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Warmers & Icebreakers

Universal Activities for Opening Lessons

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Methods and activities for more effective teaching with less preparation

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Introduction

Icebreakers are normally used the first day of class and are designed to “break the ice” by introducing the students to each other and/or the teacher and reducing any stress students might have about starting a new class.

Warmers are similar to icebreakers in that they are meant to “warm students up” but they are for use in normal classes, where the aim is not to introduce students. They can serve some or all of these functions:

- allow for latecomers
- relax students
- energize students
- review from previous class
- introduce that class

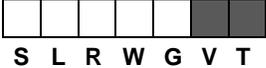
A warmer to review the previous class would usually focus on the grammar or vocabulary taught in that class. A warmer used to introduce a class may focus on the main skill being worked on in that class, the topic of the lesson or the grammar or vocabulary that will be taught. The most effective warmers are those which combine more than one of these functions. For example, a class whose skill focus was speaking and whose topic was food and whose grammar point was frequency adverbs could start with a warmer where students interview each other about their eating habits, thus combining the skill, topic and grammar of the lesson. It is important to remember that warmers are meant to relax students and they should be free to use whatever language they wish. The teaching of the lesson’s grammar or vocabulary comes after the warmer (or in the class before when it is a review). The warmer could merely put the students in a situation where they **COULD** use the grammar or vocabulary they are about to be taught (or what was taught in the class before). For introducing grammar or vocabulary, you would normally not ask students to use it but putting them in a situation where they **MAY** use it will show you what they already know and make them more receptive to the grammar or vocabulary when you do teach it.

Teachers should usually not do any correction during a warmer as the warmer is meant to reduce students’ fears about using the language. Remember that one of the biggest obstacles to progressing in a language is the fear of trying something new because it might be wrong. Warmers should be fun and ideally should send the message that your classroom is a place where there is no such thing as making a fool of yourself. Keep in mind that a way to send this message to your students is to involve yourself in the warmer as well.

Using the Collection

All the activities are categorized. First decide on the aim(s) of your **Icebreaker** or **Warmer** and then look down the appropriate columns to see which activities fit the aim(s). These are the categories, with dark shading indicating a major focus and light shading a minor one: **Speaking**; **Listening**; **Reading**; **Writing**; **Grammar**; **Vocabulary** and activities that can be used to introduce a **Topic**.

The Collection

- Adverb Game**   Elicit or write a list of manner adverbs on board (slowly, sleepily, etc.) appropriate to level. Send one student out of the class. Others decide on ONE adverb for the whole group. The student comes back in and commands other students to do actions which they do according to the chosen adverb. The student is allowed one guess at the adverb after each completed action. Demo it first by going out yourself.
- As If...**   Give each student a card with a sentence telling them how they are going to be acting. The sentence will feature "as if", e.g., act as if you are a king, a beggar, cold, hot, paranoid, crazy, etc. Students mingle and each student they talk to has to guess how their partner is acting. After students have had a chance to talk to most or all of the other students, elicit guesses about each student's behaviour. Can be used for certain vocabulary, e.g. personality adjectives, professions, etc.
- Blind Chats**   Put students in pairs. Tell them to close their eyes. They introduce themselves and then ask GTKY (get to know you) questions. If using it as a warmer give them a topic to talk about. Good for clarification language (e.g., "I'm sorry, could you repeat that?" etc.) and gets students to listen carefully.
- Brainstorm Race 1**   Establish a brainstorm topic and give students a time limit. Put them in groups and start the brainstorm. At the end of the time, find out who got the most items on their brainstorm list, elicit them and get them up on the board. Then you can ask the other teams for some additional ones that the first group missed. Great for vocabulary (e.g., personality adjectives, musical instruments, sports, movie genres, phrasal verbs, etc.).
- Brainstorm Race 2**   Divide the board up in columns so there is a column for each team of students. Draw some horizontal lines on the board to approximate lined paper. Each group comes up to their column on the board and brainstorms, writing one item on each line. Tell them beforehand that if another group has written the same item earlier, they will end up losing a point at the end. Smart students will have one team member keeping an eye on what other students are writing so this doesn't happen. They are allowed to erase and replace. At the end count up who got the most after eliminating any duplicates.
- Brainstorm Relay Race**   Establish what group of items you want students to write on the board. Could be lexical (e.g., professions, film genres, clothing, etc.) or grammatical (e.g., irregular verbs, modals, gerunds, etc.). Put students into two or more teams and get them in lines in front of the board (two teams for small classes) but make sure the first student in the line is a few metres back from the board. Give first student in the line a board marker. When you say go, the first student in each line runs to the board, writes an item on the board, gives the marker to the next person in line and then goes to the back of the line. Students in the line can confer. Stop the activity and see which group has added the most items. You can eliminate any erroneous ones first, if you like.