**First Day of Class Activities that Create a Climate for Learning**

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There’s no discounting the importance of the first day of class. What happens that day sets the tone for the rest of the course. Outlined below are a few novel activities for using that first day of class to emphasize the importance of learning and the responsibility students share for shaping the classroom environment.

**Best and Worst Classes –** I love this quick and easy activity. On one section of the blackboard I write: “The best class I’ve ever had” and underneath it “What the teacher did” and below that “What the students did.” On another section I write “The worst class I’ve ever had” (well, actually I write, “The class from hell”) and then the same two items beneath. I ask students to share their experiences, without naming the course, department or teacher, and I begin filling in the grid based on what they call out. If there’s a lull or not many comments about what the students did in these classes, I add some descriptors based on my experience with some of my best and worst classes. In 10 minutes or less, two very different class portraits emerge. I move to the best class section of the board and tell students that this is the class I want to teach, but I can’t do it alone. Together we have the power to make this one of those “best class” experiences.

**First Day Graffiti –** This is an adaptation of an activity proposed by Barbara Goza in the *Journal of Management Educatio*n in 1993. Flip charts with markers beneath are placed around the classroom. Each chart has a different sentence stem. Here are a few examples:

“I learn best in classes where the teacher \_\_\_”
“Students in courses help me learn when they \_\_\_”
“I am most likely to participate in classes when \_\_\_”
“Here’s something that makes it hard to learn in a course: \_\_\_”
“Here’s something that makes it easy to learn in a course: \_\_\_”

Students are invited to walk around the room and write responses, chatting with each other and the teacher as they do. After there are comments on every flip chart, the teacher walks to each one and talks a bit about one or two of the responses. If you run out of time, you can conduct the debriefing during the next session.

**Syllabus Speed Dating –** Karen Eifler, an education professor at the University of Portland, designed this activity. Two rows of chairs face each other (multiple rows of two can be used in larger classes). Students sit across from each other, each with a copy of the syllabus that they’ve briefly reviewed. Eifler asks two questions: one about something in the syllabus and one of a more personal nature. The pair has a short period of time to answer both questions. Eifler checks to make sure the syllabus question has been answered correctly. Then students in one of the rows move down one seat and Eifler asks the new pair two different questions. Not only does this activity get students acquainted with each other, it’s a great way to get them reading the syllabus and finding out for themselves what they need to know about the course.

**Irritating Behaviors: Theirs and Ours –** This activity grows out of research done by D. Appleton in 1990 (*The Journal of Staff, Program and Organizational Development*). His findings are a bit dated now, but the idea is not. Appleton asked students to list faculty behaviors that most irritate them. He had faculty do the same for student behaviors. I’d put students in groups and have them respond to a slightly different question: “What are the five things faculty do that make learning hard?” Or, asked positively, “What are the five things faculty do that make it easy to learn?” Collect the lists and make a master list to share in class or online. Below the five things faculty do, you can also list the five things students do that make it hard or easy to teach. The follow-up conversation is about how the teacher and students can each commit to not doing what appears on their respective “hard” list and have a better class experience as a result.

**How to create curiosity for things to come:**

Hand out a quiz with questions all based on the course material – they can be about advanced content or can relate more “larger” philosophical questions. Tell the students they are to “cheat" on this quiz: work in groups, use smart phones ..... The answers are discussed afterwards with the class. Content questions remind them what they don't know and get them curious to find out (you can make these questions very hard to answer even using Google) and of course the more philosophical questions are introducing a class culture of free discussion and critical thinking.

**The following activity ideas are taken from:** [**http://www.icebreakers.ws**](http://www.icebreakers.ws)

[**Bigger and Better**](http://www.icebreakers.ws/medium-group/bigger-and-better.html)

Bigger and Better is a team building activity in which teams compete by trading ordinary objects. The winner is the team that ends up with the biggest and best items when time expires.

This active teambuilding exercise requires six people at minimum, and can support very large groups if the teams are divided evenly. Teams should be about three to six people in size. This game involves interacting with lots of strangers in a public place such as a school campus. Props required include small objects such as paper clips or pens (one for each team). Recommended age is 18 and up. This game can be played with adults and even in corporate settings. When playing with younger people, please be sure to provide proper supervision when necessary.

