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## Compiled Messages

**Subject:**

Icebreakers Discussion Thread **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Roisin Donnelly **Date:** 02 February 2012 10:42 AM

### Post your ideas on icebreakers in this thread only!

Have a look at the icebreaker examples under the '[Week 1 Activities](#)' icon; select one from the list [if it appeals to you] and describe how you could use it with your own groups in your own disciplines [or please feel free to include one from your own experience that has worked well for you in the past, either in a face-to-face or online setting].

Some of the online links: <http://www.mystudiyo.com/ch/a96827/go>

Create a monster name avator: <http://monster.namedecoder.com/>

Montage-a-google: <http://grant.robinson.name/projects/montage-a-google/app/>

Guess-the-google: <http://grant.robinson.name/projects/guess-the-google/>

Dangerous Dave Tredz Game: <http://www.tredz.co.uk/Game.asp>

Other icebreakers ideas:

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm#firstday>

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers Discussion Thread **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Barry Ryan

**Date:** 31 January 2012 8:05 PM

I think icebreakers are a great way to get everyone at least to talk to someone in the class; particularly important for first years on day one in the big, bad college classroom! I like the look of a few of these icebreakers (mentioned in the readings); however, they seem best applied to online icebreakers.

My experience to date is based on F2F activities. One of the icebreakers I use with my first year tutor group is to ask them to line themselves around the lecture hall based on date of birth (starting at Jan 1st and working around the room to Dec 31st). Once the students have figured out (after talking to most of the class along the way!) the correct order I then ask them to introduce themselves to the person either side of them. The students then have at least two people to chat to during the first coffee break!

Another icebreaker I use is more suited to group work introduction. I divide the class into two large groups (around 12 per group) and give them each three cards from a regular deck of cards. Everyone in the group must use all the group's cards to individually form 21 (they can add, subtract, multiply or divide the numbers on the cards) with three cards per person. I then give the students the whole room and allow them to "figure out" how best to work in a group (e.g. sit together, form subgroups, have a leader). At certain points I will make suggestions on how to improve the group dynamic. Of course the race to be the first group finished adds a little bit of tension and competition!

Reply

**Subject:** **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

F2F and  
online  
icebreakers

**Author:**

Roisin      **Date:** 01 February 2012 2:36 PM  
Donnelly

Yes absolutely as Barry, Debbie and Steve allude to, icebreakers can be useful for reducing tension when a group of learners meet for the first time and to immediately involve students in the class in a fun yet purposeful way. That is such a useful point too Steve - about setting up ways for the students to speak/communicate in front of their group of peers as early as possible - providing enough opportunities for them to practice making presentations. You have shared a mix of 'light' and more textured, yet very effective icebreakers for the f2f classroom which is great.

However, when face to face interaction is not readily available, we try to consider the role of technology for icebreakers (generally can be done with a variety of different tools/media); so what tools (synchronously or asynchronously) could you use to foster openness that leads to a bonding experience that in turn can help students to feel a sense of community, which in turn hopefully motivates them to be engaged in their learning?! Phew! Such a little activity having the potential for such large impact.

Debbie mentioned private chatrooms for the 'things in common' activity - are there any others come to mind? and Steve gave some ideas for using websites; Barry, would any particular tool work for the date of birth or the cards icebreakers?

Throwing this out there for everyone - what would be involved for us as teachers to adapt a f2f one for online use? Are there some that just won't work online and need f2f human contact? And indeed, do we need a plan B - what can we do when icebreakers go wrong?

Looking forward to hearing more about what you all do to encourage socialisation with your students and your ideas on icebreakers. They make for very enjoyable reads!

Reply

**Subject:**

Virtual      **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
"Breadcrumb  
Trail"

**Author:**

Barry      **Date:** 02 February 2012 11:38 AM  
Ryan

Hmmm...I'll have to have a proper think and a search online for something that might map the DOB/Cards activities to an online environment...perhaps the class could try to find out is there a link to connect a group by using a wiki...(e.g. I went to school in England, Paul is English, Pat has the same initials as Paul, Mary supports the same football team as Paul...and so on). A variant of this may be for all the class to note their location on a "class map" (<http://www.pinmaps.net>) and see what the shortest distance to call to everyone's house would be?

