

The Importance of Icebreakers

Objective: Icebreakers are one of the most important parts of the Orientation experience because they are a quick and easy way to get your group more comfortable with each other. Icebreakers can help you get to know the students you'll be supervising as well as letting them get to know each other as well. The following pages will help you successfully utilize icebreakers during Orientation.

What is an Icebreaker?

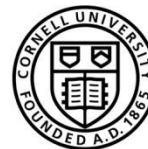
Icebreakers are little games to help people get to know one another better. Whenever you meet new people, whether at work or in school, you will likely play some games to "break the ice." They are a fun way to ease the anxieties of meeting new people and trying to fit in.

For some people, the icebreaker brings up feelings of apprehension and even hostility. They remember doing corny activities all in the name of getting to know each other; what really happened was they ended up feeling embarrassed. Icebreakers do not have to be corny, and they are certainly not a waste of time. They also shouldn't make people walk away feeling embarrassed. They serve very specific purposes, and they can really help you in the situations you are about to be in as an Orientation Leader.

Why use Icebreakers?

Icebreakers are basically games that aid you when you are presenting to a crowd or when working with a new group of people. They serve several purposes:

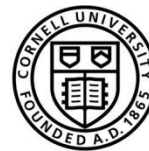
- **To get to know one another:** One of the most important purposes of many of the icebreakers you'll be using is to get participants to know one another. Icebreakers force people to talk to others and in the process people begin to get acquainted.
- **To create a feeling of comfort:** Once people go through an icebreaker together, it is only natural for them to feel more comfortable around each other. You have forced them to share a positive, and maybe goofy, experience.
- **To set a tone:** It is important to set a positive tone and a good icebreaker can help. Icebreakers, in their very nature, are positive, feel-good games that set a positive, feel-good vibe.
- **To add energy:** Icebreakers can add a great deal of energy to any situation. You may not need a lot of added energy with a group of college students, but it could help, especially when people are just meeting. Icebreakers loosen everyone up and get the group excited and enthusiastic. Don't just use them at the beginning of a presentation, but throw them in whenever you feel your audience needs a little energy boost.



Icebreakers are necessary. Use them well and feel free to be creative and fun. Make your icebreakers your own. Students may complain, but they will have a good time and they will probably remember your icebreakers years later.

Getting Ready for your Icebreakers and Games

- **Be prepared:** Know your icebreaker! If you have to consult your manual at every step, the game won't have the proper flow and people may get bored and uncomfortable. Try playing with your friends before you meet your new students to make sure you get the gist. If you are unsure of a game to play, ask those in your group if they have any ideas and then have them explain.
- **Be creative:** Make up your own or modify ones you have seen before to make them more fun or challenging.
- **First impressions:** Until this point, new students only interfaced with Cornell via email and phone, they are entering a new environment and they may be anxious. You must give them the best impression you can!!! It may affect all of their time here!
- **Energy:** Set the tone. Don't come across as tired, bored or a TCFO. Have high energy especially during the first half hour but don't scare them! This is especially true for icebreakers. Be excited about the icebreakers you play. If you are excited and enthusiastic, they will be excited and enthusiastic; but if you aren't, they won't be either.
- **Be organized:** Your group will look to you for direction and information, have information on hand. Keep a map and Orientation booklet on you at all times.
- **Appearance:** Make sure your clothes are neat, you are groomed, and wearing your Orientation shirt.
- **Watch your language:** Choose your words carefully – be sensitive to the group dynamics. Keep statements upbeat and positive. Strong statements make a good first impression
- **Jump right in:** If group members seem reluctant to do an icebreaker, don't tell them that's what you're doing. Sometimes it helps to not actually say that you are going to do an icebreaker, just start a game and get people to play along.
- **Make sure you have all the info:** Know the campus (map) and the resources; keep the resources we give you on hand (info for counseling, where to go if you have a question about a specific thing, your Orientation Guide, your training manual). It's ok to not have all the answers, but make sure you can refer your students to someone who does know.



Types of Icebreakers & Examples

You should choose a couple of icebreakers in each category to learn. The better you know your icebreakers the more fun they will be for everyone else!

Level 1:

These are the most basic and simplest forms of icebreakers. Use them early on in the orientation process when people are just getting to know each other and may not yet feel comfortable with each other. They do not involve physical contact and do not disclose very much personal information and are essential because of the non-threatening environment being created in the group.

