

Breaking the Ice

~ Nihal ElRayess | [Visit My Site](#) ~

Below I've compiled a list of top icebreakers, whip-arounds and energizers from years of meetings, conferences, and sources on the web. But first, when you're kicking off or taking a break during a meeting, conference, or gathering, consider what your "ice" represents. [Tim Hallett](#) identified the following situations:

- If you bring like-minded people together, the ice represents the fact that people haven't met yet.
- If you bring together people from different backgrounds and cultures, the ice represents the different perceptions of one another.
- If you bring together people at different levels of organization, the ice represents the perception of status differences within the organization.
- If you bring together delegates and speakers, the ice represents the question "Why should I listen to you?"

**Intro adapted from blog.sli.do*

Energizers/Movement/Team-Spirit-Building/Communication

Group Rock Paper Scissors

- Time: 5 minutes for a large group, the larger the more time.
- Size: Minimum 20 people, no real max (the more the longer time). Best for: Large groups
- Purpose: Spirit, get up and move, team, winner
- Noteworthy: Loud, space is flexible - people can make their way around tables, etc (just need arm/hand space to put out hands for RPS)
- What: Everyone stands up and turns to a nearby person. Plays RPS, loser gets behind winner and chants their name as they go to the next winner. By the end there are two big groups of folks chanting their winner's name and the last 2 face off for the final winner.

Throw a Sound Ball

- Time: 5 minutes
- Size: Groups of 5-10

- Purpose: Move around, interact, warm up, get uncomfortable while also getting comfortable with group
- Noteworthy: Do need to face each other as a group. Works well when a group of folks is sitting at a round table (they can stand in their spot and do this).
- What: Everyone stands, orients ideally in a circle. In turn, each person uses their hand as though throwing something. They throw a “sound” at someone. That person catches the sound, makes that same sound and then throws a new sound at someone else. Get faster and faster.

Pass the Hand Clap

- Time: 2-5 minutes (depending on how much time you go around)
- Size: All (although less than 4 would be awkward)
- Purpose: Interact, teamwork (intuiting someone else)
- Noteworthy: Need to get in a continuous circular line or orientation
- What: Starting with one person, they turn to the person next to them and try to clap at the same exact time, that person turns to the person on their other side and does the same, until you pass the clap all the way around the circle. Repeat getting faster and faster.

Human Formation

- Time: 10-15 min
- Purpose: Teamwork, interaction, visual/body-language syncing
- What: Form groups. Assign the group an object to create physically without talking. Give them 1 minute. The rest of the participants watch. Competitive twist: Tell the group their object in secret and ask the rest of participants to guess what it is. Objects aren’t posted here to ensure mystery when I use this. If you’d like some tips, email me.

Trading Cards

- Time: 10-15 min depending on number of people
- Size: Large group
- Purpose: Move around, have fun, ideally laugh
- What: Create multiple sets of trading cards. Mix up the cards and give each participant one. Explain what a “whole set” is (without showing it explicitly) and ask them to form a whole set. E.g., If using a superhero card set, you might say “there are sets of 7 superheroes; or use humorously framed sets of an organizations teams or projects and say “a full set is 7 of our projects.” The participants should be able to quickly figure out as they engage each other what goes into a set. If making this a competition, you can have incomplete sets so only one or two full sets could ever be formed and win. ALTERNATE: If you have a smaller group

of participants, you could have entire sets for each participant. At the beginning they would receive an incomplete/mixed up set (but the right amount of cards). They will trade with each other until they form a complete set.

Animal Imitation

- Time: 10-15 min depending on size of groups
- Size: Can be done in groups simultaneously (5-10 people in each group) or as the whole group if it's not bigger than 15
- Purpose: Interact, engage
- What: People have to imitate an animal and the rest of the group guesses what it is.

Yes, And...