However, reading Steve's and Debbie's comments got me thinking in another way...currently I ask my first years to "tweet" or generate a Facebook "status update" as a contextualized "1 min paper"; in this way the students are limited by character count and this focuses them to think and (hopefully!) understand the content before putting pen to paper...where lies the link to the online environment. Currently this activity is carried out in class, on paper, it would be easy to transfer this to the VLE (perhaps avoiding the public access Twitter/FB arena is best here). Linking in with Steve's idea of random topics, that nobody has any real expertise in, could be a way to make everybody feel they have something to add to the "discussion".

Reply

**Subject:**

Do we really need online icebreakers?  
**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

John Mulreid  
**Date:** 02 February 2012 10:12 PM

I'm playing the devils advocate here. Do we really need online icebreakers?

At this point I can't see the need for them. The whole purpose of doing an icebreaker in a face to face setting is to create a safe and friendly environment to build up the learners self esteem and confidence so they are engaging and creative. Do the same barriers exist in an online environment?

I'd welcome your views on this.

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers Discussion Thread  
**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Debbie Howlett  
**Date:** 01 February 2012 1:45 PM

The 'icebreaker' I have used in the past is the '3 in common' game. Again like Barry it is a game I have used F2F but if it is possible to have private chat rooms on the VLE it could be used on-line.

The game is that the group are broken down into small groups of 3 or 4 and the group members then find three things they all have in common. They are not allowed pick the usual things like sex, hair colour, job etc. They must pick uncommon things like supporting the same football club, music or movie interests etc. After about 10 - 15 minutes the groups re-join and each group tell the others the three things they have in common.

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers Discussion Thread  
**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Steve

Meaney  
**Date:** 01 February 2012 2:23 PM

Most of the experience I've had with these has been in a face-to-face setting, so the ideas may not port to the online environment easily.

The arranging according to year of birth, surname etc. which Barry mentioned is a useful one and works well to get everyone moving physically (more blood to brain = good vibes) and also socially. I usually get them to shout out their names/month/year of birth as well.

I've also use the three minute test in class (<http://www.cfcl.com/vlb/Cuute/f/quiz.txt> has a similar one to that I've used).

One thing which I have done and which I think might work online (with some tweaking) is to explain something complicated that you don't think I know in 5 minutes/100 words etc.

I've also polled the class to get a random selection of topics (anything really from politics to skittles and Jersey Shore - really!) and then divide the class into groups. I then highlight one of these (my pick, by vote, or else sequentially) and one person talks about this to the rest of the group for 1-2 minutes.

The main motivation in my icebreakers is to gradually introduce them to communication orally with ever larger groups of their peers, as they have to present to the class as part of their assessment. I'm not sure how these could be applied to an online setting. Maybe it would be possible to ask participants to provide their favourite information/humour/whatever website, preferably something a bit obscure/off the beaten track of the internet.

/steve

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion Thread **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Angela Walsh **Date:** 01 February 2012 8:25 PM

Hi All

In common with previous posts I have had most experience with F2F settings. I have also used the arranging according to year of birth both as an ice breaker in the morning time and as something to boost energy - as Steve says Blood to brain in the middle of afternoon sessions especially if we have been involved with discussing heavy technical stuff. It can be good to draw a line under one topic do a quick ice breaker/ energy generator and move to the next item on the agenda.

To add to the F2F suggestions for the moment - I'm going to have a think about the online ones - We use the following

New groups

We give everyone a post card that contains 5 pieces of general information such as someone who has an "i" in their name

Someone who can speak a foreign language etc

and then we ask every one to get an autograph from someone in the group under each heading

For groups who already know each other we've given out a name of a film star to each person and they have to try and find who their co star is. When they find who their partner is we usually get them to work together for the duration of training. It has the effect of getting people talking and breaking up people who tend to stick together alot.

Angela

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion Thread **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Edel

Gavan **Date:** 01 February 2012 8:48 PM

First I think its important for the tutor to tell the students that this is a safe and secure leaning environment and that everybody opinion is important. Especially with online classes as learners cannot see faces or reactions.

Ideally any ice breaker that gets students speaking and communicating with each other would be a good start. Also this would give an opportunity to test mikes & speakers. I like the idea of truth or lies but to do it between students. So maybe have the tutor send a few student some truth/lies, have them speak the truth/lies to the class and the class to guess. That way everyone gets to speak.

Reply

**Subject:** **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Safety

Blanket!

