

# Using ICE-BREAKERS in your activities

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An 'ice-breaker' is a simple activity designed to encourage the pupils you are working with to actively engage. They are designed to introduce some energy and excitement into a session, and they can be effectively used to set out the core topic of the session.

They can be very effective in helping a group of learners to settle and become focused on a task. They can also be fun!

## Some top tips for effective ice-breakers

- Use icebreakers to create a more relaxed environment.
- Use icebreakers as topic lead-ins during the session.
- Make sure that you have the right amount of pupils for the game that you choose.
- Make the instructions for the icebreaker as simple as possible.
- Keep your eye on the participants. Make sure that they are having fun.
- Be ready to improvise if necessary.
- Try not to introduce an icebreaker game that will make others uncomfortable- physically or mentally.
- Don't underestimate the time it will take to complete the icebreaker game or activity (5-10mins maximum).
- Make sure you have all the materials that you need for the ice-breaker.
- Make a note of which ice-breakers work for you and which ones don't.
- Don't choose complicated icebreakers. Keep it simple.

## Why bother with an ice-breaker?

There are a number of reasons to use ice-breakers with groups of learners. These include:

- They warm up your audience
- Can create interest in a topic
- Good for reducing tension
- Help you to learn about your audience
- Help your audience learn about each other
- They can break down social barriers

## Example ice-breaker activity

This activity provides each participant (pupil) in your session with a piece of a 'jigsaw puzzle'. They need to arrange the pieces to form an image. The 'jigsaw puzzle' is a photograph/image that you have roughly cut into a number of pieces.

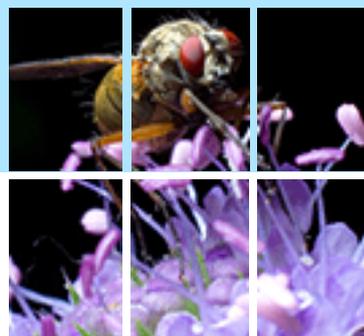
It's a good idea to have one image for each group or team in the room. For example, if you want a group of 25 pupils to work in teams of 5 you'll need 5 images that are cut into 6 pieces.



Leave one piece from each image on separate tables around the room. Mix all the other pieces together and then hand out one piece to each pupil.

The task for them is to find the table that their piece belongs to, along with all the other pupils. At the end of the activity you will have 25 pupils sat around 5 completed 'jigsaw' images. You should then ask each group or team to describe the image on their table.

This activity has been used successfully for a suite of tasks devised in collaboration with the Royal Air Force – it may be useful to link the images that you use in some way as this might create another useful discussion point. For example, you may wish to have images of different strands of engineering, different approaches to power production, chemical interactions, mathematical models etc etc etc. If the images are related in some way to your area of interest or expertise as a STEM Ambassador this will make it more comfortable for you to lead a short discussion around their content.



West Yorkshire STEM is part of Research Toolkit Ltd, the STEM Ambassadors Programme and Schools STEM Advisory Network contract-holder for West Yorkshire.

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This information sheet draws upon more detailed material provided on the STEMNET website.