

Icebreaker and Teambuilding Workbook

Office of Student Involvement & Leadership



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS

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Why do icebreakers/teambuilders?

There are a number of reasons to lead activities with your student organization members or executive board. Astin (1984) proposed that the investment of student psychosocial and physical energy dictates how connected they feel to an institution and to their academic and personal success. By doing activities together, students invest physical energy into retaining core concepts and building community within their organizations.

This workbook contains activities intended to serve a number of purposes in your organization:

- Icebreakers – Activities intended for a group of individuals who do not know each other well; meant to aid in building rapport between team members and make them familiar with one another.
- Energizers – Brief activities intended to spark conversation or activity so that individuals can regroup and focus on the next activity.
- Teambuilders – Hands-on activities meant to challenge teams to learn a number of skills, including teamwork, communication, problem-solving, etc.

This is by no means an all-inclusive collection of activities to facilitate with your group! Be creative to help your members learn important leadership skills.

If you are interested in having someone from the Office of Student Involvement & Leadership facilitate any of these activities at your group meeting or retreat, contact us by emailing sil@uno.edu or calling 504-280-6349.

Table of Contents

• Adjective Name Game	1	• Minefield	11
• Animal Round-Up	1	• Mingle	12
• Balloon Castles	2	• Motion Name Game	12
• Beach Ball Q&A	3	• Pair Up	13
• Clothespin Samurai	3	• People Bingo	14
• Earthquake	4	• People Platform	15
• Electric Orange	5	• Popcorn	16
• Gumdrops Structures	6	• Someone Else's Eyes	16
• Hula Hoop Pass	8	• Take What You Need	17
• Human Knot	9	• Two Truths and a Lie	17
• Human Sculptures	10	• Water Carry	18
• Look Up, Look Down	11	• Where the Wind Blows	19



Adjective Name Game

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: None

Number of People: 8-15

Instructions:

Ask participants to form a circle. Each group member is required to think of an adjective that describes him/herself AND starts with the same letter as his/her first name (ex: dandy Dan, super Samantha). Each group member will state his/her adjective + name AND repeat the adjectives + names of all previous participants in the circle. At the end, everyone will repeat everyone's adjectives + names together.

Animal Round-Up

Activity Type: Energizer

Supplies Needed: None.

Number of People: Any.

Instructions:

Instruct participants to silently think of their favorite animals. Then, without talking, instruct the group to arrange themselves from largest to smallest animals. Group members can only make gestures and the noise of their animal. After they have finished, have group members go around and say the animal they were supposed to be to see if it was accurate.

Balloon Castles

Activity Type: Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: 25 balloons and 1 roll of tape *per group*.

Number of People: Teams of 4+.

Instructions:

Challenge each team to build the tallest, free-standing, self-supporting balloon castle that is possible using the balloons and tape provided.

At the end of 20 minutes, stop the action. Make sure that the group lets go of their castle as soon as you say, "Stop!" If they do not let go, their group will be disqualified.

After you have determined a winning team, ask everyone to sit on the floor.

This activity is meant to develop problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. Debrief with participants to help them process the activity.

- What did you learn about relationships in this activity?
- What was your role in the activity and how did that help accomplish the greater goal?
- What did you learn about planning in this activity? Did you plan at all?
- What was most frustrating and rewarding about this activity?
- How did your team decide who would play what role and what type of structure you would build?

Beach Ball Q&A

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: Beach ball with questions written on it.

Number of People: Any.

Instructions:

Write a number of questions on a beach ball. Have participants sit in a circle and pass the ball around the circle. When someone catches the ball, s/he should answer the question that his/her left thumb is nearest. Continue passing the ball around and answering questions until time is up or everyone has had the opportunity to answer a question.

For example questions, see the appendices.

Clothespin Samurai

Activity Type: Energizer

Supplies Needed: Clothespins, pool noodle.

Number of People: Any.

Instructions:

Arrange group members in a circle with one person in the middle who is blindfolded. The blindfolded person in the middle has several clothespins attached to their clothing (back, arms, legs shoes, etc.). The blindfolded person is handed a "sword" (inflatable or foam pool noodle). The other group members must remove the pins without getting whacked by the "sword". If you are whacked three times, you're out.

