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# Energizers & Ice Breakers

# Hello! Fancy seeing you here :)

We're Rosie and Faris, the co-founders of the nomadic creative consultancy, Genius Steals, and the experimental learning community, the School of Stolen Genius [SOSG]. Oh, and we have a newsletter, Strands of [Stolen] Genius. (Are you sensing a theme here?!) We believe originality is a myth, but that nothing comes from nothing. You can't invent without inventory, and we're here to help feed your brain.

Each week, we spotlight people inspiring us, letting them take over and guest curate an edition of our newsletter. Members of the SOSG have access to expert interviews from the guest curators, as well as plenty of other goodies, including the **full deck of Energizers and Ice Breakers**, free **research reports, community meetups, and webinars**, like 'What Ideas Are & How To Have Better Ones' and 'Beyond Boring Briefs.'

**Membership is only \$25/month**, and if you work for someone else, we think you have a good chance at expensing it. We've got you covered with a letter you can download, edit, and share with your boss. We hope you'll join us!

Rock on,  
Rosie & Faris



<http://learn.schoolofstolengenius.com>



# SCHOOL OF



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## ICE BREAKER

Nicole D'Alonzo |  
Founder, 19 Minute  
Yoga | USA

It helps when questions dial-in directly to what is important for the other person. It's easy to come up with an agenda and talking points, but the key is to tailor your content to the audience, whoever that may be.

In my mastermind groups, I learned to keep things simple and ask better questions, including:

- What's top of mind for you? What's most important for you today?
- **What's your rose and thorn of the day/week? (Something beautiful, something painful.** Something great, something less so. The metaphor gives room for interpretation.)

**I particularly like the rose and thorn question, because** asking people to share the highs and lows of their day/week is a simple way to create structure while building connection. It's all about creating structure—in conversation and creativity—to get to the good stuff. This can be especially helpful as a weekly ritual, as an opportunity for teams to continue to check-in and hear about people's lives outside of work.

## ROSE & THORN





## ICE BREAKER

Gareth Jones |  
SVP Marketing  
Wunderman Thompson |  
USA

- Time: 10 minutes
- 5-10 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Each person needs a sharpie and a sheet of paper with the outline of a fish on it.

# STINKY FISH

## Overview & Instructions:

This is a Hyper Island **exercise called Stinky Fish**. The basic idea (very Swedish) is that if you keep a fish in your pocket it will eventually start to stink. Similarly, if you go into a conversation with preconceptions, biases or concerns they too will start to stink (metaphorically).

At the beginning of the meeting participants are given a **piece of paper with the outline of a fish on it. They write their preconceptions, biases, concerns for the meeting inside the fish.**

The facilitator then goes around the room getting everyone to talk about their stinky fish - and **get their concerns off their chest** so they can approach the discussion with an open mind.

The facilitator then pins the stinky fish to the wall and returns to them at the end of the meeting to see if people's concerns have been addressed.

## Preparation:

Print the fish template, or prepare a virtual version using software like Miro.

## Debrief & Key Learnings:

The point of the exercise is to go into every conversation with an open mind, assume good intentions and be ready to be productive.





## ICE BREAKER

Daniele Lazarotto |  
Founder, Cordão|  
Brazil

# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

## CRAZIEST EXPERIENCE

### PERCEPTION VS. REALITY

As a teacher, everytime I begin a new class, I ask my students to share what was the **craziest thing they ever did**.

Or, what is the **one thing that they know people often think about them, but it's actually not true**. I feel we get all a little bit more comfortable and connected after we let down our guard in the beginning.

With my clients, I ask them to tell me **how they got involved with the company and what their first impressions were when they got there**. It allows them to reflect on not only their initial perspective, but the difference in their **experience vs perception**.







## ICE BREAKER

Caroline Tseng |  
Strategy Director,  
ACE Content |  
USA

# YOU AS A BRAND

## SELF-DEPRECIATION

I've learned most of my things from Faris, and so at the beginning of a big formal workshop I like to make everyone stand up and share something funny/silly about themselves related to our brand or prompt. Let's say it's an auto brand... I'd ask everyone to **share their name/role/etc and then share what car brand reflects their own personality and why.**

The answers are always really interesting and you get some insight into people's quirks. It also gives you a way to talk about brands in a human way based on intuition, which gets clients/marketers out of their quant heads. Plus, you get to survey the room. How many people think they're "BMW's"? No one b/c they think BMW's represent assholes? What about Volvos? Too safe? You get some interesting insights about brand reputation and get to have your clients experience that live with you.

Also being self deprecating is always disarming and a go-to tactic of mine. Did I steal this from Faris too? 🤔





## ICE BREAKER

Satish Krishnamurthy |  
Head of Strategy,  
Sideways Consulting |  
India

# INSPIRATION & INTRODUCTION

I'm always curious **where people find their inspiration, or who and what they find inspiring.**

It's an open ended question for a reason - It could be a person, well-known or not, a company, a brand, even a comic strip.

### Instructions:

Go around the room and ask everyone the question. When people start talking, take a lot of notes.

It's not important *what* they bring up, it's important *why* they bring up what they do. Keep asking why the inspiration comes. How you pin it down might depend on the focus of your workshop. For example, if you're focusing on values, you might ask the values of the person -- or inanimate object. If the workshop is an attempt to generate lots of ideas, perhaps you ask attendees to share three adjectives related to what they picked.