**Setup for Bigger and Better**
To prepare for Bigger and Better, get several paper clips or some small objects that are low in value. Be sure to have enough to provide one per team.

**Playing Bigger and Better**
Explain the rules to everyone: You will give each team a small object, and their job is to keep trading and upgrading their team’s object to obtain the largest and most valuable item possible. They may not offer anything other than the item they have, and they must stick together as a group. Set a time limit, such as one or two hours, and tell everyone that they must be back in time or else they will be disqualified. Announce that each team’s item will be judged in three categories: size, value, and creativity.

Divide the group into teams of three to six. Pass out the paper clip (or other small object) to the each group and send them off. When time expires, the judging process begins. Each team presents their item before the entire group. They explain why their item is biggest and best. At the end, choose winners for each of the three categories, or judge the items in any other way you wish. This activity involves good teamwork and creativity as each team coordinates their efforts and decides what strategies they will approach when playing. Camaraderie will be built, and surprises will come out of the activity. Who knows, a group might be able to turn a paper clip into a car! Well, maybe a toy car.

**Candy Introductions (Use items relating to course content instead of candy!)**

Candy Introductions is a get-to-know-you game that helps people learn new facts about each other in an easy way.  They select various pieces of candy from a bag, and each candy variety is associated with a fact about themselves which they will introduce to the others. This game also goes by other names, including the M&M game, Candy Confessions, the Skittles Game, the Gum Drop game, among others.

Candy Introductions can work with any group size.  The icebreaker works best when the group size is limited to 12, so if you have more than 12, divide the larger group and run the icebreaker within the smaller sized groups.  This icebreaker works best indoors, and is well suited for classrooms or meeting rooms.  Materials required are: candy with about five different variations (color or candy type), and an optional chalkboard/whiteboard.

**Setup for Candy Introductions**

Purchase several variety packs of candy, enough for each person to be able to have at least five pieces.  They can be any candy type, but not too many choices (limit it to around five or six different varieties).  Alternatively, you can buy gummy bears, life savers, gum drops, skittles, m&ms, or any other candy that already has a variety of colors.

**Instructions for How to Play**

Pass around the candy and tell each participant to choose anywhere from 1 to 5 pieces of anything that they want.  Instruct them not to eat it yet, though.  After they have chosen their candy, you will tell them what each candy type/color represents.

If there is a whiteboard or chalkboard present, write on the board the following:

* Red – Favorite hobbies
* Green – Favorite place on earth
* Blue – Favorite memory
* Yellow -Dream job
* Orange – Wildcard (tell us anything about yourself!)

If you don’t have the above colors, change the above to match the candy types that you have.  Each person takes turns introducing himself or herself, beginning with their name and then saying one fact for each candy type that they have.  This easy introduction game should go relatively quickly (assuming they weren’t greedy and that they didn’t take too many pieces of candy!)

**D**[**efend the Egg**](http://www.icebreakers.ws/medium-group/defend-the-egg.html)

Defend the Egg (also known as the Great Egg Drop) is a teambuilding activity that involves collaboration, problem solving, and creative teamwork.  Groups build a structure out of ordinary materials and try to protect a raw egg from breaking when dropped from a high elevation.

This exercise in teambuilding can be messy, so choose an appropriate setting where making a mess is acceptable.  The recommended group size is: teams of four or five people.  Several materials are needed: raw eggs, several plastic straws, masking tape, newspaper, and other materials of your choice.  This activity is for people ages 14 and up.

**Setup for Defend the Egg**

This game works well with teams that are not too large.  A good team size is four or five people.  Pass out one egg and a limited supply of materials (e.g. four straws, a three foot strip of tape, one section of a newspaper, etc.)  This activity is more challenging with less materials provided, so decide how challenging you wish to make it.

**Gameplay for Defend the Egg**

Explain the rules: the mission is to protect the egg from cracking using teamwork, creativity, and a good design.  You will drop each structure at least fifteen feet, and so the goal is for each structure to be able to withstand such a fall.  Each team will only be given limited resources, and so they must be wise with what they have.  They may not use any other resources other than what is given to them.  Optionally, you can have other critera for judging including:

* most creative design
* most stylish/visually appealing
* (any other awards you wish)

Decide on an appropriate amount of time (e.g. 20-25 minutes) and then instruct them to begin!  Tell them to place their egg inside their structure.