**Author:**

Barry Ryan **Date:** 02 February 2012 11:43 AM

Hi All,

Yes, I totally agree with this thread...we, as online tutors/facilitators need to ensure that our students feel secure in posting to "cyberspace". As Steve mentioned, making a permanent, digital file (blog, image, audio, video etc) can be very intimidating; I know that I was initially very cautious about placing any of my "handiwork" on my ePortfolio. We need to let students know about the safety, storage and accessibility for all class digital entries.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Safety **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Blanket!

**Author:**

Angela Walsh **Date:** 02 February 2012 7:59 PM

Hi All

This links to an item I was reading during the ID module about tutors creating screencasts. The idea that a verbal slipup by a tutor can end up going viral can deter lecturers/trainers creating screencasts or recording live lectures. So safety blankets are required for all ..... tutors and students alike

Angela

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Safety **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Blanket!

**Author:**

John Mulreid **Date:** 02 February 2012 10:39 PM

I agree, people are so reluctant to have a permanent record of their training/lectures 'on tape' for the reasons outlined by Angela. However sometimes it is good to slipup, isn't that one of the ways that we learn and improve? I presume it's like acting, initially you are conscious of the camera but as time passes you become more comfortable with being in front of a camera.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Angela's icebreakers **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Roisin Donnelly **Date:** 02 February 2012 11:03 AM

"breaking up people who tend to stick together a lot"

So true Angela that another function for icebreakers is not just for new people but also has a role when people already know each other - to avoid the forming of cliques and factions in group work. Cheers for that!

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Angela's icebreakers **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Angela **Date:** 02 February 2012 7:50 PM

Walsh

Hi Roisin

Yes as well as that sometimes no one wants to be the one to volunteer to form a group or to decide on who is going to be in a group so it can make things easier on that front too  
Angela

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers Discussion Thread **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Enda O Reilly **Date:** 01 February 2012 9:25 PM

I can't open the icebreakers examples from the Course Contents section, but I have used a number of face-to-face icebreakers over the years. They are a great way to get students going.

One example - get students to write down on a piece of paper a specific interest or hobby (crazy ones if possible) and stick pieces into a box. Students to select one at random and find the person who has this hobby. Discussion should follow. Repeat the process a number of times.

Another one that I have used, particularly where there is a mixture of mature and young learners, is to draft a class code of conduct or a Bill of Rights. Might sound a bit boring, but it sorts out some of the issues that potentially arises when you have such a diverse mix of learners. Mature students can take over a group, so setting some ground rules can solve some of the problems (not them all).

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers Discussion Thread **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Angela Walsh **Date:** 01 February 2012 10:00 PM

Hi Enda

We have used that code of conduct as well we call it agreed behaviours. It addresses the issues of the safe environment that Steve and Edel have mentioned. As the behaviours are agreed by the students - under the guidance of the teacher/trainer - it certainly makes it easier to address issues that may arise that are contrary to the behaviours agreed.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers Discussion Thread **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Enda O Reilly **Date:** 02 February 2012 9:36 AM

Hi Angela

Sometimes it works and sometimes not, but I think by students/employees trying to set their own ground rules, they are more likely to follow them.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion Thread  
**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Angela Walsh  
**Date:** 02 February 2012 7:47 PM

Hi Enda

Absolutely. We also ask them to rate themselves out of 10 for particular behaviours after a couple of days. It can help address issues like punctuality but it's also a method of giving positive feedback and encouraging appropriate behaviours

Angela

Reply

**Subject:**

Agreed  
Behaviours  
**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Jim  
Ffrench  
**Date:** 03 February 2012 6:01 PM

Hi Angela,

This agreed behaviours policy sounds like a great constructivist method of classroom environment control. Self rating passes behavioural responsibility over to the student and I can see how it would encourage positive results. I'll chalk this one up for piloting with a future class, thanks.

Jim

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion Thread  
**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Angela Walsh  
**Date:** 01 February 2012 10:01 PM

Sorry Enda I meant to say that I had a problem opening the ice breakers example as well. I had to log out and log back in again and it took a while to open but it opened eventually

Angela

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion Thread  
**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Jim  
Ffrench  
**Date:** 01 February 2012 9:58 PM

Hi all,

Given that my students can work in teams from the word go, I have not found the need to give this any great thought in the past, being satisfied with giving them the opportunity to introduce themselves to their peers in the first class. However, since I've started this MSc and have become introduced to the concept of icebreakers formally, my eyes have been opened to their advantages. After reading all of the other post so far, there are what I consider to be some great suggestions proposed for F2F icebreakers, which I shamelessly will 'duplicate' for future classes.