Important: **DON'T BE JUDGMENTAL!** Whether people find political figures that you aren't aligned with or pop stars whose music you hate, you're there to ask questions rather than make judgements.







## ICE BREAKER

Mark Pollard | Author, Strategy Is Your Words & Founder, Mighty Jungle | USA

Ice-breakers and self-introductions are kryptonite to me. I've run hundreds of workshops and someone will usually bring up the idea of an ice-breaker. This makes my soul roll its eyes into the back of its head. And **most of my self-introductions involve me telling people how awkward I am at them because a confident self-introduction where I'm from means you're arrogant and deserve taking down.** In the USA, people are trained at these things from a young age and the extroverts rule.

I'm likely to mess with people by getting them to **turn to the person next to them and have them discuss the last time they both cried.** Or I'll use an interview question so they can practice listening and insight. An example might be to answer the question, "What's something you learned about yourself in the past year and why was this an important lesson?" Then I'll ask people to share back to the group what they heard.... **"I don't like shallow water - the waves are too small."**

# YOUR LAST CRY

# IMPORTANT LESSONS

# LEARNED





## ICE BREAKER

Ged Hawes |  
Founder, Live &  
Learn | Netherlands

If we're short of time then something to get people laughing and chatting. I'm a fan of the **"don't show your teeth"** game. You just introduce yourself and what you want to get out of the session (for example) but you can't show your teeth. The sounds are bizarre, the words unintelligible but you can leave inhibitions at the door.

For workshops I'm wanting to see people's personalities in action early so something like the **marshmallow tower challenge** gets everyone interacting and gives me a little idea of how people are going to contribute to the session.

## HIDE YOUR TEETH

## MARSHMALLOW

## TOWER CHALLENGE





## ICE BREAKER

Aisha Washington |  
Manager, Strategic  
Marketing Partnerships  
NBC News

- Time: 15 minutes
- 5-10 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- No materials needed.

# PASS THE TORCH

### Overview & Instructions:

One person in the group starts talking about their background/favorite music/world travels/whatever they'd like until someone else in the group raises a hand because it's something they have in common.

So, I could start talking about how I grew up in Atlanta and moved to New York for work and traveled to Spain (then boom, someone raises a hand) so they start with the connecting fact that they've also spent time in Spain and can go on with the story from there.

**The goal is to get the torch passed to all participants.** You learn something about everyone in the group and also find shared connections!

### Preparation:

Can be played in a circle of chairs or on a Zoom call.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

Build personal relationships with people you work with, so you have little nuggets you could discuss and bond over coming out of the exercise





## Ice Breaker

Patrick Givens |  
Audio Advertising  
Lead, Amazon

# SONG YOU USED TO HATE BUT NOW LOVE

I'm going to take 'Genius Steals' to heart and rip off a great ice breaker I learned from Lakshmi Rengarajan (WeWork, Match.com).

**"What's a song you initially hated, but now kind of love?"**

I love this because it gets people into storytelling mode. Try it out yourself.

To answer this prompt, you need to talk about change. The song didn't change, so most likely you did. Suddenly, instead of telling the room a simple answer you're telling them about a journey of your own. Plus, it's nostalgic so everyone is in a positive headspace. You'll hear setup, tension, evolution, resolution from one person after another. The room comes to life and the group gets an insight into each participant's personal trajectory.

Plus, you can make it into a great Spotify playlist and send that around after.





## Ice Breaker

Alison Taffel  
Rabinowitz | Career  
Coach, Flatiron  
School USA

I love using **my animal spirit tarot cards** with students when breaking the ice. It's interesting to see how they interpret their past, present, and future as it relates to each animal's meaning. The whole exercise opens our sessions in a way that's truly transcending for those who dig that kind of stuff. My favorite ones to use are **The Wild Unknown**.

That said, I don't use the tarot cards on all my clients -- just the ones who are horoscope junkies like me.

Fun fact: the most frequent card that pops up with students is the Turtle -- who is known to carry many stories in their shells.

## TAROT CARDS





## ICE BREAKER

Steve Chapman |  
Artist & Consultant

I approach workshops with the mindset that the people attending are so much better at stuff than they think they are so I like to compassionately throw people in the slightly less shallow end (but not the deep end). Miles Davies used to do this with his musicians where, just as they were about to start playing he'd shout to them "Play this in G" and they'd instantly have to adjust everything. He didn't do this to catch them out, simply because he knew they were even better than they thought they were and they would play with the energy and vigour of experiencing the song anew. I think he called this "**provocative competence**" or something like that.

Most of my workshops are focussed on getting better at not knowing, embracing uncertainty and allowing ourselves to mess up and be ok with messing up so I like to start with an icebreaker that gently allows us to get OK with messing up together or at least to notice our

