ICE BREAKER ACTIVITIES

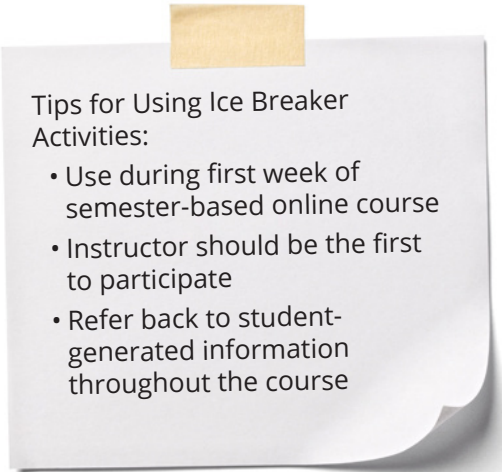UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
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INTRODUCTION

Establishing a welcoming classroom in the online environment allows students to settle in and adjust to this form of instructional delivery. In collaborative settings, there is a unique sharing of ideas and perspectives among students. There is a freedom to express ideas, create new products, share inventions, and, in general, make significant learning contributions in the classroom. Incorporating ice breaker activities into the first week of an online course helps to establish a positive tone and social climate for the course.

A CLOSER LOOK

Social ice breaker activities set the stage for many later course activities. Many of the activities suggested here utilize online discussion forums. In such forums, students and instructors can make introductions, form relationships, share personal and professional information and experiences, and generally learn more about each other. This is just a sampling of ideas. Use your imagination to expand upon or add variation to these or to add more to this list.

Tips for Using Ice Breaker Activities:
- Use during first week of semester-based online course
- Instructor should be the first to participate
- Refer back to student-generated information throughout the course

Personal Introductions

Many online instructors prefer to create a discussion thread for learners to make introductions. Instructors could structure the introduction activity by asking for specific items or characteristics. For instance, ask learners to list their professional interests, goals for the course, or jobs they've held. In addition, ask about personal interests such as hobbies or favorite places to visit or vacation. The most interesting and useful posts are those that combine personal as well as professional information. Most commonly, questions are based on the course textbook or other readings. Switch things up by including questions based on your students' experience or ones that have a direct relation to their lives.

Eight Nouns

In this activity, learners are required to post to a discussion forum eight nouns that best describe themselves. Everyone should also describe why each particular noun selected is representative of who he or she is. Such descriptions can be short or longer, depending on instructor preferences.

Five Pictures

This is a slight variation on the above activity. In this activity, learners create a collage of five pictures or images that best describe themselves. These can be pictures they have already taken or images from other sources. Make sure to have learners cite the sources for images that are not their own. Learners should also describe how the pictures represent who they are.

Two Truths and One Lie

This activity is fun but can sometimes be challenging. Learners must post two truths about themselves and one statement that is a lie. Fellow class members must attempt to determine which piece of given information is false. They can guess this after asking questions of the individual or exploring other information, as this might be used in combination with another activity.

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An Online Cafe

An online cafe can be created as a special place and social space for learners to "hang out" informally. Here, learners can post questions and comments on personal interests, pertinent items in the news, and so on. The online cafe is a safe haven that operates within as well as outside of the course. The online cafe is a place to get to know peers and perhaps the instructor without worrying about the degree to which each comment relates to the topics of the course. As such, this technique helps to personalize the course and establish a learner-centered course atmosphere.

EXAMPLE

Below is an example of how to begin the five pictures ice breaker activity.

🍃 Ice Breaker Discussion

Instructions

Let's get to know each other better.

A. Create a single-page document or graphic (.gif, .jpeg, or .png) file that contains five still (not animated) images that visually describe yourself to us. Your description must also contain an explanation of each image's source. If the images are not your own, you need to state the source of the images. Any program capable of inserting and editing graphics may be used. In the past, students have created their assignment in programs such as Adobe Photoshop, Microsoft Word or PowerPoint, Picasa.google.com (free download), and Gimp.org (free download).

B. Post your file to the Module 1 Ice Breaker discussion area as an attachment to a message. The message's Subject should be "Introducing Yourfirstname Yoursurname" (e.g., "Introducing Jane Smith").

C. Read at least two other students' postings and respond to them.

Purpose
- Students provide background information and emails for instructors and other participants.
- Students practice searching the Web for graphic images and downloading them.
- Students practice inserting graphic images into a document.
- Students cite references or images used that are not their own.
- Students become acquainted with posting discussion messages and responding to other students' messages.

Assessment

Up to 35 points possible. The Discussion Board Rubric will be used to assess this activity. Please review the rubric to understand the performance levels expected.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

Bonk, C. J., & Khoo, E. (2014). Adding some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ activities for motivating and retaining learners online. Bloomington, IN: Open World Books.