With regard to an online version of an icebreaker, Unique and Shared sounds like an excellent team-building activity that may be doable using the discussion board. The description says:

"It promotes unity as it gets people to realize that they have more common ground with their peers than they first might realize. As people become aware of their own unique characteristics, they can also help people feel empowered to offer the group something unique."

Sounds about right, what does everyone else think?

<http://www.icebreakers.ws/team-building/unique-and-shared.html>

Reply

**Subject:**

Shameless **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation duplication!

**Author:**

Roisin **Date:** 02 February 2012 11:11 AM  
Donnelly

We want this module to be a balance of the pedagogy and technology, but in an applied way - so that you can all take practical ideas and strategies away to use and adapt in your own practice. And good for you Jim - after all there is no copyright on ideas as such!

Thanks for Unique and Shared!

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
- Seven **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
degrees of  
GoogleMaps?

**Author:** Steve  
Meaney **Date:** 01 February 2012 10:19 PM

Was thinking about how to get the students to connect online, and wondered if you could take seven degrees of separation online. I think that you could maybe do something with Google Maps - have everyone pin their homeplace/hometown and then try and connect them. I think that this might be a good part of an overall strategy to identify commonalities.

-steve

Reply

**Subject:**

Great **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Minds!

**Author:**

Barry **Date:** 02 February 2012 11:36 AM  
Ryan

Seems like we are thinking along the same line Steve!  
I posted something similar, in a well disguised, indented post (before I realised the importance of a unique subject heading!) earlier in the thread. This Gmap "breadcrumbs trail" might be a very effective way to get people to chat, and they might even discover that classmates live close by!  
When I carry out a F2F adaption of this (I put up an acetate...yes...remember them?!...with a rough sketch of Ireland/Dublin and I ask the class to place dot for where they live) its surprising how many people in the same class take the same bus/LUAS route to college and never cross paths!

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
- Seven

degrees of  
GoogleMaps?  
Mark

**Author:** Mark Maguire **Date:** 03 February 2012 10:34 AM

Hi Steve,  
I think the 7 degrees of separation is a great idea, by going thru a friend of a friend etc, were connected to everyone, dont know how difficult this would be to do, will do some research on it?

Reply

**Subject:**  
Re:Icebreakers  
- Am I doing it right? **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Steve Meaney **Date:** 01 February 2012 10:59 PM

Hi all,  
As I think about this more, I'm actually finding that my ideas are somewhat contaminated by my own experience in online fora, chat etc. (I've been part of E-communities since 1998/99). The knock on effect is that is actually hard to get into the mindset of someone who might be engaging in this for the first time, who needs the sort of 'bill of rights' or social contract, who may not be comfortable expressing themselves in a way which has a (semi) permanent record and so on.

In attempting to get into this mindset, one of the things that occurred to me was that when you are getting your toes wet on the internet is the feeling of 'am I doing this right?' as you don't want to be embarrassed when posting to a forum etc. Same idea with recording your own voice, videos etc. I think that its hard to get comfortable in this way in an online setting, as the non verbal communication is lost and noobies may not be aware of the necessity to make emotions etc. clear in text. I'm actually leaning towards some sort of jump straight in with a short audio recording, lets say a 60 second clip about your favourite food, and then trying to match up profile pictures with the voices.

Anyhow, a first thought.  
-steve

Reply

**Subject:**  
Re:Icebreakers  
- Am I doing it right? **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Enda O Reilly **Date:** 02 February 2012 9:50 AM

Hi Steve

Have to agree with you. There is a feeling of 'am I doing this right'. At the start of the ID module, our group managed to meet face-to-face to get know to each other a bit better and I think this helped overall with our online exchanges. In the online environment, it is harder to convey your thoughts and feelings and can be frustrating at times.  
A short video or audio recording at the start of an online course/programme would help.

Reply

**Subject:**  
Reassurance  
is vital online **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Roisin Donnelly **Date:** 02 February 2012 10:57 AM

Couldn't agree more Steve and Enda on "am I doing this right?" – without the f2f interaction, reassurance is more vital than ever for learners.

One of the things we aim do as online tutors on this module is share with you our rationale for the particular approaches we take.