# PROVOCATIVE COMPETENCE IN G MAJOR







## ICE BREAKER

Kim Mackenzie |  
Head Of Strategy + Copy |  
Character USA

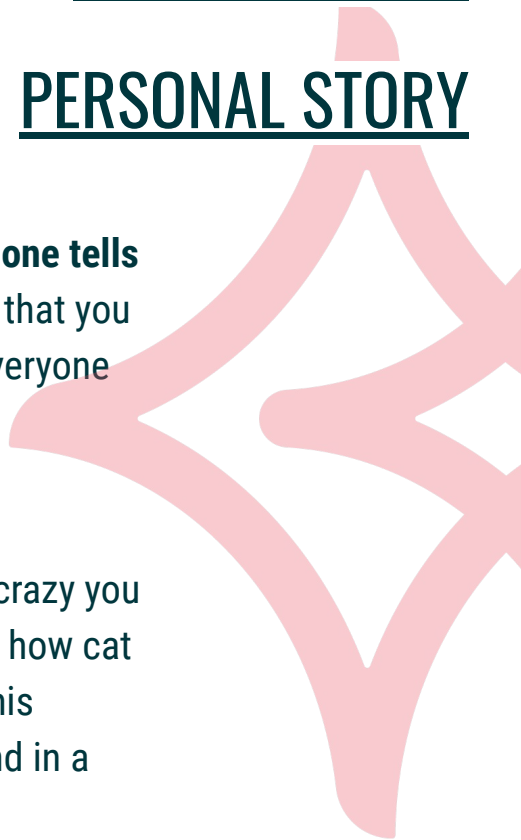
*I have two go-tos!*

One quickie which gets everyone giggling: **Everyone forms a circle and one by one tells the group what their first concert was and how old they were.** The outcome is that you start to see your team mates in a more casual, human light, and it signals to everyone that our session is not going to be dry or academic.

The second is for everyone to form a circle and tell a **personal story about the brand/category that the workshop or work session covers.** Tell us about how crazy you were about Aquafresh as a kid, why slow cookers are a source of deep anxiety, how cat food is your way of feeling better about your cat being stuck indoors all day. This exercise enables the group to immediately start thinking about the topic at hand in a different way and loosens up the cobwebs.

## FIRST CONCERT

## PERSONAL STORY



## ICE BREAKER

Mariana Cotlear Vega |  
Strategy Director at  
Edelman USA

I wish I had a clever answer here but I am much more of an intuitive strategist than a methodical one and I like to feel my way around these situations. I am 'in time' not 'on time.'

If ice needs to be broken **I will typically start with some kind of personal overshare and use that to start the conversation.**

So for example: as I sat down to write this tonight, my dog pooped on the floor right in front of me. This literally just happened!

If I was in a virtual meeting or workshop, I would tell everyone and then ask them to share anecdotes of times they felt betrayed by their pets (or kids!). Everyone has one.





## ICE BREAKER

Asad Shaykh |  
Strategy Director at Wildfire x GREY  
& Head of Brand at Pride London  
UK

# 2 TRUTHS AND A LIE

I believe one can learn more about a person asking them to tell a lie about themselves than sharing a truth - which is why I love **Two Truths and a Lie**.

It can be used anywhere from family parties to company events.

To play, you simply ask each person to brainstorm three "facts" about themselves -- two of the facts will be true, and one will be a lie.

For instance, I might say:

*"I once silhouette danced for in a music video. I have appeared on the Piccadilly Circus sign. I ziplined in Switzerland once."*

Coworkers can take turns guessing which is the lie.

(FYI: Unfortunately, I did do that dance in a music video.)





## ICE BREAKER

Shann Biglione | Head  
of Strategy at Zenith  
USA

# HEROES & VILLAINS



It depends **how you plan to use** the ice breaker. If you want it to be an exercise that can be used later on, I like to ask people simple things like their favorite brand or **favorite hero/villain**.

These are usually helpful as springboards later on when ideas start drying out, asking people to think of what they'd do if they were brand X or character Y. Of course these are pretty straightforward, but I've found them to be pretty helpful tropes of workshoping.

Now, if you really want to break the ice and if reusing later on in the meeting is less of a priority, [I love The School of Life approach of asking deeply personal questions](#). Like **“What makes you most stressed?”** They have great questions for ice breakers, which you can tailor to the comfort levels of the room.





## ICE BREAKER

Rob Schwartz |  
CEO TBWA NYC  
USA

# THE COIN GAME

The object of an “icebreaker” is two-fold.

First, you want to create a comfortable space for people to speak freely.

Secondly, you want to learn something about the participants.

**My favorite exercise is called “The Coin Game.”**

Here’s how it works. Have a big sack of coins on hand. Ask a participant to pull out one (quarter, dime, nickel, what have you). On each coin is a year. The participant calls out the year and tells us what they were doing at that time.

If the year is in their life-time, you’ll learn something specific and revealing about that person. If it’s a year beyond their life, like say, “1948,” it forces the participant to be creative. And the answers are always fascinating.





## ICE BREAKER

Katy Bass | Founder  
Altavox  
UK

### Overview:

Most teams communicate verbally so it's a nice mix up to **get everyone drawing together**. A lot of people will say they can't draw but the point of this exercise is to show some vulnerability. If everyone is used to failing in front of each other, the group dynamic is going to be more open, generous and positive.

### Preparation:

- Make sure participants have pen and paper ahead of the session (if using). Alternatively, prepare your online whiteboard for the activity (you can use [this template](#))
- Choose ambient music to play during exercise, do a sound check

# SKETCH YOUR NEIGHBOR

### Instructions:

*Adapted for remote teams on a video call*

1. Assign each team member with another person's name and send them a direct message to let them know - send these privately so the others can't see the names.
2. On the call, share the whiteboard link (if using). **Give everyone 1 minute to silently draw the person they've been assigned.** Play background music during the exercise.
3. When everyone has finished, take turns guessing who drew who. If using paper, get participants to share paper drawings on the webcam.





A circular inset image of JP Castlin, CEO of Rouser, speaking and gesturing with his hands.