- Time: 10 min
- Size: Pairs
- Purpose: Engage and also open up "sense of possibility"... move into possibility mindset, creativity mindset
- What: Explain the idea of "Yes, and" and practice it with this activity. Pick a topic (e.g., going on a trip) and the pair basically takes turn elaborating on a trip together. They always elaborate using "yes, and" and avoid any instinct for "no" "but" .. even working through difference in opinion, preferences leveraging "yes, and."
- More resources: This approach comes from improv. Here are some more resources to learn about "Yes, and..."
 - <https://medium.com/improv4/saying-yes-and-a-principle-for-improv-business-life-fd050bccf7e3>
 - <https://www.fearlessculture.design/blog-posts/this-mindset-will-make-you-more-creative-and-innovative>

Learn Something About Others

Selfie Challenge

- Time: 10-15 min depending on number of people
- Size: Best with large group of people - 100 or more works fine!
- Purpose: Highly engaging while also learning something about people
- What:
 - Select 5-10 interesting questions (see questions below, e.g., Find someone who is a twin)

- Print onto a sheet and pass out to all (folded up)
- Ask people to find and write down the name of a person for each question... they should take a selfie
- When they've completed or gotten as far as they think they can, they should text all photos to a designated facilitator who'll be monitoring for first people to complete and win

Question Beachball

- Time: 10-15 min depending on size of groups
- Size: Can be done in groups simultaneously (5-10 people in each group) or as the whole group if it's not bigger than 15
- Purpose: Interact, engage while learning something about people
- What: Prep = write q's on beach ball. People throw the ball, the color that the writing index finger of the catcher's hand touches determines what they must answer.

Commonalities

- Time: 5-10 min
- Size: Groups of 4-5 (you could push to 8-10 but harder)
- Noteworthy: This takes more time if groups are larger, but you can really be flexible with this and choose your time based on what you have time for - more time = more items in common, less time = simply cut off and acknowledge even if they didn't meet goal, what they came up with is great. Could give prize for group that's most prolific.
- What: Find 10 things you all have in common (can't be body parts or types of clothing - e.g., we all wear shoes; can't be "I speak English"). One person should write down and be ready to share.

M&Ms

- Time: Depends on size of group
- Noteworthy: If you don't want folks to select their question in advance, don't post the questions for viewing before folks have an M&M. Space isn't an issue with this.
- What: Each participant selects 1 M&M. Display the questions by color. Each person answers the question that matches the color.

Paper Airplane

- Time: Depends on size of groups/full group
- Size: Groups of <10 (if your entire meeting is around 15 people you could do this whole group and plan for more time)

- Noteworthy: You need physical space for this so you can toss the airplanes.
- What: Pass out sheet of paper, ask each person to right one interesting fact [or use a diff question from below] about themselves. Have them make a paper airplane. Everyone close their eyes (shield their face) and launch the airplane. People catch or gather the one close to them. Each person reads one and everyone tries to figure out who it is.

Two Truths and a Lie

- Time: Depends on size of groups/full group
- Size: This works well with the full attendees, but can also be done in groups. The bigger the group(s) the longer it takes.
- Noteworthy: Space isn't an issue with this. You can use variations on the number (3 truths and a lie, 1 truth and a lie). You can also reverse it and do 2 lies and 1 truth.
- What: Going around the room, in turn each person shares 2 truths and a lie. The group needs to guess which one is the lie.

Definition Towards Affinity/Collaboration

- Time: Depends on size of groups/full group
- Size: Groups or full group of attendees
- What: Attendees will describe a concept, phrase, or word of your choice with one word. First they write it down, then they share with all. Break into groups and discuss it with discussion questions you've prepared. E.g., If your word is your org culture, discussion q's could be is this the culture you want? Expect? What would you do more or less of on the list?

Did You See It?

- Time: Depends on size of groups/full group
- Size: Groups or full group of attendees
- Noteworthy: You can give attendees a head's up about this activity to give it a more competitive/trivia-like edge rather than frustrating people if folks really haven't observed much.
- What: This activity probes how observant we are in the workplace. We walk into the same office daily, have the same co-workers, but how observant are we? Ask questions that people have to answer based on whether they observed something. E.g., What was for breakfast this morning?