Be sure to supervise each team as they build their structure.

When time is up, collect all the structures.  Now is dramatic finale in which the structures are dropped (or thrown!) from at least 15 feet in elevation and then carefully inspected to see if the eggs survived. The winners are the groups that successfully protected the egg.  If you chose to have other awards, announce those winners also.

This activity is useful to illustrate the importance of teamwork.  Ask everyone to reflect on how their group accomplished the task, what worked, what was challenging, etc.

**Variation**

A much more challenging variation of this activity is to provide no materials (other than the egg) and ask the participants to find materials from outdoors.

## [Fear in a Hat](http://www.icebreakers.ws/medium-group/fear-in-a-hat.html)

A good activity to run at the beginning of a class semester, Fear in a Hat (Also known as Worries in a Hat) is a teambuilding exercise that promotes unity and group cohesion. Individuals write their personal fears (anonymously) on sheets of paper which is then collected in a hat and read aloud. Each person tries to describe his or her understanding of the person’s fear. This leads to good discussion centered around the fears.

This teambuilding exercise requires writing utensils, sheets of paper, and a hat. Allow about five minutes of writing time, plus one to two minutes per participant. The recommended group size is at least eight, but no larger than 20. It’s possible to run this activity with a large group, if the group is divided into smaller groups and if there are enough facilitators. This activity is for people ages 14 and up.

**Setup for Fear in a Hat**
Distribute a sheet of paper and a writing utensil to each person. Instruct them to anonymously write a fear or worry that they have. Tell them to be as specific and as honest as possible, but not in such a way that they could be easily identified. After everyone is done writing a fear/worry (including the group leaders), collect each sheet into a large hat.

**Running the Fear in a Hat Teambuilding Activity**
Shuffle the sheets and pass out one per person. Take turns reading one fear aloud, and each reader should attempt to explain what the person who wrote the fear means. Do not allow any sort of comments on what the reader said. Simply listen and go on to the next reader.

After all fears have been read and elaborated, discuss as a whole group what some of the common fears were. This teambuilding exercise can easily lead to a discussion of a team contract, or goals that the group wishes to achieve. This activity also helps build trust and unity, as people come to realize that everyone has similar fears.

**i[cebreaker Questions](http://www.icebreakers.ws/small-group/icebreaker-questions.html%22%20%5Co%20%22Permanent%20Link%3A%20Icebreaker%20Questions) – teacher could have a file and keep adding new ones … (tool box!)**

Icebreaker Questions is simply a list of 20 great questions that you can ask people to help them feel more part of a group or team.  These questions are fun and non-threatening.  You can use them as an icebreaker for meetings or classrooms, written on notecards and adapted for other games, or simply as a fun activity to help people get to know each other better.

**Instructions for Icebreaker Questions**

A great way to help people open up is to ask them fun questions that allow them to express their personality or interesting things about them.  Here is a list of twenty safe, useful icebreaker questions to help break the ice:

1. If you could have an endless supply of any food, what would you get?
2. If you were an animal, what would you be and why?
3. What is one goal you’d like to accomplish during your lifetime?
4. When you were little, who was your favorite super hero and why?
5. Who is your hero? (a parent, a celebrity, an influential person in one’s life)
6. What’s your favorite thing to do in the summer?
7. If they made a movie of your life, what would it be about and which actor would you want to play you?
8. If you were an ice cream flavor, which one would you be and why?
9. What’s your favorite cartoon character, and why?
10. If you could visit any place in the world, where would you choose to go and why
11. What’s the ideal dream job for you?
12. Are you a morning or night person?
13. What are your favorite hobbies?
14. What are your pet peeves or interesting things about you that you dislike?
15. What’s the weirdest thing you’ve ever eaten?
16. Name one of your favorite things about someone in your family.
17. Tell us about a unique or quirky habit of yours.
18. If you had to describe yourself using three words, it would be…
19. If someone made a movie of your life would it be a drama, a comedy, a romantic-comedy, action film, or science fiction?
20. If I could be anybody besides myself, I would be…
21. If you were a comic strip character, who would you be and why?
22. What thought or message would you want to put in a fortune cookie?
23. If you had to give up a favorite food, which would be the most difficult to give up?
24. What is one food you’d never want to taste again?
25. If you won a lottery ticket and had a million dollars, what would you do with it?
26. You’ve been given access to a time machine.  Where and when would you travel to?
27. If you could be any superhero and have super powers, which one would you like to have and why?
28. Mount Rushmore honors four U.S. presidents: Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt.  If you could add any person to Mount Rushmore, who would you add and why?
29. What award would you love to win and for what achievement?
30. If you could transport yourself anywhere instantly, where would you go and why?
31. In your opinion, which animal is the best (or most beautiful) and why?
32. What is one item that you really should throw away, but probably never will?
33. Growing up, what were your favorite toys to play with as a child?