We have included a podcast at the start of each weekly activity to give you all the lie of the land for the week ahead in audio. We also make use of the Announcements feature at the start of each week to give a text-based overview of the highlights of the week. We try to distil a blend of 'comfort', 'faith' and 'hope' through the use of voice emails. Not sure how helpful these are yet to you, but hopefully will hear back in the module evaluations!

We will be attempting to weave a mix of literature, wisdom and common sense into our discussion posts, as well as the all important reassurance that you are doing it right, and of course pointing out gently when things can be done in a clearer way. Through all this, tutor adaptability and flexibility is useful as every group is unique and have different needs. Hope this makes sense!

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
- Am I doing it right? **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Debbie Howlett **Date:** 03 February 2012 8:17 AM

Hi Guys,

I think another aspect to this fear of 'am I doing it right?' is am I alone here?. In a classroom situation you can always turn to the person next to you to ask a simple question or pass a comment.

Our role as tutors/teachers must ensure each student is included and dispell any feeling of being alone. I think the option to 'chat' without using voice appeals to a lot of students today as they are more accustomed to texting than talking.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
- Am I doing it right? **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Enda

O Reilly **Date:** 03 February 2012 10:58 AM

Hello Debbie

I think that feeling of 'isolation' starts to kick in if you are not contributing in some way to the discussion forum. The tutor has a big part to play in early stages in order to make students feel confident about contributing and I think this week we all have seen that support

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
- Am I doing it right? **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Jim

**Date:** 03 February 2012 6:16 PM

Ffrench

Hi Enda,

I agree, you start off just reading posts and seeing where you can contribute to a thread. Then after posting a comment it is reassuring/reaffirming to receive a positive comment back from the tutor.

Reply

**Subject:**

Students  
more

accustomed **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
to texting  
than  
talking

**Author:**

Jim Ffrench

**Date:** 03 February 2012 6:10 PM

Apart from a few of us dinosaurs out there, personally speaking Debbie.

From a reformed luddite.

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion  
Thread

**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** John  
Mulreid

**Date:** 02 February 2012 10:00 PM

I am a big fan of icebreakers. In my view they serve many purposes:

1. They remove the barrier between the trainer/tutor and the participants
2. Encourage participants to interact with each other
3. They energise the room
4. They can be linked to the subject matter you are teaching/providing training one which leads nicely into the start of your lesson.
5. Most importantly they're a bit of fun!

Here are some I like the use and have used in the past:

1. Actor, supporting actor and Movie Name. Particularly good with large groups. Basically each participant is provided with a card (could be the name of the actor, supporting actor or the movie itself). Each participant must interact with the wider group in order to find the two other cards that match their own. For example, Patrick Swayze, Jennifer Grey and Dirty Dancing. The first team to make the correct match receive a prize. It's normally a large box of sweets and they are encouraged to share it with the room. The great thing about this ice-breaker is that you can update as the number of movies out there is endless. Alternatively, you could tweak it and have, Name of Country, Capital City and Currency.

2. Truth and Lies exercise. Each participant is asked to write down their name, occupation and three interesting things about themselves on a piece of paper provided. One lie and two truthful things. When they are finished they pass the piece of paper to their neighbour. The neighbour then introduces them and the wider group have to figure out which thing is the lie. It can be very amusing and you find out interesting things about the people in the room. The facilitator/trainer is encouraged to participate as well.

3. Picture Cards. The facilitator provides the participants with a number of cards that have pictures on them. The pictures should represent negative, positive and neutral aspects of the subject matter. Each participant takes a card and discusses it with their group. The group decided which picture best represents their view of the subject matter. We used this recently when delivering training on Performance Management, it was a very useful way of getting peoples issues out in the open. For example one of the pictures was a manager cracking a whip at the team. It's a safe way for people to express how they are feeling about the training.

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Thread: Plea  
for Simplicity

**Author:** Clare Gormley **Date:** 03 February 2012 12:17 PM

Wow, reading through all these discussion postings I'm struck by how innovative your classroom/lecture/training sessions seem to be in comparison to most of those I've attended over the years! There's a whole world of icebreakers I've never heard of - I liked the sound of several and especially the simpler ones such as John's suggestion of using a provocative visual to get everyone talking. Also liked the idea of the Google Maps approach for connecting people that Steve & Barry raised for web-savvy learners.

