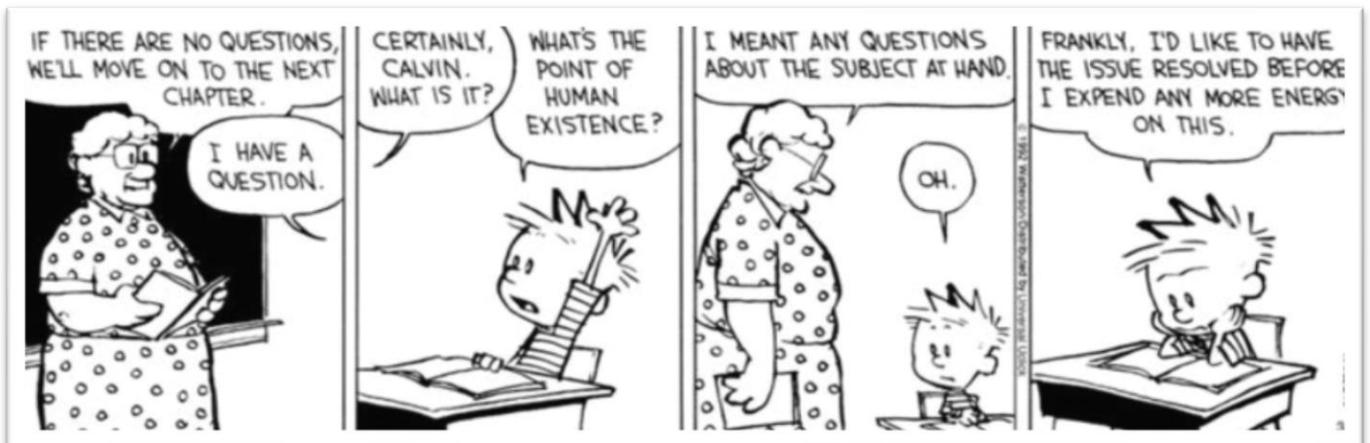


Countering Classroom Crickets

Getting Students Talking



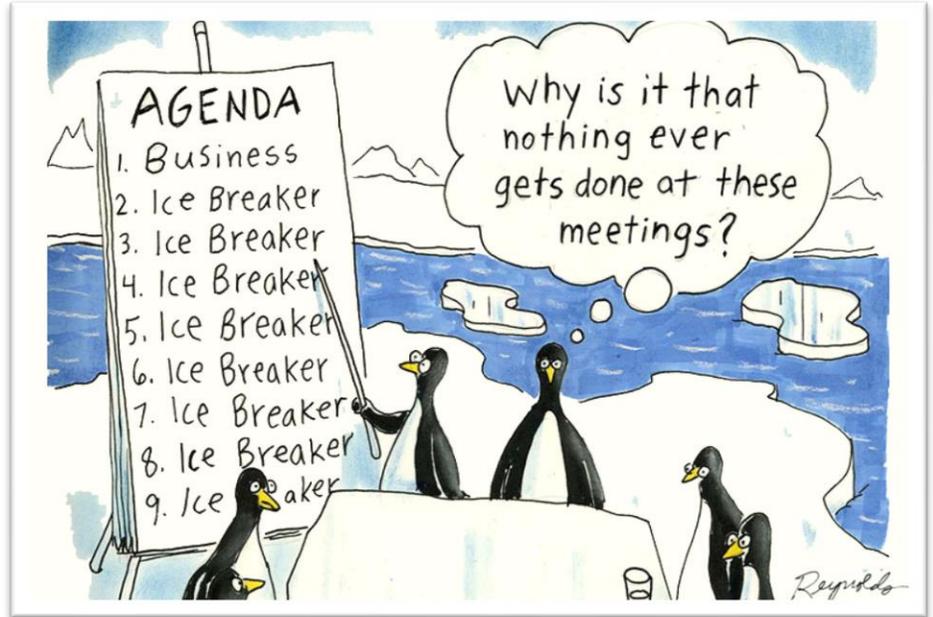
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Icebreakers

About halfway through each class, I have students stand up and begin walking around the classroom. I remind them to breathe deeply and that they are getting their blood moving and their brains cleared. Then I have them stop and pair up with someone. I ask them to share names, especially early in the term, and then I throw out a simple question for each one to answer. I have a list of these in a notebook, and I'll just pick one like, "Sweet or salty and why?" or "Describe your closet" or "What makes you laugh out loud?" You can find lots of these on the Internet, and I've included some below. They usually generate a bit of laughter, but they also generate a few moments of conversation between classmates, which is the real goal. I then have them walk some more and repeat the exercise with a different classmate and question. This activity takes no more than 5 minutes, gives a much-needed break for both body and mind, and allows classmates to connect a little informally. Who knows—they might be making a connection that may lead to a future friendship.