## [Lost on a Deserted Island](http://www.icebreakers.ws/small-group/lost-on-a-deserted-island.html)

Lost on a Deserted Island is a teambuilding activity that also helps people share a little about themselves.  Given the scenario that everyone is lost and stranded on a deserted island, each person describes one object that they would bring and why.

This game is a teambuilding and get-to-know-you icebreaker.  The recommended group size is medium, although small and large group sizes are possible too.  An indoor setting is ideal.  No special props or materials are required.  This icebreaker works well for any age, including adults and corporate settings.

**Instructions for Lost on a Deserted Island**

The situation is dire — following a shipwreck, everyone has been stranded on a deserted island!  Each person is allowed to bring one object to the island — ideally something that represents them or something that they enjoy.  The first part of this icebreaker is simple: each person is asked to describe what object they would bring and why.  This need not be realistic; if someone loves music, he or she might choose to bring a guitar, or an animal lover might choose to bring a dog, a food lover might choose to bring sirloin steaks, and so on.  Encourage people to be creative.

After everyone has introduced their object and why they have chosen that object, the teambuilding portion follows.  Divide into smaller groups and ask everyone to work together to improve their chances of survival by combining the various objects that they introduced.  If necessary, you can add more objects, but be sure to use all the objects that everyone mentioned.  If you wish, you can reward the most creative group with a prize.

Lost on a Deserted Island is an approachable way to get people to open up and share a little bit about themselves and what they enjoy or value.

## [Never Have I Ever](http://www.icebreakers.ws/small-group/never-have-i-ever.html)

Never Have I Ever is an icebreaker game that helps people get to know each other better.  Everyone sits in a circle and take turns saying something they have never done.  Each player starts with ten fingers showing.  Each time says something that you’ve done, you drop a finger. The goal is to be the last player remaining.

This get-to-know-you game can be played indoors or outdoors.  The recommended number of people for this game is ten to fifteen, but all group sizes can play by dividing into appropriate sized groups.  Recommended age is 8 and up.  No special materials are required.

**Instructions for Never Have I Ever**

Instruct everyone to sit in a circle.  If you have an extremely large group, tell people to form smaller circles of about ten to fifteen people.  To start each round, each player holds out all ten fingers and places them on the floor.  Go around the circle and one at a time, each person announces something that they have never done, beginning the sentence with the phrase “Never have I ever…”  For example, a person could say, “Never have I ever been to Europe.”  For each statement that is said, all the other players drop a finger if they have done that statement.  So, if three other people have been to Europe before, those three people must put down a finger, leaving them with nine fingers.  The goal is to stay in the game the longest (to be the last person with fingers remaining).  To win, it’s a good strategy to say statements that most people have done, but you haven’t.

Playing this game, along with the benefit of getting to know each others’ experiences better, can be very humorous (e.g. saying silly statements such as, “Never have I ever skipped a class in school”)  Have fun!

## [String Game](http://www.icebreakers.ws/small-group/string-game.html)

The String Game is an introduction icebreaker game and conversation starter that allows people to  tell others about themselves.  It’s a simple game and can be adapted according to your needs.

This getting-to-know-you game usually does not take long, unless you choose to run it that way.  The recommended group size is small and medium groups, although with careful planning it might be possible to do this activity in a large group by splitting it into smaller groups.  An indoor setting is ideal.  This icebreaker is recommended for young children up through eighth grade.  It’s well suited for classrooms, camps, or other settings where people may not know each other very well yet.