Notes:

You as the facilitator should not be participating monitoring safety for the participants and keeping track of how many times people have been hit by the "sword".

Earthquake

Activity Type: Energizer

Supplies Needed: None.

Number of People: Any.

Instructions:

One facilitator calls instructions to the group. Group members join groups of three with people making a house with their hands and one person standing underneath.

The facilitator calls two instructions:

- Eviction - Everyone in a "house" must leave and find a new one.
- Earthquake - All houses collapse and everyone must form a new threesome of house and resident.

The facilitator tries to get into one of the threesomes, so the person left-out becomes the new facilitator.

Electric Orange

Activity Type: Energizer, Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: Coin/die, "orange" or other item

Number of People: Any

Instructions:

Divide the group in half and have each line up beside each other. All players divide into two lines (facing out) shoulder to shoulder. One facilitator should be standing at one end of the lines with a coin/die, and one facilitator should be standing at the other end with the orange/other item.

At one end of the line, a facilitator continually flips a coin/rolls a die. One person from each team watches the coin/die and squeezes their teammate's hand when they see the designated face (e.g., a "heads" on a coin or a "4" on a die). Each team member squeezes the next person's hand, passing the "electricity" down the line. When the last person's hand is squeezed, s/he grabs the "orange" (or other item) from the facilitator.

Whoever grabs it first wins and moves to the front of his/her line to watch the coin/die. HOWEVER, if someone starts the "electricity" before the designated face has been seen, they lose and move to the far end of the line to grab the orange/other item.

*It is helpful to have additional facilitators present to watch for false starts or any cheating.

This activity emphasizes the importance of waiting and/or listening before taking action. It also demonstrates consequences to action (e.g., if someone squeezes a teammate's hand too soon, then the entire team is inconvenienced).

Gumdrop Structures

Activity Type: Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: Gumdrops and toothpicks.

Number of People: Teams of 4-10 people.

Instructions:

In an area unseen to the participants, structures made of gumdrops should be previously constructed by the facilitators. These are the structures that the participants will need to re-construct in their groups. Each group will be told to choose one "Seer," three "Runners," one "Builder," and one "Observer."

Explain:

In a separate room (or space) is a structure made of gumdrops and colored toothpicks.

- Seer: Only person allowed to see the structure. Unlimited opportunities. Must communicate what the structure looks like to the runners.
- Runners: Carry messages from the Seer to the Builder. Runners may not ask questions of seers. Nonverbal signals are ok, but only the Seer can talk to the Runner. Runners may only talk to the Builder, and then only one at a time.
- Builders: Work in a separate space where they cannot see the Seer or observe the instructions being given. Builders are provided with building supplies. Builders may not face each other or look at each other's work. They may not speak to anyone. Once a runner has received instruction, he/she will go to the Builder. The Runners may then (one at a time) relay the instructions to the Builder, using words only. Runners may not touch or respond to what the Builders are doing. Relay instruction only. The Builder may only listen, without asking questions or responding.
- Observer: observe the group's process without visibly reacting to them or interacting with them. Observations and comments will be a crucial part of the discussion at the end of the activity.

At the end of the time, facilitators will bring over the original structure to compare to each of the new creations.

De-brief up in a large group.

- What was difficult about the process?
- How did the Seers feel? Was it hard to give instructions without seeing what was needed? Or was it liberating? How did you feel about the lack of concrete feedback about what was happening regarding your careful instructions?
- How did the Runners feel? Was one-way communication difficult?
- Was it frustrating to envision one thing and see the Builder doing something else?
- How did the Builders feel? Was it easy or hard to construct something with only verbal instructions and without being able to ask questions? Or did anybody feel liberated by having only instructions to follow?
- Does anybody have personal reactions or challenges to share?
- What does this activity tell us about our communication styles? What are the benefits of two way communication? Would it have been easier to construct something resembling the original structure if questions were allowed? What would you have done differently?
- What if only a certain number of questions or words were allowed?
- Would you have known what to ask? Would it have helped?

Hula Hoop Pass

Activity Type: Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: Hula hoops

Number of People: 8+

Instructions:

Have participants form a circle, holding hands. Put a hula hoop over a pair of linked hands. Task the group with passing the hula hoop clockwise around the circle without letting go of each other's hands (i.e., stepping through the hoop, etc.).