## ICE BREAKER

JP Castlin | CEO  
Rouser | Sweden

While I don't have any creative exercises, I do have a couple of suggestions that, while they may come across as bleedingly obvious, are about as frequently used as chocolate teapots.

Firstly, **leave the ego outside the door**, regardless of whether you are the senior manager leading the meeting or the junior being asked to partake. A lot of strategic work is like sculpting - you start with a big block of ideas and then chip away until you get to the core of the problem you are trying to solve.

Secondly, **ensure that everyone gets to speak**. Complex problems are multi-faceted, which means that one needs multiple angles of attack. This also helps to minimize pluralistic ignorance.

Thirdly, **recognize that meetings cost a lot of money** (average salary of attendants per time unit x attendants x time unit). So come prepared. If there is a pre-read, do actually read it. Time spent explaining to people why they are in a meeting adds up, usually to a lot more than employees realize.





## ICE BREAKER

Aisea Laungaue | CSO  
Anomaly LA  
USA

I don't have any exercises actually!

Though I like to invite friendly tension into the room early so I like to start with getting people to **name things they hate that everyone else loves** or to talk about the hill they're willing to die on.

They're often funny and surprising in a way that helps everyone get a sense of the other people in the room without having to default to the safe questions where everyone just ends up responding with safe and boring answers.





## ICE BREAKER

Marissa Shrum | Founder  
Remember, I Love You  
USA

A dear friend, coach and community builder, Stephanie Redlener works to connect and fortify women leaders. She was taught a practice by one of her teachers and has passed it on to her community.

She **starts her community calls asking participants to brag about themselves.**

It's a wonderful ritual and so uncommon in our society to start a meeting with a point of pride.

Particularly for women, some of us are unconsciously taught to make ourselves small as to not make others feel less-than. This is sad when you know the truth: we are all great when we make our unique contribution and affirm the contributions of others.





## ICE BREAKER

Jurate Limontaite |  
Comms Planner,  
TPA

# AUTOGRAPHS

- Time: 10 min.
- 10-20 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: a sheet of paper and pencil for each participant

### Overview:

Getting to know each other quickly through sharing.

### Preparation:

Make a list of 6 descriptions

### Instructions:

Have participants get autographs from others who fit certain descriptions. each person signs only once. these descriptions can be written on a large sheet of paper or given to each person on a separate sheet.

### Instructions cont'd:

Suggested descriptions: a person who hates cats, can raise one eyebrow, is a Virgo, sings in the shower, likes jazz, can't swim, etc. (pick 6 descriptions). The first person to have an autograph for each description is the winner.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

a person might be able to find a new friend with the same interests



## ICE BREAKER

Kema Christian-Coates|  
Director of Content Strategy  
Deutsch NY

- Time: 10 min.
- 8-10 people

### Overview:

Having a brain teaser "lightning round" is one of the best ways to kick off a workshop where you need everyone to participate, collaborate, and think creatively. Being a workshop facilitator takes a lot of thought and preparation, so having a simple icebreaker like this one is a low lift with a great payoff: it helps your attendees get in the right mindset to solve problems and think differently. Split your attendees into two teams and read out a few brain teasers, like "What do these words have in common: polish, job, herb?" The first team who answers correctly gets a point.

### Preparation:

Google a few brain teasers and test them out on your coworkers to make sure they aren't too obvious or commonly known. It's also important that they aren't too difficult - giving your attendees an accessible win helps them to be more open-minded and optimistic going into the workshop.

## BRAIN TEASERS

- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: keep it simple! All you need is a few brain teasers, and a pen and paper to calculate the score

### Instructions:

We incorporated them into our workshop deck, so we had a few slides with the brain teasers (no answers in the deck, just to be safe). Read them out loud and give each team about a minute or so to answer. First team that responds gets a point.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

You can think of this like a warm-up - no key learnings. It just prepares you for the real workout.





## ICE BREAKER

Marisa Zupan | CEO,  
United Sodas of  
America

# WHICH SPICE GIRL ARE YOU?

- Time: 10 min.
- Any size
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: a personality

### Overview:

Ask everyone to pick which Spice Girl they would be. This icebreaker is all about identity group dynamics and humor.

### Preparation:

Make sure you have images of the Spice Girls to refresh your memory.

### Instructions:

Using an image of the Spice Girls as a prompt, It is always helpful recap quickly the personality of each Spice Girl for the group. Don't worry if anyone is unfamiliar with the Spice Girls – because they are nicknamed Sporty, Posh, Baby, Scary and Ginger people who don't know anything about the Spice Girls can still get a pretty good idea of what they would choose. Ask everyone to write their choice on a piece of paper and then a short explanation as to why. Humor usually ensues, ice is broken and everyone knows a little bit more about each other.







## ICE BREAKER

Katie Dreke |  
DRKE.co

## FUTURE HEADLINE

- Time: 15 min.
- 6-10 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: pencil & paper for each person and one paper copy of the NYT from that day

### Overview:

The group together visualizes a shared project that is currently underway, or perhaps near completion. Each person takes 5 mins to imagine TWO DIFFERENT New York Times headlines (and corresponding key image) from The Future: 1 headline represents the positive outcome of the project (Success!!) and 1 headline represents the negative outcome of the project (Total Flop!!). Once everyone is done, each person shares their headlines, and the group discusses what power they still have in their hands to impact and influence the outcome of the shared project.