One thing I do feel though, is that like everything else in e-Learning, it's all about the audience. The kind of icebreaker that's going to work well with students may not sit at all well with busy professionals who are wondering when the session is going to "get to the point". That's not to say that corporate/professional audiences don't need icebreakers (it might be very advantageous for them to know more about each other) but I think there may be some resistance to what they might view as time-wasting frivolity! (I bet some of you have come across this attitude too?). In this case very simple (perhaps more formal) introductions of "who you are and one key reason why you're here" would at least get the ball rolling.

The other reason I would call for simplicity is that if people are shy or new to technology, then they have their own concerns around all that so the simpler the icebreaker is in an online context, the better - getting used to a new discussion forum or webinar technology can be challenging enough (speaking from personal experience!) without trying to do lots of new activity online and potentially floundering under pressure at the very start. Again, knowing your audience and their skillsets/experience would be key, in my view, especially in a wholly online context.

Reply

**Subject:**

Icebreakers  
- when and **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
how best to  
use?

**Author:**  
Roisin Donnelly **Date:** 03 February 2012 2:19 PM

Cheers Clare for these points. I'd just like to add in some of my own thoughts here on icebreakers too if I may, and also draw out some of the points that particularly struck me when reading everyone's posts in this topic. I'd love to hear back from you all if you agree or disagree with any of it!

From the f2f workshops to academics that I have delivered in DIT and elsewhere around the country this past x number of years (far too long!), I have encountered some teachers who really dislike icebreakers generally, especially when they feel they are trivial or just plain silly. Many others do acknowledge they have a positive role, especially where they are directly

related to the project/task and are subsequently incorporated into the later discussions (as you say Clare, the same would apply in the corporate world). Yes, it's all coming back to the audience.

We have seen some excellent examples from people's practice this week for first year students (cheers Barry and Steve) and new teams in an industry setting (thanks to Angela and John). For final year students in a group perhaps discussing project interests and saying how they relate to the project or thinking about the problems around an issue that will be subsequently tackled would work better?

Fair play to you John for taking on the devil's advocate role here :) by asking do we really need online icebreakers? Highlighting the barriers that exist in an online vs f2f environment is something that is coming out in several of the posts this week, and something I'll come back to at the end of this post. One of the most challenging things to do in an online course is to try to get learners engaged in critical thinking. Steve's idea of "explaining something complicated that you don't think I know in 5 minutes/100 words" would be a nice way to kick-start this.

As Jim says, sometimes a straightforward introduction can suffice depending on the context of the learners and Enda highlighted what can work when faced with a "mixture of mature and young learners" – something that faces most of us at some time or another.

Both Edel and Debbie mentioned a "safe and secure learning environment" and ensuring that "each student is included and dispel any feeling of being alone" respectively – this is so true as well as directing the right type of icebreaker for the audience at hand, that the climate for icebreakers would be all important too.

I read some interesting tips about icebreakers in the Edie West book called "The big book of icebreakers: 50 quick, fun activities for energizing meetings and workshops". Some of the tips can help us avoid annoying or even boring icebreakers. The author says that anyone can use icebreakers, but using them successfully requires practice and skill. The book gives us some useful questions to think about when planning to use an Icebreaker:

- Why am I thinking about using an icebreaker? In other words, what value would an icebreaker add to this situation?
- What would be the result if I didn't use an icebreaker?
- What icebreaker would create the experience needed?
- How will this group of people react to this Icebreaker?
- How should I introduce it, facilitate it, and close it?
- How will I know if it's been successful? (Go back to #1)
- What's the worst that could happen if I use an icebreaker, and how would I deal with it?

Gilly Salmon has also offered some alternatives to the 'embarrassing' ones that exist out there for adult learners in particular - would they appreciate more the following options directly related to whatever group task lies ahead?

- In 1-2 sentences, each participant explore the nature of success on the online course.
- Each participant offers a contribution to the 'netiquette' of the group. Build a commonly agreed list of the contributions.
- Offer a learning styles or team roles inventory. Ask participants to discuss their styles and how they think their styles will manifest itself in the online environment.

- Ask participants what single thing would improve the quality of their online communication. Who could help to achieve this?
- Set up a 'skills and knowledge' market. Each participant states some help that he or she would like from one other participant. In return, they agree to help one other person (a bit like mentoring).
- Set up a 'discovery' area for participants to publish their own tips and tricks on the technology (Sound familiar?!)