When the group has mastered passing the hula hoop around the circle, have them pass the hula hoop one person forward, then two people back, then one person forward, two people back, and so on.

If anyone in the circle releases hands, they've "broken the link" in the circle and the entire group must start again.

*For added challenge, add another hula hoop going in the opposite direction (counter-clockwise).

**This activity also works well as a competition. Split the large group in half and have each circle race the other.

The activity demonstrates the importance of teamwork and communication. Each person must work together to pass the hula hoop, and one person breaking the chain impacts the entire group. Oftentimes, groups find it helpful to chant together ("one forward, two back, one forward, two back") to find a rhythm so they are on the same page. They also encourage and cheer for one another—have them discuss how this open and constant communication impacts the group dynamic.

Human Knot

Activity Type: Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: None

Number of People: 6-10. (Split larger groups into multiple circles.)

Instructions:

Have participants stand shoulder to shoulder in a tight circle. Instruct the members to put their right hand in and grasp the hand of someone across from them (not beside them). The members should now put their left hand in and grasp the left hand of someone across from them (not the same person). Now the members must “untie” knot without anyone unlinking.

The group “wins” when they have un-knotted the chain into a large circle or multiple circles.

Variations:

To emphasize the importance of clear communication and strategic thinking, facilitators can designate a few participants who can speak and require the others to remain silent.

To emphasize the importance of trust and teamwork, facilitators can designate a few participants who must close their eyes throughout the entire exercise.

This activity is meant to develop problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. Debrief with participants to help them process the activity.

- What tactics made untying the knot easier?
- What words did you use to communicate clearly?
- How did it feel to not be able to speak?
- How difficult was it to trust others to untie the knot?
- How can you apply this activity to working together as a team?

Human Sculptures

Activity Type: Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: Photos of group poses.

Number of People: Teams of 3+.

Instructions:

The facilitator has photos of group poses (e.g., movie posters, album covers, magazine ads, etc.); it is important that no team member sees these photos in advance. These are poses that teams will need to recreate. There are three roles to play: Sculptor, Tools, and Clay.

Explain:

- Sculptor: (One person.) The only person who can see the photo and give instruction to the tools. This person may NOT touch/move the clay.
- Tools: (1-3 people, depending on group size.) The people who must follow the sculptor's instructions to move the clay to look like the photo as described by the sculptor.
- Clay: (Remaining team members.) The people who are posed to look like the group photo. May **not** move themselves, but must remain posed as the tools move them.

Give sculptors a moment to look at the photo before giving instructions. The activity can close when everyone has successfully recreated the group photo or at a given time limit. It is very important to remind sculptors and clay that they may not move the clay into poses. At the end, sculptors may show the team the photo that they were recreating. (*It is helpful to take a photo of the team's end product to compare how well they've done.)

De-brief up in a large group.

- What was difficult about the process?
- How did the sculptors feel? Was it hard to give instructions without being able to do anything? Or was it liberating?
- Was it frustrating to envision one thing and see the tools doing something else?
- How did the tools feel? Was it easy or hard to construct something with only verbal instructions and without being able to see the vision? Or did anybody feel liberated by having only instructions to follow?
- How did the clay feel? Was it easy or hard to be integral to the process without having an input or direct action?
- Does anybody have personal reactions or challenges to share?
- What does this activity tell us about our communication styles?
- What would have made the process easier?

Look Up, Look Down

Activity Type: Energizer

Supplies Needed: None.

Number of People: Any.

Instructions:

When the facilitator says "look down" everyone must look at the ground; when s/he says "look up," everyone must look up and stare directly at the face of another person. If two people make eye contact, they must scream and then step out of the circle. The rest of the participants continue staring until the facilitator says, "Look down" again.

Minefield

Activity Type: Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: Paper plates.

Number of People: Any.

Instructions:

Place paper plates ("mines") all over the ground. Pair off the group; one member of each pair will have their eyes closed and be unable to speak during the activity. The other member of each pair will be giving directions to their partner. The only directions that can be given are "left, right, forward, and back". If a mine is touched, the pair must start over.

This activity is meant to foster trust and teambuilding. Debrief with the entire group.

- What strategy or technique did you use to make it through the minefield?
- Did you trust your partner? How did you come to trust them?
- What reservations did you have about you position in the pair?
- Was it easier just following directions or would it have been better if you could have asked clarifying questions? Why?