### Preparation:

Useful to have a shared room, perhaps a large table, for a sense of community.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

Which headlines inspired us the most? Which were most desired/least desired? How much control do we have in our hands to impact potential headlines like these?



## ICE BREAKER

Janis Middleton | SVP,  
Executive Director of  
Multicultural and Inclusion  
Strategy

# BICYCLE FUNCTION

- Time: 7 min.
- 5-7 people
- Some facilitation experience needed.
- No materials needed

### Overview:

If you were a function on a bicycle, what part would you be and why? Depending on how people describe themselves, the goal is to see the roles that each team member plays. This way each person can hopefully learn one another's work style and see that each role is key to making the bicycle moves and operates as it should.

### Preparation:

No preparation, but you can share the question beforehand ask everyone to come prepared with an answer.

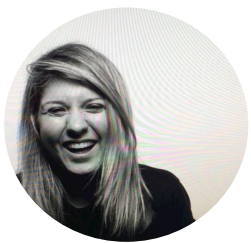
### Instructions:

It's simple. Just ask the question before the meeting starts. This is especially helpful when new team are assembled or new team members join the team.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

I'd say again that the goal is to see the roles that each team member plays. This way each person can hopefully learn one another's work style and see that each role is key to making the bicycle moves and operates as it should. If you have enough lead time, you could take take it one step further. You can either 3D print (when the office is open and because we all need a reason to use the 3D printer) parts of a bicycle for each team to have on their desks as reminders. As people's roles change and they grow, they'll start to see themselves as different parts of the bicycle. You can also print pictures of each part of the bicycle to keep it simple. This part is completely optional though.





## ICE BREAKER

Steph Morrow | Head of Strategy (Western Europe) VIRTUE

### Overview:

I find this works best with a more senior group of people, but I love to start a convo asking people what they're most worried about right now, and what gives them the most hope for the future. I always open the conversation myself. Beginning a workshop from a place of honest vulnerability just creates a really different temperature for the conversation that follows. The biggest roadblock to a successful work session is people either being checked out or self consciously holding back. This kind of nails two birds with one stone, and if you're a more experienced moderator, you can even gear the session towards appeasing their biggest worries.

## THE SUNDAY SCARIES

- Time: 10 min.
- 5-15 people
- Some facilitation experience needed.
- Materials: none

### Preparation:

Maybe a quick meditation. That's a joke, but it's really important that you go into it really ready to be vulnerable yourself, and listen closely to others as they respond.

### Instructions:

You introduce it, gather your bravery and ask away!

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

I think it's useful right at the beginning if you can help people understand that their worries are really similar or really different. If they're similar, emphasize that they're not alone. If they're really different, emphasize the fact that everybody's got their own thing they're worried about.





## ICE BREAKER

Steph Morrow | Head  
of Strategy (Western  
Europe) VIRTUE

# THE SUNDAY SCARIES

### Instructions:

You introduce it, gather your bravery and ask away!

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

I think it's useful right at the beginning if you can help people understand that their worries are really similar or really different. If they're similar, emphasize that they're not alone. If they're really different, emphasize the fact that everybody's got their own thing they're worried about.





## ICE BREAKER

Caitlin Higgins |  
Business Analyst,  
Dragon Army

### Overview:

Participants are asked to create their own yoga pose and then have another participant name it.

### Preparation:

This absolutely works with remote teams, and not a ton of space or setup is needed. Participants just need to be able to see everyone else in some capacity.

### Instructions:

1. Everyone starts standing
2. **The facilitator goes first: they mindfully strike a made up yoga pose and everyone copies the movement. They then call on another participant to help them remember the name of the made up pose, forcing them to think creatively on their feet.**
3. The participant that named the pose then follows suit, creates their own yoga pose, everyone copies the movement and a different participant is called on to name that pose. (This continues until everyone in the group has invented their own yoga pose.)  
Hilarity ensues.



- Time: 15 min.
- 5-15 people

## BYO YOGA

- Some facilitation experience needed.
- Materials: none

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

This exercise forces people to be creative and think on their feet. You may have a mixed bag of participants, some of whom that may not be used to vocalizing their thoughts. However, when forced to name a pose (example, Walking Boy Drops Ice Cream, or I'm-A-little-tea-pot-asana) this exercise removes the stakes of sharing ideas and makes the group more comfortable in the exchange to follow.

## ICE BREAKER

Leighann Farrelly |  
VP, Client Services,  
VMG



### Overview:

This is a fairly well-known icebreaker, with a small twist. Participants begin by mingling and asking questions to get to know each other. Then, each person shares interesting facts, about themselves, including two true things and one lie. I love the simplicity of it as engaging, get-to-know-each-other technique that allows people to share things they think are unique to them, and learning more about what others value. People are often surprised by what two things are true, and the best moments of conversation and discovery are born from the group's attempts to decipher a particularly challenging set of facts to identify the lie.

### Preparation:

Perhaps a simple note to the team to come prepared or think a bit in advance about what three facts they'd like to share.



# TWO TRUTHS & A LIE W/ A TWIST

- Time: 5 min.
- 5-15 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: none - this can be done verbally!

