case the technology fails—it is important to use learning time effectively so you must be ready to continue the lesson despite technology interruptions
- An attitude that allows me to remain calm and move on

Content—I have:

- Checked that the activities I have planned will work with the tools available
- Carefully chosen the activity to suit the context

Format—I have:

- Ensured visuals and audio are clear and high quality
- Identified appropriate resources to use

Text—I have:

- Used simple, clear language
- Used key phrases rather than long sentences
- Kept all instructions short and sweet

Graphics—I have:

- Used graphics rather than text whenever possible
- Chosen simple, clear images
- Used free and open sources for images when possible

Colour—I have:

- Used colour sparingly to highlight key features
- Used colours that are clearly visible and readable

Sound and animation—I have:

- Used special effects sparingly for maximum impact

## Using Icebreakers and Energizers in Online Teaching

As well as making sure your activities are effectively designed, you need to make sure that they are used appropriately. Use the following checklist to prepare and deliver learning experiences.

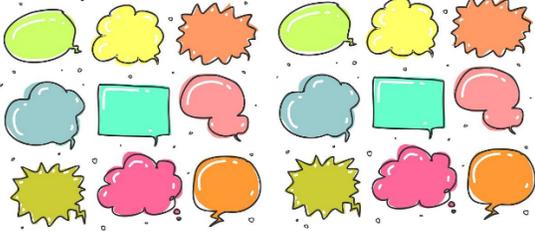
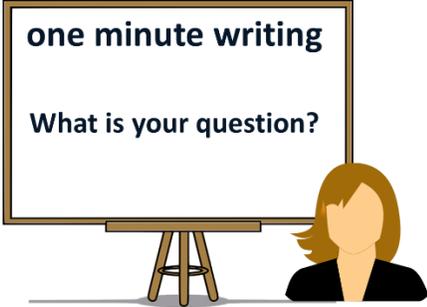
Preparing the 'space' and equipment—I have:

- Checked that the computer works reliably and the Internet is accessible
- Checked that the required software, online meeting space and tools (video, audio, annotation, chat, file sharing, breakout rooms, etc.) work reliably
- Checked that the lighting on me is appropriate or adjustable [you may need to add a light], that I am visible, and that my monitor is adjusted to show me looking straight into the camera
- Viewed all text and images to check that video/animation will be clear, even on a small computer screen
- Checked that learners have the equipment they need
- If asking learners to move around, asked them to check that their environment is safe and free of physical barriers
- Located the telephone number for IT Services

Delivery—I have:

- Practiced using the media/tools smoothly and efficiently
- Practiced giving directions to ensure first use goes smoothly
- Checked that an online meeting space is set up for use and that learners can access it

## Examples of Icebreaker and Energizer Prompts

	
<p><b>Today</b></p> <p><small>Link to music One word Type of food Name of a cartoon character Place you would like to visit Book or movie recently enjoyed</small></p> <p><b>Please share a link to a photo that represents how you are feeling today.</b></p> <p><small>Rating: family friendly only</small></p>	<p><b>Share Highlight</b></p> 
<p><b>Reflection</b></p> 	<p><b>Share or Review – Random Names</b></p> 
<p><b>Think – Write</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 most important ideas</li> <li>• 2-3 steps to remember</li> <li>• 3 important terms</li> </ul>	<p><b>one minute writing</b></p> <p><b>What is your question?</b></p> 

### References

Chickering, Arthur W. (1991). Institutionalizing the Seven Principle and the Faculty and Institutional Inventories. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. Jossey Bass Inc. 47. What are the Seven Principles: <https://www.utc.edu/walker-center-teaching-learning/teaching-resources/7-principles.php>

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