- **Introduce yourself:** Have each person say his or her name, hometown, major etc.
- **Name and Motion:** Have each member of the group say their name and do a motion (like shooting hoops or a dance move) have each subsequent member do the preceding members names and motions.
- **Name Game:** Sit in a circle. One person starts by using an adjective starting with the same letter as their first name, followed by their first name (i.e. Clever Claire, Kind Karen). The next person and each following have to repeat the first person's adjective and name and then add their own. Go around the circle until the last person has to repeat all other names in order and end with their own.
- **Two truths and a lie:** Each person says three statements about themselves, two are true and one is not. Have other members of the group guess which one is false.
- **Let's Make a Deal:** 4-8 people per team. Make up a worksheet with 6-8 items listed that the team members would likely have with them. Make 1 or 2 items more uncommon things. The team gets points for each person who has these items. Only 1 of each item per person can be counted and the team with the most points wins. Your list could include: a photograph, a calculator, a pencil, more than 3 credit cards, an unusual key chain, something red, etc.
- **Starburst:** Prepare by bringing a bag of candy with multiple colors. As students arrive, give them a piece of candy, but tell them not to eat it. When everyone has arrived, tell the students that each color corresponds to a certain question that they must tell the group (i.e. Pink = what did you do over the summer, etc.). Can be played with Skittles, M&Ms, and the like.
- **Movie word game:** Everyone sits in a circle while one person goes out of the room. They have to decide on a movie title. Take the title, "I know what you did last summer." Each person in the circle is given a word from the title. When the person comes back in, they all switch places. Then the person outside asks somebody a question, and that person has to answer using their assigned word in their sentence. Example: if I have the word "Know" and I am asked what color my hair is, I could say, 'Well I know that my hair is the color brown.'



Level 2:

This type of icebreaker is a little more interactive. If you have a group of students who seem comfortable with each other but may not be ready for full physical contact, use this type of icebreaker. These icebreakers involve some movement but are not particularly rigorous.

- **Winds of change:** Have the group sit or stand in a circle, with one person in the middle. The person in the middle says one thing about themselves (I like to ski), everyone who agrees must stand and switch places with someone else in the circle, the person left is the new person in the middle. This game is great for a larger group.
- **Earthquake game:** Have participants get into groups of three, with one person (or two people) out. Each group of three should build a house with two of the people forming the house and the third person inside. The person out then yells either “Eviction!” or “Earthquake!” and rejoins the game. If “Eviction!” is called, only those people inside the houses move and they must switch places with someone in another house. If “Earthquake!” is called, the houses break up and all participants must either build a new house or get into one of the newly built houses. The person who is left after all the groups of three have been formed is now “out” and becomes the new caller.
- **Animal Match:** Upon entering the room, everyone is given a card with an animal on it (make sure there are two of every animal). On the count of three everyone makes their animal noise and tries to find their animal match. This can also be done with famous pairs (Micky and Minnie, etc.)
- **Concentric Circles:** Split the participants into two equal-sized groups and make two concentric circles, one inside the other so every participant in the inner circle is facing one in the outer circle. Give them a topic to speak to each other about such as their favorite sandwich filling or earliest childhood memory. After one minute, tell everyone in the inner circle to move four places to their right, and repeat, changing directions and number of people to move.



Level 3:

These icebreakers are for the group that is already relatively comfortable with each other. They are games that typically involve a lot of physical interaction. Only very rarely do Orientation Groups do Level 3 icebreakers.

- **Human knot:** Have group stand in a circle and put their right arm in. Have everyone grab hold of someone else's arm. Then do the same for left arms and try to untangle the knot!
- **Birdie on a Perch:** Have each member of the group find a partner. Form two concentric circles with each member going to a different circle. The inner circle faces and walks one direction and the outer circle faces and walks the other. The caller calls out "Birdies on a perch!" where students find their partner and link arms back-to-back. Be aware of your group members' physical abilities.

Handslap: All participants should kneel on the floor and put both their hands on the floor in front of them. Everyone should then put their left hand under the arm of the person to their left. In this way, everyone should have two other hands between their own two hands. One person starts a pulse by slapping one of his hands on the floor and this is then passed around the circle in one direction with each hand slapping in turn. If someone slaps his or her hand twice in succession then the direction is reversed. A hand is out if the person hesitates or slaps when it is not their turn. A person is out when both his hands are out. The leader should try and speed up the game towards the end by punishing hesitations severely.