### Instructions:

Start the meeting or workshop with a few minutes of socializing, encouraging people to ask questions of one another about work, hobbies, travel, interest, etc. **Then, ask the group to be seated, and explain the rules of sharing two things that are true about you, and one thing that is not true - anything from places you've traveled, things you've accomplished, people you've met, etc.** As the facilitator, you begin with yours and have the group talk through and identify your lie. Each person takes his or her turn doing the same with the group.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

Since this is really about getting to know people, post-exercise discussion might be **asking what answers surprised them**, or if they've found something they have in common with someone else in the group through the exercise.





## ICE BREAKER

Mike Piggott | Freelance  
Editor, Writer and Podcast  
Creator, Contributing Editor  
The Marketing Society

# ONE WORD STORY

- Time: 2 min.
- 5-20 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: none

### Overview:

I remember doing this at drama school when I was 12-13. You can perhaps give people parameters, like story genre, or a thing that needs to happen, like a betrayal. But then just get them to keep up the flow and try and be creative.

### Preparation:

None

### Instructions:

I mean, it's a one word story. Each person says a single word to push the story forward, going round in a circle.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

anticipation, thinking on your feet, working with others, being creative.





## ICE BREAKER

Eric Tsai | Group  
Strategy Director at  
the community

### Overview:

It's a quick exercise just to get everyone laughing and introducing themselves at the beginning of a workshop or session.

### Preparation:

Organize the chat platform by getting phone numbers or creating a group chat somehow.

### Instructions:

It can be done a number of ways. One could be to have people introduce themselves and share a gif in real time that describes their personality. Another option could be to have them share a gif that shows how they're feeling that day or a gif that represents them.

## SHARE A GIF

- Time: 4 min.
- 4-10 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: Access to the internet and a chat platform (eg: WhatsApp, Slack, etc) for everyone

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

It's always good to allow the conversation to flow as people see the gifs coming in. You can ask others what they thought them and encourage explanations of them. It can get goofy, but it can also be awkward so keep facilitating the conversation!





## ICE BREAKER

Jill Hoppenheim |  
Founder, Bagg  
Street Productions

### Overview:

A compliment circle

### Preparation:

None

### Instructions:

Everyone sits in a circle and we go around clockwise. Each person has a turn to be the one that gets complimented. All other team members will say one positive thing that they appreciate or are inspired by, about the person - it could be their work, upbeat attitude, their comedic sensibility etc.

## COMPLIMENT CIRCLE

- Time: 10 min.
- 3-10 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: none

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

The exercise tends to change the energy of the group. People feel valued or appreciated and it also allows people to see other things positive attributes about their co-workers.





## ICE BREAKER

Rohan Routroy |  
Senior Strategist,  
Twitter

# PERSONAL CHECK IN - RED, YELLOW, GREEN

- Time: 10 min.
- Any # of people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: none

### Overview:

Start by asking everyone to rate their mood. Red - I am not present and very preoccupied and overwhelmed.

Yellow - I am partially present yet able to participate here

Green - I am fully present and ready to go.

### Preparation:

None

### Instructions:

You start by asking everyone to rate their mood and go around the room.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

After everyone is done - we acknowledge and feel aware of where everyone is at. The goal is to lean in more for the people feeling red, and also help the yellows to move to green by raising our energy and vibes.





## ICE BREAKER

Matt Muir | Generic  
Media Wanker  
(Freelance)

- Time: 10 min.
- 5-15 people

### Overview:

Each person presents three facts about them - one of which is true, two of which are lies. The audience has to work out which is the true fact among the falsehoods

### Preparation:

Literally nothing whatsoever

### Instructions:

The facilitator explains that the terms of the task - that everyone, themselves included, will take it in turns to state three facts about themselves, of which one will be true and the other two will be TOTAL LIES!

Each participant takes a minute (roughly) to present three facts about themselves, two of which are false and a third which is in fact TRUE. The rest of the group votes on which they think is the TRUE fact - which is noted by the facilitator on a whiteboard.

Once everyone has presented their facts and the attendees have selected their 'truths', the process is repeated with each person revealing their TRUTH, whether the audience picked correctly, and elaborating a bit on the story behind it

# ONE TRUTH, TWO LIES

- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: none, but maybe a whiteboard

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

What makes a good lie? Why did we make the assumptions we made about which statements were true and which weren't? What does this tell us about inbuilt prejudices that we may hold, and how these come out in our thinking? And what have we learned about our co-participants which surprised us?





## ICE BREAKER

Jenny Chang |  
Cultural Intelligence  
Strategist

# WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

- Time: 30 min.
- 3-20 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: none

### Overview:

It's simple, but especially with people that think for a living, I like asking people what they're thinking about lately. This can be anything from a funny video they saw the other day to a big structural/existential question they've been wrestling with. I find it gives a lot of insight into what's personally important to someone (or can provide a lot of entertainment).

### Instructions:

The facilitator should start, preferably with a more thoughtful answer than just one word, to give others an example of what you're looking for.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

- How does what you're thinking about relate to your life/work?
- What made you think of this/how long have you been thinking about it?
- How can other people support you?





## ICE BREAKER

Alima Trapp | EVP  
Strategy, Walton  
Isaacson

- Time: 5 min.
- At least 5 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: beach ball, sharpie

### Overview:

An easy way to break the ice by having participant answer interesting questions about themselves, adding in a bit of motor skills

### Preparation:

Write a series of interesting questions on the beach ball in a sharpie in advance of the meeting

### Instructions:

Have guest form a circle. Toss the ball to a participant, they answer the question where their dominant hand thumb lands. Continue until everyone has taken a turn.

