

### **Betsy’s Favorite Icebreaker**

- I ask students to print their first names in large letters on the blank side of an index card. Then they write their major, hometown, and a skill/talent on the lined side. Students exchange cards with a partner whom they do not know well (not from their high school, dorm, previous class, etc.). They then interview their partners and add one or two pieces of information, preferably something unusual and memorable. Each student introduces his/her partner, using the cards for reference. When multiple students have the same first name, I ask them to add a last initial to the blank side of their cards.

I set a goal for myself for how long it will take me to remember their names without help and ask the students to hold me to it. My sections are normally 22 students, so I usually give myself 2 or 3 class meetings to master their first names. Presenting myself as a learner who needs to form a strategy and involving the students in a learning partnership helps to set the tone and expectations for the class.

At the beginning of each class, I use the cards to take attendance until I no longer need them. If I draw a blank on a student’s name, I try to identify something about them from the interview and/or ask another student to help me. When I make a mistake, I model reviewing and self-testing. While I am learning names and faces, I spread the cards out as a seating chart so that I can glance down and “cheat” if necessary during class. Later, I use the cards to organize groups, keep track of who is asking/answering questions, call on students with particular interests or experiences relevant to the material for the day, etc.

### **Julie's Favorite Icebreaker**

- This should be conducted the first day of class, right at the beginning of class. One of the best ways I have found to “energize” the classroom is to leave it! Tell the students you are going to leave the room for 5 minutes, and when you return, you want each of them to be able to introduce 5 other students to you on a first-name basis. They are free to decide how to do it. When you come back, the energy level in the classroom is generally very high. Ask for a volunteer to begin with introductions. As students are introduced, you can repeat their names and welcome them. In smaller classes (25 and under) I’ve found that students will sometimes challenge themselves to learn ALL of the other students names. This helps me do the same very quickly. It also has the benefit of introducing very active and student-generated learning strategies during the very first moments of class.

### **More Icebreakers from TLC\***

- On the first day of class I pass out a syllabus which includes a “student data sheet.” I ask students to form pairs with student “A” interviewing “B”: and filling in the other’s data sheet. “B” does the same for a third student. I ask each student to respond to a final question and add information as he/she thinks best. It has brought no complaints and provides useful information on one student in three.
- I ask students in groups of 2 or more to find something in their wallet, backpack, etc., that would help the class understand and remember who they are. This is a short 10 minute exercise that also personalizes the group. Of course, there are pictures, but people also find other interesting items that surprise even themselves. Modification: ask students to pull out their key rings and tell a partner what the keys signify.
- I prepare groups of images (6-8 of each) from public or popular media that reflect some aspect of my discipline and write questions on the back of each. The questions include: Why did you choose this image? How is it an image of you as an engineer/dancer/ anthropologist/etc.? What does your choice of image indicate about why you are in this course? How does it reflect you as a learner? I ask the students to pick an image that appeals to them, think about the questions, and form teams with others who have the same image. It doesn’t take long for students to begin talking about what they expect the class to be like. After 20 minutes, I ask each group to share a similarity and a difference they found within their group’s responses.

\*Originally collected from UW faculty and TAs by the Center for Instructional Development and Research. Adapted by Angela R. Linse, PhD. Teaching and Learning Center, Temple University