For a sense of added value, I suppose it can boil down to this - any icebreaker that focuses on a learning experience (possibly involving research being required for the original post), prompting an exchange of views and being a people networking opportunity - can all increase its effectiveness.

As a final reflection this sunny Friday morning, I think it can be useful to be clear on the notion that not every group activity/game/exercise is an ice-breaker. As you have all very helpfully outlined in your posts, ice-breakers perform a very specific function at the start of a group's life, but similar activities can be useful at other times too:

- re-energise groups that are falling asleep,
- change the tone or mood when things are getting out of hand,
- refocus on practical application when the discussion is too theoretical,
- have a bit of fun after working hard on something, etc.

In my experience, which is mainly with groups of adults, managing these aspects are an important part of the facilitator role. But, as some of you have rightly indicated, since much of the information about how participants are feeling come from non-verbal cues in a f2f group, I consistently juggle with translating the guidelines I use for myself to an online situation. Any further thoughts welcome!

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Plea for **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Simplicity

**Author:**

Jim **Date:** 03 February 2012 6:34 PM  
Ffrench

Well said Clare. Being one of the very few teachers, it appears, who hasn't used any of the list of icebreakers that have been suggested here, I have delivered to 'audiences' whom the majority would consider these icebreakers to be 'time-wasting frivolity'. Having said that, I can definitely see a use for some with other groups, and knowing about them does allow me to chose. As you say, knowing your audience and their skillsets/experience is key.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Thread: Plea  
for Simplicity

**Author:**

Angela Walsh **Date:** 03 February 2012 7:16 PM

Hi Clare

You're absolutely right about corporate audiences. Some of the ice breakers I've mentioned have been used with induction groups who don't know each other but where people know

each other and are attending a training session the feeling usually is let's get to the point and there is an audible groan when just after sitting down people are asked to stand up and participate in something they feel is a waste of time. We have started to use ice breakers related to the topic at hand. We have found that they help focus people on what we are about to discuss and get the chat going.

Angela

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Thread: Plea  
for Simplicity

**Author:** Nuala Sweeney-Burt **Date:** 04 February 2012 11:01 AM

Clare, I should have read your comment before I posted my own - my excuse is that I got lost in the thread! I completely agree with you about the question of the audience. When I have been in a room with a corporate audience, I can imagine the reaction to some potential ice-breaker activities. The focus is often much more on 'how long will this take?', 'why do I need to do it anyway?' and 'what exactly will I get out of this?' Roisin's questions to ask would be really important to me in that context - such as, what's appropriate to the audience, and what if I don't do an ice-breaker?

Your suggestion of a simple approach with introductions and 'what do you hope to get out of this session?' is one that I would typically use - I suppose I just never labeled that as an ice-breaker, but if it serves the purpose of an ice-breaker, then it is one!

Reply

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Thread

**Author:** Hugh Mullan **Date:** 03 February 2012 3:37 PM

Hello all efriends,

Here we go...

1 It would be nice if online webinars, meetings etc. Were as straight forward as using the dial up telephone used to be. I was scared of skypeing for a long time especially after noticing quite a delay the first few times. I'm still a little nervous every time I need to participate in an online live meeting or some such. This is probably not helped by the fact that problems are still regular enough

2 If we all had high quality broadband connections that would help a lot of the above issues I suppose.

3 If everything happened a little quicker with computers. Turning it on, logging on, getting the internet going, going to the site you want, logging in there, finding the place you want to be in.

4 Wouldn't it be nice if we could agree on one web browser, one software company, one programme for everything darn it! or at least fewer than we are expected to introduce ourselves to and engage with so often, we had a meeting in work the other day on skype, the next one was in adobe connect, why?

5 Can we abolish passwords? I have more passwords than I care to remember. Let's have a webcam in every computer for retinal scanning. You'll automatically get an account and

automatically log in ever after.

Hugh.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Hugh's **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Wish List

**Author:**

Roisin **Date:** 03 February 2012 4:18 PM  
Donnelly

Good to hear from you Hugh on your wish list - and really like the eFriends intro!

When you get a chance, would love to hear some of your ideas on icebreakers too!

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
Discussion **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation  
Thread

**Author:** Hugh

Mullan **Date:** 03 February 2012 7:46 PM

To keep this focused on something that could be used by me in my own discipline I am going to consider a group project that I have just launched with first year students.