**Instructions for the String Game**

This activity needs a little bit of preparation work.  Purchase a big roll of yarn or string.  You can buy any color, or multiple colors if you wish.  Take a pair of scissors and cut strings of various different lengths — as short as 12 inches, and as long as 30 or more inches.

When you are finished cutting the string, bunch all the pieces up into one big clump of string.

To play, ask the first volunteer to choose any piece of string.  Have the person pull on it and separate it from the other pieces of string.  Ask them to introduce themselves as they slowly wind the piece of string around their index finger.   The funny part of this icebreaker game is that some of the strings are extremely long, so sometimes a person must keep talking for a very long time!  This is a good way to get everyone to start talking.  People might find out something interesting or new about each other!  Feel free to adapt this game according to your needs.  Have fun.

[**Trust Walk Teambuilding Activity**](http://www.icebreakers.ws/small-group/trust-walk-teambuilding-activity.html)

The Trust Walk is a teambuilding activity that helps people practice trusting each other.  A leader steers his or her partner around obstacles using verbal or nonverbal instructions.

This activity is an active teambuilding activity that requires a great deal of space.  An outdoor setting with some obstacles (but nothing too dangerous!) is ideal.  The recommended group size is: small, medium, or large.  Participants will form pairs.  Materials required include blindfolds and any props that you can set up as minor obstacles.  This activity is for ages 14 and up.

**Instructions for the Trust Walk Teambuilding Activity**

The Trust Walk Activity is an effective team building activity involving leadership and building trust, as blindfolded participants must rely on instructions given to them in order to avoid various obstacles.

As the faciliator of the Trust Walk Teambuilding Activity, be sure to scout out a safe area in advance.  Large fields or the woods may be good places to try.  Minor obstacles (trees, branches, small hills) are okay, but do not play this game in a dangerous environment (for example, anywhere with very steep ledges or sharp protruding objects).  Once you have found a safe, large area, you can prepare additional obstacles if desired (cardboard boxes, balloons, etc.).

Start in a nearby location.  Ask participants to arrange themselves into pairs.  Instruct one partner to be the guide (navigator) and the other to be blindfolded.  Once the blindfolded partner is ready, slowly spin the person around a few times so that they are unsure which direction they are headed.   Guide the participants to the field with obstacles.  From this point on, the guide should not touch the partner at all, but rely solely on verbal cues (e.g. “In approximately five steps ahead, there will be a tree branch.  Go ahead and step over it slowly.”)

Remember that the guide is solely responsible for his or her partner’s safety.  He or she try their best to steer their partner away from obstacles.  Valuable lessons can be learned to teamwork and unity.  For example, the guide will learn about the challenge and responsibility of caring for another individual’s well being, while the blindfolded partner learns to trust and rely on another person.

**Reflection of the Trust Walk Activity**

If desired, ask participants to reflect and share what they learned from this experience.  The following are some sample questions to ask following the Trust Walk team building activity:

* What was it like to be the “guide,” being fully responsible for the safety of your partner?
* What do you think was the purpose of this team building activity?
* Did you have any difficulty trusting your partner while blindfolded? Why or why not?
* Why is trusting your teammates important?
* Afterwards, how did it feel when you and your teammate successfully trusted each other to accomplish something challenging?
* How does this relate to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (here you can fill in the blank with the current scenario of the participants, such as class, a sports team, employees working together on a project, etc.)?

## [Two Truths and a Lie](http://www.icebreakers.ws/small-group/two-truths-and-a-lie.html)

Two Truths and a Lie is a classic get-to-know-you icebreaker. Players tell two truths and one lie. The object of the game is to to determine which statement is the false one. Interesting variations of this game are provided below.

This game is a get-to-know-you icebreaker.  Recommended group size is: small, medium, or large.  Works best with 6-10 people.  Any indoor setting will work.  No special materials are needed, although pencil and paper is optional.  For all ages.