Guess Who

- Time: Depends on size of groups/full group

- Size: Groups or full group of attendees
- What: Everyone writes down something (my biggest fear, where I've been on vacation). Collect all the thoughts, then one person reads, and everyone else has to guess who.

Button Sharing (*NOTE: Requires advance ordering of custom buttons or stickers*)

- Less ice-breaking and more a mode of continuous team-building throughout a workshop:
- Have a bunch of buttons everyone gets, and encourage folks to gift/trade them. E.g., "Thank you," "I learned something from you," "Yes, and," "You inspired me," "let's collaborate," company values, other meaningful phrases.

Teams Build Something

Speed and Coordination

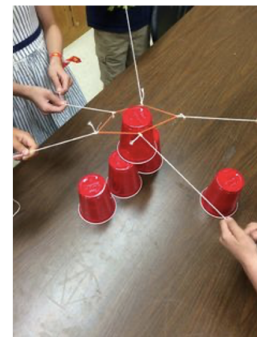
- Time: 10 min
 - Size: Teams of 5
 - Purpose: Teamwork, collaboration, team design
 - What: Stack cups using rubber band and string (as shown in pic - or on demo table). Everyone must be holding a string at all times, but may only touch 1 string. Only the rubber band may touch the cups. Fastest group wins.



Starting position



Finish



Build something physical that involves design and creativity.

- 30 min
- Follow it with 10 min deconstructing the learnings from this exercise
- TED TALK (specifically dissecting collaboration via an activity like this, and specifically mentioning spaghetti activity)... some people may have done one of these.

https://www.ted.com/talks/tom_wujec_build_a_tower_build_a_team/transcript?language=en#t-2431 "Design is a contact sport." - a nice analogy to team building in our context.

- 1) Tallest structure with newspaper (need newspaper, tape, scissors)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5f95zfBVi4>

[Best team building activity- newspaper tower building by Engineering students](#)

2) Tallest structure w/ spaghetti+marshmallows (messier clean up: need boxes of spaghetti, marshmallow, maybe tape)

<https://makefuncreating.com/crafts/how-to-build-a-tall-spaghetti-and-marshmallow-tower/>

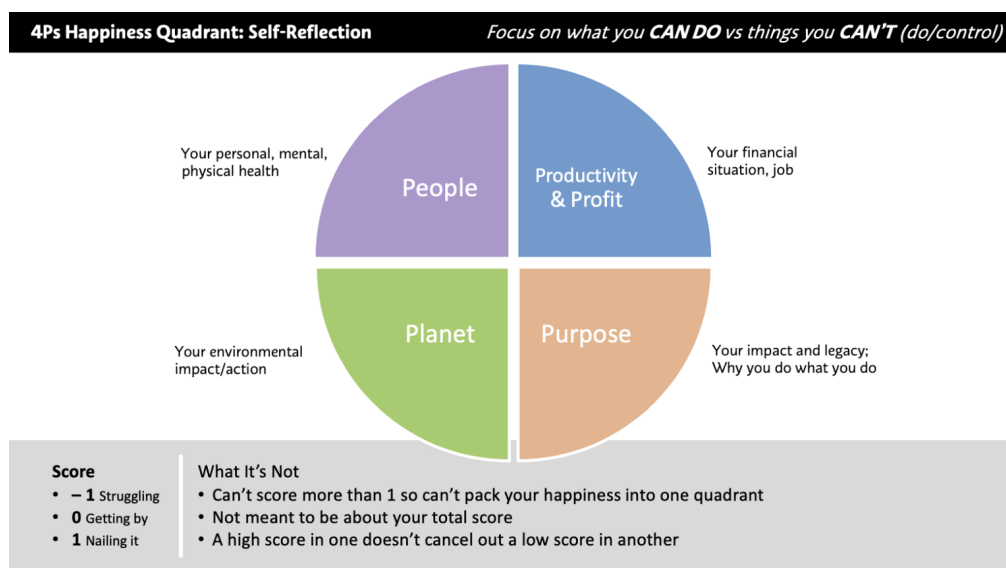
3) Bridge: Using the materials provided, two teams must work together to build a bridge, with each sub-team constructing half the bridge each. During the challenge, teams cannot see each other and must rely on their communication skills to build an identical design. ... Enough people for at least two sub-teams of four or more.