General icebreaker questions

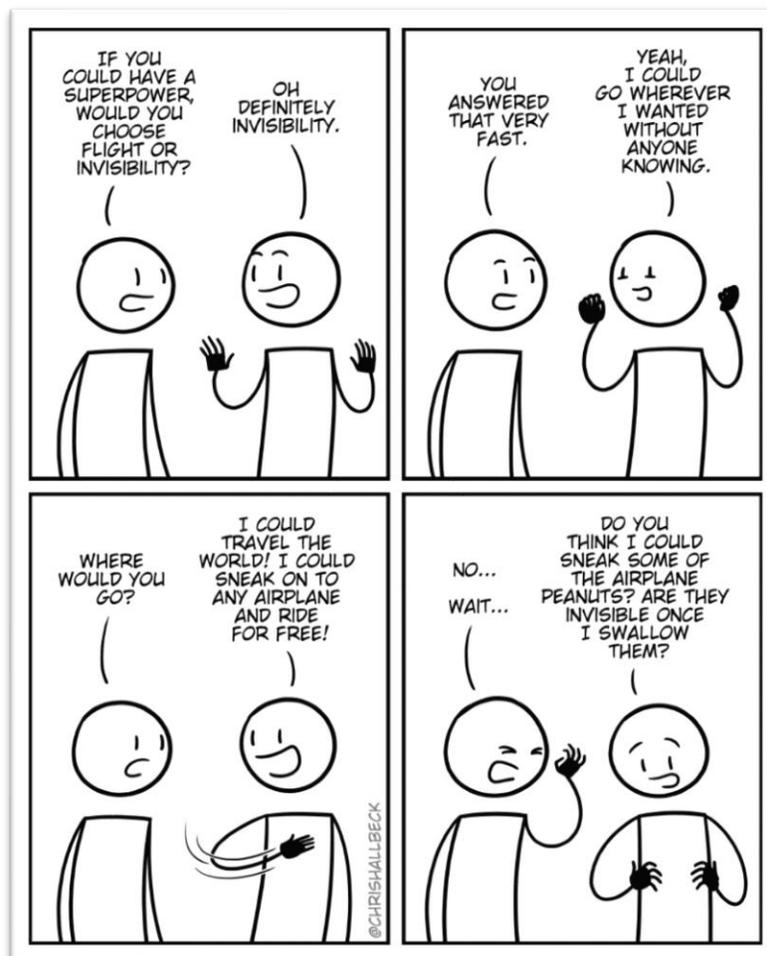
1. What is one article of clothing that someone could wear that would make you walk out on a date with them?
2. The zombie apocalypse is coming, who are 3 people you want on your team?
3. What is your most used emoji?
4. What was the worst style choice you ever made?
5. Who was your childhood actor/actress crush?
6. If you could bring back any fashion trend what would it be?
7. What's the most embarrassing fashion trend you used to rock?
8. Does your current car have a name? What is it?
9. What was your least favorite food as a child? Do you still hate it or do you love it now?
10. If you had to eat one meal every day for the rest of your life what would it be?

This or that questions

1. Coffee or tea?

2. Teleportation or flying?
3. Are you a morning person or a night person?
4. Are you a cat person or a dog person?
5. Would you rather live in the ocean or on the moon?
6. Would you rather meet your travel back in time to meet your ancestors or to the future to meet your descendants?
7. Would you rather lose all of your money or all of your pictures?
8. Would you rather have invisibility or flight?
9. Would you rather live where it only snows or the temperature never falls below 100 degrees?
10. Would you rather always be slightly late or super early?
11. Would you rather give up your smartphone or your computer?
12. Would you rather live without heat and AC or live without social media?
13. Would you rather be the funniest or smartest person in the room?
14. Would you rather be able to run at 100 miles per hour or fly at 10 miles per hour?