**Instructions for Two Truths and a Lie**

Ask all players to arrange themselves in a circle. Instruct each player to think of three statements about themselves. Two must be true statements, and one must be false. For each person, he or she shares the three statements (in any order) to the group. The goal of the icebreaker game is to determine which statement is false. The group votes on which one they feel is a lie, and at the end of each round, the person reveals which one was the lie.

**Variations to Try**

“Two Truths and a Dream Wish.” – An interesting variation of Two Truths and a Lie is “Two Truths and a Dream Wish.” Instead of telling a lie, a person says a wish. That is, something that is not true — yet something that the person wishes to be true. For example, someone that has never been to Europe might say: “I often travel to Europe for vacation.” This interesting spin on the icebreaker can often lead to unexpected, fascinating results, as people often share touching wishes about themselves.

## [Unique and Shared](http://www.icebreakers.ws/medium-group/unique-and-shared.html)

Unique and Shared is a get-to-know-you game as well as a team-building activity.  The game helps people see that they have more in common with their peers than they might initially realize, while highlighting their own individual strengths that they can contribute to the group.

An indoor setting is preferable.  Participants will split into groups of about five people, so this activity works fine with medium, large, and even some extra large groups.  Each group of five needs paper and a pen.  This activity is for all ages.

**Instructions for Unique and Shared**

Ask participants to form groups of five people with the people around them.  Pass out sheets of paper and writing utensil.  The first half of the activity is the Shared part.  Instruct a notetaker for each group to create a list of many common traits or qualities that members of the group have in common.   Avoid writing things that are immediately obvious (e.g. don’t write down something like “everyone has hair” or “we are all wearing clothes”).  The goal is for everyone to dig deeper than the superficial.  Allow about five or six minutes and then have a spokesperson from each subgroup read their list.  If there are too many groups, ask for a few volunteers to read their list.

The second half is the Unique part.  Keep the same groups or, optionally, you can ask everyone to rearrange themselves into new groups.  On a second sheet of paper have them record Unique traits and qualities; that is, items that only apply to one person in the group.  Instruct the group to find at least two unique qualities and strengths per person.  Again, strive for qualities and strengths beyond the superficial and past the obvious things anyone can readily see.  Allow another five or six minutes.  When time is up, share the unique qualities in one of the following ways: (1) each person can share one of their unique qualities themselves; (2) have each person read the qualities of the person to their right; or (3) have a spokesperson read a quality one at a time, and have the others guess who it was.

Unique and Shared is a valuable team-building activity because 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.

[**Who Done It (Whodunit)**](http://www.icebreakers.ws/medium-group/who-done-it-whodunit.html)

Who Done It? is an icebreaker that reveals interesting (and sometimes incredible!) things people have done. It’s a simple guessing game that is straightforward to play.

This game is a get-to-know-you style icebreaker in which players try to guess which person corresponds to each item written on notecards.  The recommended group size is a medium sized group of about eight to sixteen people, although the game can be adapted to accommodate other sized groups.  Playing this icebreaker indoors is most ideal.  Materials required are: several notecards and pens. Who Done It? is playable by all ages, including college students and adults in corporate settings.

**Setup and Gameplay for Who Done It (Whodunit?)**

This game can be played individually or with two teams.  For extremely large groups, choose ten volunteers and split them into two teams of five.  To set up the game, pass out an index card and a pen for each participant.  Ask each person to write down something interesting they have done.  Examples include the following:

* I went skydiving once.
* I got arrested before.
* I once drank a gallon of milk.
* I lived in seven different states.
* I ate bugs before.

Try to instruct people to write a fact that most people don’t already know – the sillier (or more unbelievable) the better.  Collect all the cards (separate them into two piles if two teams are playing).  Shuffle the cards and then pass them back out.  Each person (or team) takes turns reading aloud their card and then the reader must guess whose fact he or she read. After he or she guesses, the guessed person simply says “yes” or “no”.  If the person guesses correctly, the guessed person can briefly explain what they wrote (if desired).  The guessing continues until all cards are exhausted.  Everyone reveals who wrote which card at the end.

The Who Done It? game is a good, simple get-to-know-you game that is especially good for groups with new people, or for whenever you wish to help people get to know each other better to break the ice.  Sometimes humorous facts can be revealed, leading people to exclaim, “You did WHAT?”