- Could be an interesting twist to have 2 teams in the physical room that have to communicate with remote participants who act like a bridge in communicating the design between the two teams.
- So it would be pairs of team in room + remote participants as a communication channel/chain

NEW: Introspective Exercise

4Ps Happiness Quadrant:

- 1 hour, individual work, and then group share
- See TedTalk: https://www.ted.com/talks/dominic_price_what_s_your_happiness_score
- What: Explain how it works. Everyone works on their own for 10 min. Ask for volunteers to walk us through theirs. Break into groups by QUADRANT they want to improve and in groups discuss ways to improve. Pick a partner to hold you accountable.



Ways to Form Groups

- Form groups by birthday month/season
- Form groups by favorite season
- Line up in order of how many languages you speak
- Concentric Circles (two circles, inside + outside person face each other, rotate after each question)
- Form groups by:
 - Star Wars
 - Star Trek
 - Dr. Who
 - None of the above? Form an outlier group but quickly form consensus with others on what show you share.

Questions to Use For Various Items Above And Whip-Arounds

(A whip-around is just a quick tour around a meeting at the beginning. It acknowledges a pause before you jump into the work. It should be quick, 5 minutes or so, and usually most attendees already know each other. Another strategy instead of going in order and if you have a little more time is to popcorn around the room; people pick the next person who'll respond.)

A lot of great ones here: <https://toggl.com/blog/icebreaker-questions-for-meetings>

- Would you rather live in the country or the city?
- Should all students be required to learn a second language?
- Which is worse: Bad breath or body odor?
- Would you rather be indoors or outdoors?
- Which is better: Playing sports or watching sports?
- Would you rather travel every single day or never leave home?
- Would you rather own a private jet or have the ability to teleport like in Star Trek?
- Would you rather speak to a huge crowd or hold a snake?
- Do you play any sports? If so, which ones?
- Do you consider yourself shy or outgoing? Why?
- What was the last movie you saw? Did you like it?
- Describe your perfect dinner.
- What would you do with a million dollars?
- What is one thing you're good at?
- If you had to describe yourself using three words, it would be...

- If someone made a movie (or TV show) of your life, what genre would it be? A drama, a comedy, a romantic-comedy, action film, or sci fi?
- If they made a movie (or TV show) about your life, what would it be about and which actor would you want to play you?
- If you could have an endless supply of any food or drink, what would it be?
- Are you sunrise, daylight, twilight, or night? Please share why you picked your time of day?
- If you could choose your age forever, what age would you choose and why?
- Which do you prefer, savory or sweet?
- Are you a pie or cake person?
- Who is a twin?
- Who has broken a bone? Which bone?
- Who has been to a professional sports final (e.g., superbowl)
- What is your favorite quotation of all time?
- If you were to donate to one charity, what would it be and why?
- If you had one free hour each day, what would you do?
- What is the best gift ever you ever received?
- You have a time machine. When (and where) would you like to visit first?
- If you didn't have to work right now, what would you be doing instead?
- How would your best friend describe you?
- How would your enemy describe you?
- If you could have dinner with one person, dead or alive, who would it be and why?
- What was your first job?
- Are you reading anything interesting right now?
- Where was the last place you went for the first time?
- Do you have a favorite breakfast cereal? Follow-up question: milk first, or cereal first?
- If this is wrong, I don't want to be right: Favorite weird (but brilliant) food combo?
- Would you rather be able to fly or turn invisible?
- If you could travel anywhere in the world today, where would you go?
- Which one fictional place would you most like to visit?
- Have you ever met anyone famous?
- What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
- What's the first thing you remember buying with your own money?
- Who was most influential in your life as a kid?
- If you could only use one piece of technology, what would it be?
- What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
- If you were to host your own talk show, who would be your first guest?
- What is your useless superpower?
- How many cities have you lived in during your life and which is your favorite?