## CATCH & HELLO

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

Questions can range from last book read, favorite album, food, TV show, pet peeve, etc. It is a fun way to get the meeting going amongst 'strangers', getting them up and out of their seat and getting more than another person's name. The answers tend to spark further conversation or encourage participants to tell a story of provide context to their answer in an easy going way.





## ICE BREAKER

Alex Morris |  
Strategy Director,  
AnalogFolk

### Overview:

Begin by having everyone write on a post it note what they think needs to be decided by the end of the meeting. Facilitator should collect the post its and put up on the wall. Everyone should then go up to the board and add a tally mark to two of the post its. Once this is done, discuss the top 2-3. Reserve time at the end of the meeting to come back and make sure you've made the decisions that were ranked highest.

### Preparation:

Supply post it notes, a wall, and markers.

### Instructions:

This exercise plays a few different functions. Primarily, it reminds everyone that the meeting is working towards a specific action. But it also gives everyone a sense of ownership of the outcome. An alternate version for when you need more control of the decision that needs to be made is to present the one thing that needs to be decided, and have everyone contribute what they need to know to make that decision.

## WHEN WE LEAVE

- Time: 20 min.
- 5-15 people
- You'll want to have a little facilitation experience
- Materials: post it notes

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

Discuss how different people across different roles need different pieces of information in order to make a decision. Discuss how everyone can have different motivators based on their role, and how these are all valid. Making a decision based on what will increase your budget the following year is valid, and its better if that motivation is out in the open. Then you can discuss how to make sure that motivation can align with motivations that also benefit the business.





Updated: 2021.10.7

# Appendix: Longer Form Workshop Exercises



## ICE BREAKER

Lisa Prince | Founder  
School of Ideas  
USA

# ABC / 123

- Time: 5 minutes
- 1-1000 people
- Beginners can facilitate.
- No materials needed.

### Overview:

A "multitasking doesn't work" game

### Preparation:

None.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

This exercise is living proof that while we can do two things at once - we end up doing both things badly.

I use this as a (passive aggressive) reminder that while folks are very welcome to spend the workshop checking email they just need to be aware of the cost: the email won't be written well and they won't be able to pay as much attention to me.

It tends to shut down distractions very effectively in a fun, quick way.





## ICE BREAKER

Lisa Prince | Founder  
School of Ideas  
USA

ABC / 123

### Instructions:

It's a simple game.

You **ask the audience to say the ABC quietly in their heads.**

The first person to get to the end wins a prize.

People get very quiet and competitive. The first person usually jumps up and is very proud.

**Then you ask them to alternative between letters and numbers...A1B2C3D4** and remind them that the first person to get to the end will get a prize.

Watch people struggle and in most cases give up quickly with frustration. Unless you are in front of engineers and/or software companies. It's a cliché, but they will stick with it until the very end.





## ENERGIZER

Laura JB |  
CCO, GREY UK

## IDEA OF NOTE[S]

- Time: 30 minutes
- 6-20 people
- Some facilitation experience needed.
- Materials: music player, pens & paper, at least 30 random images from the interwebs, sometimes tequila, and of course, a brief. Also, a loud voice as it can get quite boisterous.

### Overview:

Meet new people, come up with ridiculous ideas, run like the wind and perhaps throw back a stiff drink. All to the soundtrack of \*insert cheesy musician here\*. Keep going even if it's not making sense, it'll be worth it.

### Preparation:

Set up a space where you can run a relay from one end to the other. Find something decent to play music on and print out a load of images (I play this game a lot so I have a laminated stack that I put out). Pen, paper, all the good stuff down one end of the room, separated per team. Random pics and tequila at the other end.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

How creativity really works. How important play is to ideas, even when the ideas (may) come out quite seriously. How to create the atmosphere for creativity to flourish.





## ENERGIZER

Laura JB |  
CCO, GREY UK

# MUSICAL IDEA CHAIRS

### Instructions:

A great brief still needs a great briefing, so make sure there's some storytelling in the upfront bit.

Split into teams of 3 or 4 people and sit in clusters around some paper at one end of a room.

**Much like musical chairs, when the music is playing you work on the brief together.**

This could be something for a real client, or perhaps a bigger business or social problem that the group wants to tackle.

When the music stops one person has to run from their workspace to the other end of the room, grab a random image and run back. If it's after a certain time in the afternoon, you also throw back a shot of tequila. Then run back with random picture in hand. The team then needs to incorporate something from that image into the work. For example if you bring back a polar bear, you need to answer "how do you solve this brief with a polar bear?". That could be taking the bear itself, the cold, climate change... go lateral.

After at least 5 stops of the music and picture relays (but you can play as long as you like) give the teams a few minutes to collect their thoughts and finalise their idea. Only rules are the idea/solution has to have a really great name, and fit on one page of A4. Present back to the group. Laugh your pants off and feel proud of what you've just invented.

Thanks to [Kaospilots](https://www.kaospilots.com), this is a hack of a very old workshop of theirs that I've taken and used often. [www.schoolofstolengenius.com](https://www.schoolofstolengenius.com)



## WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

Karen Faith |  
USA

My favorite team exercise is a game I call Carrot Pretzel. It's a playful and smart way of giving others' feedback on their strengths, and it goes like this. You start with a deck of cards that you'll probably have to make. (Don't worry, it's fun.) On each card is a pair of words which may be obviously related, like "microscope telescope," or not really related, like "dog banana." It's best if none of these pairs of words have specific relevance to your team (like "strategy creative") or to personalities (like "introvert extrovert").