Condensed from "The Only List Of Icebreaker Questions You'll Ever Need" from MuseumHack.com
<https://museumhack.com/list-icebreakers-questions/>



Speed-dating mixer

I use this activity to form workshop teams that are together throughout the term. It could also be used any time you want students to talk about classroom content, issues, ideas, or anything else.

Prepare the classroom by designating as many areas as you want groups for. I put numbers on sheets of paper on tables or desks; these can be easily constructed at the start of class or prepared ahead of time.

I start by giving the students a sheet with the instructions on one side and the questions for the activity on the other. Both are on the next page.

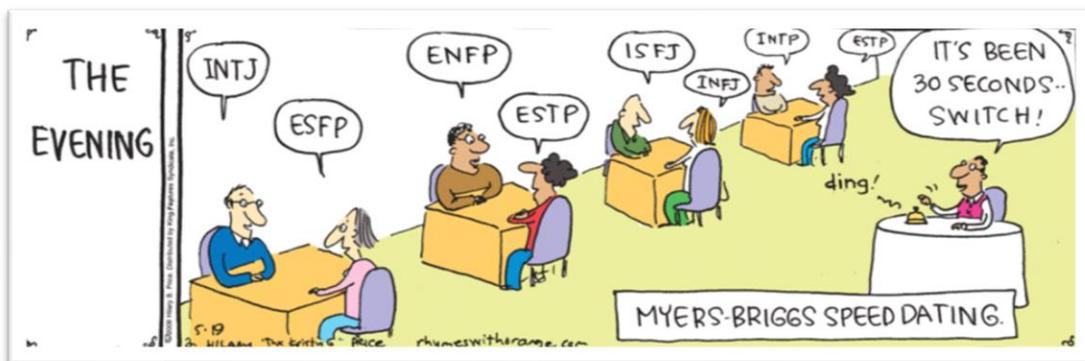
I then give students a few minutes to look over the four questions and jot down some ideas for how they would answer them. I encourage them to think, "If you were asked this question, how would you answer it? What would you want someone to learn about you?"

Once they're ready, I have the students count off in sixes (you can form whatever number of groups you wish, though) and then go to their assigned area. I then ask if anyone is familiar with the idea of "speed dating," which usually gets a laugh. I explain that there will be four rounds, one for each question. The first one is where they are currently seated. They are to share their answer to that round's question, and as their classmates listen, they may think, "I might want to work with this person." I instruct them to write down names of classmates they meet; there is space on the sheet. When I say "Switch!" they are to move to another area that has at least one person they haven't met yet.

For each round, you can set a timer, or you can let the discussion proceed organically. I listen for the level of voices and try to check in with two or three groups. If everyone seems to have shared, I give a warning that we will switch and to write down names.

At the end of the fourth round, I remind students that this is the first activity designed to help them get to know each other. I provide others before the next class session.

Variations on this could be a longer time per round. The questions could be varied, and so could the number. You could potentially give the groups a text to consider and then they discuss it as they move around to the different areas. Perhaps you could give them a different question at the start of each round. The idea is to interact with a larger number of classmates, so this works well early in the term when students are still getting to know each other.



Mixer for workshop teams (instructions given to students)

1. Look at the questions below and jot down an idea or two for each one.
2. Go to the first table you are assigned to and discuss Question 1 with the classmates you meet. Write down their names.
3. Go to the next table and discuss Question 2 with the classmates you meet. Write down their names.
4. Repeat for Question 3.
5. Repeat for Question 4.

Question 1: What is the best present you ever gave someone?

Question 2: What is a memorable place you visited as a child?

Question 3: Who is your favorite relative?

Question 4: Why are you at Chemeketa?



Take a Stand: Human Barometer

I use this activity when the class is beginning comparison / contrast writing, which leads to evaluation. The idea is to get students to “take a stand” about statements that are read to them. They are then given the opportunity to explain their “stand.”

Prepare the classroom by creating a line that represents a Likert scale of 1-5. This can be done with numbers written along a whiteboard. I also like to use the space along a wall or even down the middle aisle of a classroom. The numbers could even be assigned to places along the wall or aisle. Explain to the students what the numbers mean:

- 1 = I agree with the statement.
- 2 = I mostly agree with the statement.
- 3 = I am not sure / don't have enough information / am truly in the middle about the statement.
- 4 = I somewhat disagree with the statement.
- 5 = I completely disagree with the statement.

When the statement is read, they are to go to the number that corresponds with their agreement/disagreement. When the next statement is read, they can move to another number.

