



TATP TIPSHEET

## Icebreakers: Getting to Know Your Class

Icebreaker activities are extremely useful in breaking down barriers between students in order to facilitate class participation. They are particularly important if you plan to have your students work in groups: through encouraging greater connections between students, icebreakers can enhance group processes and thus the quality of group work produced. Following are some ideas for how to get your students better acquainted with one another.

### Icebreakers

The key with icebreakers is to keep them relatively light-hearted; don't choose activities that will force students to reveal aspects of themselves that they are not comfortable revealing.

- **Interview your neighbour:** have students work in pairs to interview each other for a few minutes. They can take notes about their interview partners that will be reported in a summary to the rest of the group. The interview can be focused on a student's major/minor, year of study, reasons for taking the course, goals for the future, and other background information. The interview could also focus on the course subject material as a way of introducing students to the subject matter.
- **What's in a name?:** Ask everyone to say their (preferred) name, and ask them to give at least one piece of information on why they were called this name (or some interesting feature of their name, such as a different way of spelling or pronouncing it).
- **Pack your suitcase:** ask students to make a list of 10 things they would pack up in the event of a disaster, or going off for a whole year to another country that is far away. 'Things' packed do not literally have to fit into a suitcase, and students cannot take other humans with them. This gives students lots to talk about before starting actual group work.
- **What do you already know on the topic?** Ask students (in groups or pairs) to jot down the most important thing they already know on the topic that the group will be exploring. Then each student will read out his or her idea, and each idea can be recorded on a flipchart or on the board.
- **Biography Bingo:** Create a bingo sheet based on discovering information about your classmates and information about the course material. Students must move around the room and ask questions of their classmates to score a bingo (4 or 5 squares crossed out in a row). Examples: find someone who was born outside of Toronto, find someone who can explain what a vector is, find someone who has a birthday in December, find someone who wants to pursue graduate studies, find someone who can define quantum physics in 5 words or less, find someone who hates chocolate, find someone who is majoring in Physics, etc. This icebreaker not only helps students get to know one another but can be used to introduce them to concepts and skills they will be learning in the course.

### **Ideas for how to learn your students' names**

Knowing and using your students' names is a great way of showing interest in your students as individuals and creates a much more comfortable and collegial atmosphere in the classroom.

- Use **name tents**: ask students to write their names on a folded index card on their desks for the first few classes.
- Use a **seating chart** for the first few classes: ask students to sit in the same place for a few classes to help you learn their names more quickly.
- Take a **picture** of students as they are seated (and ask them to keep these seats for the first few classes) and write in their names next to their images. (This should only be used with the express permission of ALL students in the class.)
- Play a **name game**. Ask students to tell you their names and one personal detail about themselves (e.g. "I have two cats" or "I play the flute and the cello"); as each person says his or her name, you as the instructor must recall not only that person's name and the personal detail, but also the name and personal detail of the student before him or her. In the end, you'll have to recall all your students' names! As an alternative, you can also use this to help students learn each others' names: have students sit in a circle and have each student recall the person's name sitting next to him or her as you move around the circle.

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