We have four programmes and I have all four in this module - around 70 students in total. I have chosen the groups at random to encourage cross programme contact. I'm aware that this may introduce difficulties although I'm comfortable with this.

As the groups will have cross programme members there is a need for an ice breaker. I launched the project last week in class and asked the groups to get together. I had previously asked them to do some individual research and the groups first task was for each member to discuss what they had found with the others with a view to the groups project being based on the most interesting / promising topic of the four.

The next week I asked the groups to sit together again at the beginning of class. Then I gave the class. At one point I gave a problem to be solved individually using pen and paper to draw an answer. As they were drawing away it struck me that this could be a great activity to promote ice breaking within the groups and also peer learning as described so well by Eric Mazur when he asked his students to talk amongst themselves.

How does this relate to the topic at hand? Could a group who are seldom or never going to meet be given a problem, module related to solve as an ice breaker?

I feel they should be in the same (virtual) place at the same time, or not? A thought that occurred would be for the group to be forced to meet in a virtual room (2nd life for instance) and for each to be given a task to fit out the space. One member chooses the colours , another chooses the furniture ...

They could be given a preliminary individual job to do and be told to meet at a specified time in the space and have the conversation as described above. Perhaps this would be too formal. Perhaps the icebreaker session isn't supposed to be focussed in any way.

Hugh.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:** **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

Role of

anonymity  
in online  
groups?

**Author:**

Roisin Donnelly **Date:** 03 February 2012 7:46 PM

Hugh, I imagine others will have thoughts on this too.

Your question - "could a group who are seldom or never going to meet or be given a problem...to solve as an ice breaker?" - caught my eye.

It relates to another aspect of online work in that the possibility of anonymity in the online environment may encourage learners to say more about themselves and share at a deeper level than they would in a normal f2f group, especially if they don't know anything about each other to begin with.

'Give a man a mask and he will tell you the truth'  
(Wilde). Maybe we feel protected by the virtual space, especially with the use of something like an avator in SecondLife?

BTW, have you used Second Life before? Kevin will be introducing it to the Trends in eLearning module coming up on the tail of this one for those that would like to know more.

[Reply](#)

**Subject:**

Re:Icebreakers  
- from  
corporate  
clients to  
children

**Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:** Nuala Sweeney-Burt **Date:** 04 February 2012 10:37 AM

I had to think about this one for a while... my experience with classroom situations is in two quite different scenarios - in corporate training, where you are hired by a corporate client to deliver a programme, and in primary classrooms. In the corporate scenario, the focus is often on 'time is precious' and 'bang for buck', so I've done very little in the way of taking time for ice-breakers, and often thought they were a bit of a luxury. Having browsed some of the links and followed others' discussion contributions, however, I can definitely see the value of them.

I am also conscious of my own experience as a learner, where I have found in past experiences that the ice-breaker made me less comfortable rather than the presumably intended effect of making me more comfortable! I have been in a few situations where the ice-breaker required you to say something that I would consider quite personal, and being first to be asked in a group of strangers made it even worse!

With those considerations in mind, I like the montage-a-google idea a lot - it looks like it could be fun, non-intrusive and get everyone chatting informally, and it's suitable for the online environment.

I also like the '2 truths and a lie' idea - it could help people to get to know each other, again in a fun way.

I thought Angela raised two other very valuable aspects of ice-breakers, with her suggestions for activities to 'refresh' a group, and encourage people to break away from their usual clusters.

To refer briefly to my other classroom scenario - in a room full of children - I usually just do a bit of substitute teaching now and again, and that's a completely different situation, with a whole range of other factors to consider, just starting with the fact that they all know each

other, but you don't know them at all. Where I have done learning support teaching, however - with individuals and small groups - the activities we have explored here have lots of application in terms of, for example, teacher-student getting to know each other, making the learning environment comfortable and relaxed, and simply making learning fun.

Reply

**Subject:**

Sample IceBreakers **Topic:** Induction Activities: Online Socialisation

**Author:**

Enda O Reilly **Date:** 05 February 2012 8:20 PM

Hello all

Some icebreakers to keep you busy. I have used the attached document over the past couple of years to get ideas for icebreakers. It is suitable for teenagers and adults. Its fairly long but if you scroll down into the document you will find easy to use icebreakers which may come in handy.

Enda

Attachments: [96 Group Activities.pdf](#)

Reply

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