Begin by lining everyone up along the space. Then read the first statement and give students a moment to move to their “stand.” I usually observe where everyone is standing and how many are on each number. Sometimes, there will be a heavy concentration in one area. Sometimes, there will be more of a spread. Depending on how the students “stand,” I ask groups on the same number or groups on different numbers to turn and talk to each other about why they're on that number. Sometimes I ask for volunteers to share their “stand” with the large group, and sometimes I call on a particular student if I've overheard something interesting. I might say something like, “John, make a case for your position” and give John a moment to explain. I also invite students to share answers to John's “stand,” also. Then I move on to the next statement.

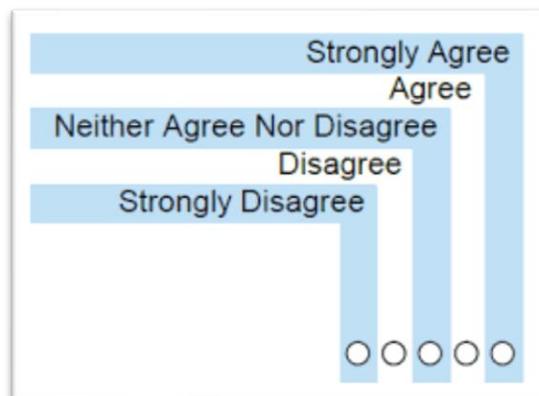
Variations can include fewer options. Once I simply asked the question, “Should teachers fail students?” The answers were Yes, Maybe/I don't know and No. This led to a rich discussion about something that was very relevant to their experience.

You can write your own statements based on a text the class reads, or you could use this as a learning check or a warmup prior to beginning a unit. Statements are usually opinion-based, but I will occasionally use a fact-based one just to gauge the students' thinking.

Two sample sets of statements are below.



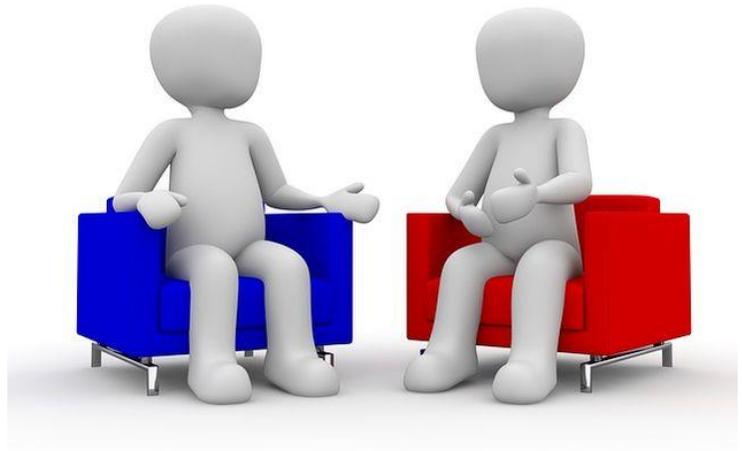
"Is it better to take out a loan or to work while in college?"	"How free should free speech be?"
Taking out a loan to pay for college is financially responsible.	Students should learn about how free speech is defined.
Going into debt is stupid.	States should have the ability to pass their own laws about what constitutes "free speech."
Students should work because they learn how to balance school and work	The First Amendment is too broad in its definition of free speech.
Colleges should give more financial aid.	Free speech rights should only be extended to American citizens.
The government owes a free college education to everyone who wants one.	Wendy Kaminer (the panelist who wrote "Progressive Ideas Have Killed Free Speech On Campus") has a right to whatever personal views she wishes.
Financial aid should only be need-based.	Colleges and universities do not protect their students' rights to free speech enough.
People wouldn't appreciate a college education if it was free because they didn't pay for it.	If Donald Trump came to Chemeketa to speak, the student body should boycott the speech because of his views.
Students can go to school without going into debt.	Juli Briskman (the cyclist who flipped off the President) should be fired from her job because she flipped off the President.
Student debt is higher than credit card debt.	The United States should change the Constitution to better define free speech.
The government should have a student loan forgiveness program.	
Banks should provide loans to students at no larger than a 2% interest rate.	