Mingle

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: None

Number of People: 8+

Instructions:

Ask each participant to find a partner and find three things they have in common. Have each pair find another pair and discover two things they have in common. If the group is large enough have the groups of four find another group of four and find something they have in common. The exercise is complete when the entire group forms a circle and finds one thing in common.

*Advise the groups to stay away from commonalities that are too simple (e.g., clothing).

Optional: While they are searching for their next group to pair up and find commonalities, instruct students to walk together as “mingle bugs” by waving their fingers like bugs’ antennae and saying “mingle, mingle, mingle.”

Motion Name Game

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: None

Number of People: 8-15

Instructions:

Ask participants to form a circle. Each group member is required to state his/her name while demonstrating a physical motion or gesture to go with it. Each group member will say his/her name and motion AND repeat what everyone else has done. At the end, everyone will repeat everyone’s names and motions together.

Pair Up

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: Quarter sheets of paper, tape, writing utensils.

Number of People: Any.

Instructions:

Prior to starting the activity, the facilitator should take the quarter sheets of paper and think of obvious things that go together in pairs, for example: salt and pepper make a pair of items that go together. Using the paper, the facilitator should write these things on separate sheets. The facilitator should make as many of these as there are group members, but they should all be different items.

At the beginning of the game the facilitator will tape one of these on the back of each participant without letting them see what it is. When the facilitator gives the "go" signal the participants must walk around, asking only yes or no questions to find out what is written on their back and who their matching partner is.

Once they successfully find their partner, they must sit down with them and do an interview, finding out 3-5 interesting facts about them.

Variations:

- Write specific interview questions on the backs of each of the quarter sheets of paper before placing them on participant's backs.
- Have pairs introduce their partners to the rest of the group, sharing what they learned about them.
- Instead of an interview right then, tell them they must then go out for lunch or coffee with that person to get to know them better.

Possible Pairs:

Salt and Pepper, Ketchup and Mustard, Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse, Right and Left, Romeo and Juliet, Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh, Black and White, Coffee and Tea, Bread and Butter, Milk and Cookies, Moulder and Scully, etc.

**Adapted from the University of Oregon Holden Leadership Center's "Salt and Pepper."*

People Bingo

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: Bingo sheets (see appendices), pens/pencils

Number of People: Any

Instructions:

The bingo sheet will have a series of questions on it with low-risk personal information (e.g., has blue eyes, Speaks Spanish, etc.). Participants are required to find another participant who can answer "yes" to a question. They must have that person sign their name within the square.

The object is to meet as many people as you can, and fill a "BINGO!" (A complete line either horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) You can only use each participant once.

People Platform

Activity Type: Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: Masking tape.

Number of People: 10-15.

Instructions:

Create an inner 2' x 2' and an outer 6' x 6' tape outline of a square for each team. Everybody starts outside the 6' x 6' square. The objective of the activity is to get everyone inside the inner square without touching anything outside of it.

Participants may only touch the outside of the outer square and the inside of the inner square as they complete the task. The area in between the squares is off limits. If a participant touches the space between the two boxes, then they may no longer use that part of the body. Once everyone is in the inner box, they must hold their position for 10 seconds.

Facilitator Notes: If one member dominates the leadership, then take away his/her ability to speak. If the group is slow to actively attempt the exercise, then set a time limit by which they must finish. If the group completes the activity easily, make the inner box smaller.

When they have completed the activity and de-brief with the group.

- What were some of the challenges in completing this activity?
 - How did you overcome them?
 - Who was the leader? How was it decided?
 - How did the time constraint affect the activity of the group?
 - Did your group plan first or just start acting? Was this method effective or ineffective?
- What might you do different in the future?

Popcorn

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: None

Number of People: Any

Instructions:

One participant in the group stands up, introduces him/herself, and begins listing personal facts/qualities. When any member of the group shares a quality, they each stand-up and shout "Popcorn!" The first person to stand-up then introduces him/herself and begins listing qualities; everyone else sits down. This activity is meant to be fast-paced and to make it clear to the group that they have many things in common. Continue until time is up or everyone has stood and introduced themselves.