To play, one person, let's call her the Director, draws a card and reads it silently. Then, without explanation, the Director arranges the entire group in one line, with one end of the line representing one of the words, and the other end representing the other. So, if I'm the Director, I'm lining people up from telescope to microscope, or from dog to banana. Once the group is in line, I tell them what was on my card, and explain what strengths or qualities that person has which made me put them where I put them. Then it's someone else's turn to be Director!

The magic of this game is that it offers us a chance to share our reflections and perceptions in a non-judgmental, non-feedback way. I've gotten deep feedback using the tool, and have also laughed my ass off. It's great awareness work to get some data on how we are perceived by others. I first did it in a psych program twenty years ago (full disclosure: that's "psychiatric," not "psychology") and it stuck with me. I have taught it to dozens of teams and it consistently delivers. And, depending on your team culture, you can get REALLY creative with the word pairings...

<http://learn.schoolofstolengenius.com>



## TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITY

Bennett Bennett |  
USA

# Playlist Happy Hour

- Time: 120 minutes
- 10-12 people
- Beginners can facilitate this.
- Materials: Just a streaming service, and a keen ear for your musical tastes

### Overview:

I've never had a proper icebreaker until I was in songwriting class last year, where we all shared the styles of music we were mostly drawn to and shared a favorite defining song. This takes that exercise and stretches it for an hour—let's really get to know each other.

### Preparation:

Give yourself a couple of days to do a mental crate-digging session. Think about the music influences you had from when you were a kid, an angsty teen, or a young adult. Maybe the song that you first remember singing in the shower; it was Unbreak My Heart by Toni Braxton for me. Or your prom song. Simmer in that vibe a little.

This [article](#) from the NYTimes can help you get in the mood for this exercise.



## TEAM BUILDING EXERCISE

Bennett Bennett |  
USA

# Introduction and Inspiration

### Instructions:

Cool, so you and your peers are now tasked to make an hour-long playlist. Pick a random partner out of a hat, and don't tell them. Imagine we got to tune into the radio station of your life for a commercial-free block. That's about 12-14 songs to play with.

- 1) Give this a damn good title. No pressure on making it perfect, but let us know what you, nationally-acclaimed virtual disk jockey are having us tune into.
- 2) What song would you start with? This is how you define the energy you want us to get from this next hour, and from interacting with you.
- 3) Think about the song you'd end the hour with—just keep it in thought, but don't place it at the end just yet. Usually, club DJ's have a whole batch of shit they send you home to.
- 4) Have about the first 5-7 songs then, you'll naturally feel that energy that you started off with taper off just a bit. Pick something that you know picks the energy up—doesn't have to be the same genre, but definitely needs a different tempo. Give us a crowd pleaser!
- 5) Around the back half, think of your favorite couple of throwbacks, use those as a launchpad for resurface a recent fave.
- 6) Feeling good? This is the perfect time to add a guilty pleasure. Slip it in towards the end—if someone think's your taste is on-point, it never hurts to go a little off-center.
- 7) Now you've reached the end. Remember that song? Is it still feeling as good then as it does now? Think about the song you'd lead up to it with, it's gotta be a perfect 1-2 punch:

Maybe you'll have something like [this](#)?

When you're done, give it a good listen—does it feel like you? Does something feel a little off or could be replaced with something better? Swap it out! And when you feel right, send that link off to the person you picked!

If not, it's all good the point is for someone to listen to these songs and use it as fuel to understand you, and to ask the right and wrong questions that start quality conversations.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

Here are a few songs to think of after you've listened to your partner's hour of music:

How are you feeling about your journey, and how your taste music and time in your life shape each other?

What songs surprised you about the person?  
What song will stick with you when you think of that person?

What did you learn about how people define popularity?

What did you learn about how people consider "good" or "great" music?

What songs would you trade with them or keep in your own playlist?





## TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITY

Emma Lynch |  
United Kingdom

## Introduce Yourself

- Time: 10 minutes
- 6-15 people
- Some facilitation experience needed.
- Materials: posterboard, paper, pen, glue, a photo of yourself (optional)

### Overview:

One of the first things we did on the advertising masters was **create a poster to introduce ourselves** to our course mates which we did in small groups. Some people did personal ads, others sold their skills, others summarised themselves or their hobbies.

### Preparation:

Gather materials.



## TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITY

Emma Lynch |  
United Kingdom

# Introduce Yourself

### Instructions:

- Get everyone into small groups of 2-4 people. In these groups discuss your journey up to this point and your current skill set, qualifications, and what work you've been doing before this event. You have 5-7 minutes to do this.
- Create posters based on discussion. Make sure they have your name on them. You have 10-15 minutes to do this.
- Hang on wall and look at everyone's adverts. In turn everyone reads out their advertisement to the group in turn and people could comment if they wanted to.

### Debrief & Key Learnings:

- Takes the pressure off people who are less performative and provides an insight into everyone's personal style.
- Working in small groups is helpful to get opinions on your idea and work with the group to develop your thoughts. It can also be a confidence step as the support of your group makes it easier to move onto presenting to everyone.
- Keep on the wall during the first week or two so you can check people's names if you forget!

<http://learn.schoolofstolengenius.com>



# THANKS!

**SCHOOL'S IN SESSION:**

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