They Say / I Say

The basic premise behind this activity is to present two contrasting texts and allow students to choose one and interact with it. Ideal texts come from opinion pieces or editorials. Texts from famous speeches or publications could also be used. The key is that they present differing perspectives

Prepare the classroom by putting out the two texts you've chosen. They should be short enough (2-3 paragraphs) so that students can read them quickly. The texts can be posted on a board, projected on a screen, or even laid on a table. I like to print them and post them on the whiteboard. Ideally, they're in different parts of the room to give students space to gather while they're reading.



Once the students have read both texts and chosen one to interact with, give them the opportunity to provide their own “take” or perspective in writing. Doing so gives students the opportunity to think about their response before talking about it. This can be done in several ways:

1. Writing a brief comment on a whiteboard. If there are few / no whiteboards in your classroom, use slips of paper or Post-It Notes on walls or tables.
2. Writing a longer comment on notebook or recycled paper.
3. Writing a comment on a computer application like Padlet.

To get the students interacting with each other, do one or more of the following:

1. Gallery walk where everyone reads all comments. Students can pick their favorites or the ones that made them think (“Wow” or “Hm” or “huh” moments) and share them in pairs or in the larger group. Alternately, provide space for students to leave a response or even just a “like.” You can debrief with a large-class wrap-up discussion.
2. Pair up two students with contrasting comments and have a conversation. You can then make groups of 4 / 8 / __ for further conversation.
3. Gather up the comments, type them up, and hand them out at the next class for further conversation. You can include all comments or representative ones, especially if you do this with multiple classes.
4. Use a real-time feedback means like Socrative, Poll Everywhere or Clickers to ask students which text they liked better. Then have them talk about why in small groups.

Two texts that I've used are on the next page.

“Is College Worth It? Clearly, New Data Say” – David Leonhardt, NYT, May 27, 2014

From the country’s perspective, education can be only part of the solution to our economic problems. We also need to find other means for lifting living standards — not to mention ways to provide good jobs for people without college degrees.

But from almost any individual’s perspective, college is a no-brainer. It’s the most reliable ticket to the middle class and beyond. Those who question the value of college tend to be those with the luxury of knowing their own children will be able to attend it.

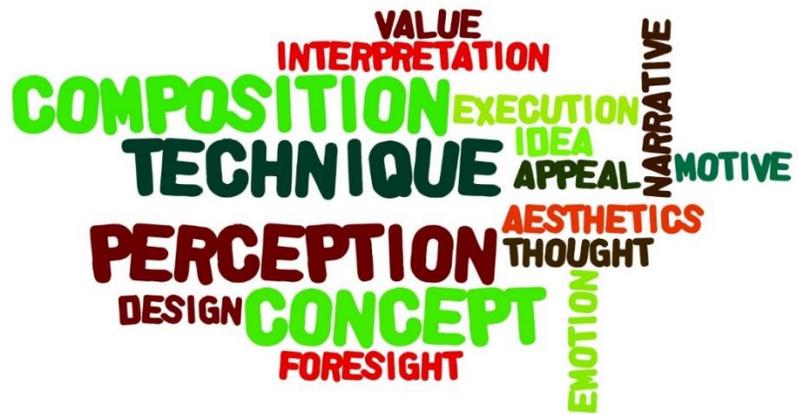
“We Send Too Many Students to College” - Marty Nemko, MartyNemko.com

Colleges love to trumpet the statistic that, over their lifetimes, college graduates earn more than non-graduates. But that’s terribly misleading because you could lock the college-bound in a closet for four years and they’d earn more than the pool of non-college-bound--they’re brighter, more motivated, and have better family connections. Too, the past advantage of college graduates in the job market is eroding: ever more students are going to college at the same time as ever more employers are offshoring ever more professional jobs. So, college graduates are forced to take some very non-professional jobs.



Techniques

Turn and Talk
Think Pair Share (Square)
Jigsaw
Gallery Walk
Philosophical Chairs
Socratic Seminar
Snowballs



Resources

Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty by Elizabeth F. Barkley, Claire H. Major, and K. Patricia Cross (Jossey-Bass)

Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross (Jossey-Bass)

Total Participation Techniques: Making Every Student an Active Learner by P ersida Himmele and William Himmele (ASCD)

The Strategic Teacher: Selecting the Right Research-Based Strategy for Every Lesson by Harvey F. Silver, Richard W. Strong, and Matthew J. Perini (ASCD)

The Cult of Pedagogy (blog), edited by Jennifer Gonzalez

- "The Big List of Classroom Discussion Techniques"
- "Deeper Class Discussions with the TQE Method"
- "Icebreakers that Rock"