Someone Else's Eyes

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: None

Number of People: 8+

Instructions:

Ask participants to pair up with a member of the group with whom they are not familiar. Give each pair 5-7 minutes to get to know each other. After that time, have the group form a large circle with one member of each pair sitting in the circle and the other member standing behind his/her partner. Each pair goes around the circle introducing each other to the entire group.

Take What You Need

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: M&Ms, candies, or toilet paper.

Number of People: Any.

Instructions:

Ask participants to form a circle either standing or sitting, whatever is comfortable. Bring out the roll of toilet paper and tell participants to "Take as much as you think you'll need". Pass it around the circle, and give everyone a chance to take some. If anyone asks any questions about what they will be using the toilet paper for, or anything like that, just repeat, "take as much as you think you'll need".

Once everyone has some, ask participants to count their items. Then go around the circle and for every item they took, participants must tell a fact about themselves to the group. For example of you took 7 items, you must tell 7 facts about yourself to the group.

If you have a really large group and somebody took too much, you can limit the number to 5 or whatever seems appropriate to stay within your time limit.

Two Truths and a Lie

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: None

Number of People: Any

Instructions:

Give the group some time to write down two things about themselves that are true and one thing that is a lie. Each group member will then share these facts about and the rest of the group has to figure out which fact is actually a lie.

Break large groups into groups of 3-4 so that each individual can discuss their facts. Share the "best" truths and lies with the larger group to wrap up the activity.

Water Carry

Activity Type: Teambuilder

Supplies Needed: 10 paper cups filled 3/4 full of water, tray

Number of People: Teams of 4-6.

Instructions:

The purpose of this activity is to work as a team to reach a common goal, problem solving, communication methods.

Prior to the activity, fill ten paper cups with water about 3/4 full and place five at one end of the room (or outside area) on the ground and five at the other end. The cups should be at least 20 feet apart from each other if possible.

Gather the group together in the middle of the room with a tray placed on the ground and give them the following challenge:

- You must retrieve all ten cups of water and place them on the tray without spilling any water. You may only get one cup from one end of the room a time. Before getting a second cup from that side of the room you must travel to the other side of the room with the tray and retrieve a cup from that side. When all ten cups of water are on the tray you must place it on the floor in the center of the room.
- Each person can only use one foot and one hand for the entire duration of this activity, and if any water spills you must start over.

Most groups will try to hop with the tray at first but this spills water. The best way to accomplish the task is to pass the tray down a line and for the person at the end to hop to the front of the line so that the chain can continue all the way to the end of the line.

When they have completed the activity and de-brief with the group.

- How did it feel to be successful/ unsuccessful in this activity?
- Did anyone get frustrated at any time during this activity?
- Did you try different things before you came up with a solution/
- Are you ever a part of a team and you just want to quit? When and how?
- How do you feel when you are a part of a team and you work together to accomplish a difficult task?

Source:

Jones, A. (1999). Team Building Activities for Every Group. Richland, WA: Rec Room Publishing. Pg. 146-147

Where the Wind Blows

Activity Type: Icebreaker

Supplies Needed: None

Number of People: 8+

Instructions:

Ask the participants to form a large circle with one individual in the middle. This individual will introduce him/herself and say one fact about themselves. (For example: My name is Noah and I like cheese.) Everyone in the group who also shares that quality must switch spots with other people who share that quality in the circle (wherever the "wind" blows them). Whoever does not find a spot in the circle becomes the person in the middle, repeating the same process with a new fact. Repeat until time is up or everyone has been in the middle.

Variation:

Tell participants that in order to get out of the middle the people surrounding them in the circle need to ask in unison, "Name of person in middle, Do you love your neighbor?" –OR– the person in the middle can say "I'm a Privateer, and you're a Privateer if..."

The person in the middle will then respond by saying one of two things:

1. They can say "No" –OR– "I'm not a Privateer" in which case everyone needs to move from their spot and find a different one. Participants may not take a spot directly next to the one they already have. This gives the person in the center time to take a spot and escape from the middle.
2. The person in the middle can say, "Yes, especially those who are wearing blue jeans" –OR– "...if you're wearing blue jeans". Only those people wearing blue jeans must move and find a different spot.

The person in the middle may say anything within reason to get people to move. For example: I especially love my neighbors who have ever been to the beach, eaten spaghetti, been to a baseball game, watched cartoons, etc.