

ESL-Friendly Icebreakers to Use in Any Subject

Icebreaker 1: Blobs and Lines

In this icebreaker, students are prompted to either line up in some particular order (by birthday, for example) or gather in “blobs” based on something they have in common (similar shoes, for example). What’s great about this game is that it **helps students quickly discover things they have in common**. It’s also ridiculously easy: Students don’t have to come up with anything clever, and they can respond to every question without thinking too hard about it. This game keeps students moving and talking, and it builds a sense of belonging and community in your classroom.

Here are some sample prompts you can use for this game:

- Line up in alphabetical order by your first or last names.
- Gather with people who have the same eye color as you.
- Gather with people who get to school in the same way as you (car, bus, walk).
- Line up in order of your birthdays, from January 1 through December 31.
- Line up in order of how many languages you speak.
- Gather into 3 blobs: Those who have LOTS of chores at home, those who have A FEW chores at home, and those who have NO chores at home
- Gather with people who have the same favorite season as you.

Icebreaker 2: The Ball Pit

This is an activity that allows students to get to know each other without having to stand up in front of the whole class. You can vary it in many ways depending on your class.

1. Give each student 3 or 4 pieces of paper and ask them to write one question or an instruction on each one, reminding them to use their imagination a little – we don’t want boring questions like *where are you from?* after all.
2. Once they’ve written a question, ask them to scrunch it up and throw it into the middle of the classroom – the ball pit. When everyone has finished there should be plenty of questions in the ball pit. As the teacher, it’s also worthwhile putting some pre-prepared questions into the ball pit.
3. Ask students to come into the middle of the room, put them into pairs and tell them to take turns picking a ‘ball’ from the pit and then answering that question, before inviting their partner’s own response.
4. Once they’ve answered the question tell them to throw the ‘ball’ back into the pit for someone else to find.
5. Switch the pairs around every few minutes, ensuring that students get to speak to as many people as possible.
6. Conduct class feedback, asking students to report any interesting things they learned about their new classmates.

This activity can also be done as a ‘snowball fight’, where students throw the balls at each other around the class and answer any which land close to them.

ESL Course Activities

The goal of these activities is to get to know your students' prior knowledge and skills in the following areas:

Grammar

- Point to random objects in the class and ask for their location (prepositions)
- Let students describe you in 2 words (Adjectives)
- Let them talk about their morning routine (nouns – action words and adverbs - describing action words)

Vocabulary and Pronunciation

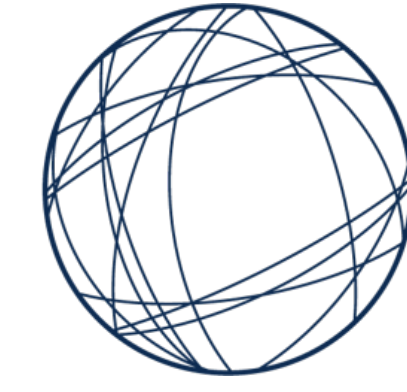
- Play Pictionary – Give one student a word (preferably something they can draw) and have the student draw on the board. Let the class guess what the picture represents

Listening, Speaking, and Fluency

- Play some videos that are an appropriate difficulty level for your students and have them describe what they saw.
- Make 2 teams. Have both teams come up with 5 questions related to the video.
- Both teams take turns to ask their questions. Award points or stars for every right answer.
- Here are some videos to get you started, but feel free to choose your own:
 - <http://rosedaletube.com/zfiles/English/ESL/eslco/Unit9/9-2-making-friends.mp4>
 - <http://rosedaletube.com/zfiles/English/ESL/eslco/Unit9/9-2-getting-to-know-someone.mp4>

Writing

Have students write 5 to 10 lines about their experience in this first day of school. Students can write about things they enjoyed, things they found confusing/challenging, things that got them curious and so on.



More ESL-Friendly Activities

Here are a few more ESL-friendly activities you can use in your classroom.

Word Association

Start by saying a word, e.g. 'cold'. Go around class and each student says something that reminds them of the previous word.

One Word Story

Ask the group to pick a topic for a story. Each person contributes one word as we go around the circle to complete a story.

Musical Words

- In groups of five or six, with each group member having one word wall card, students circulate the cards within their groups, while music is playing.
- When the music stops, the group members take turns giving the meaning of the word they have. Group members can challenge the correctness of the definition offered by their peer. If a group member cannot provide a definition, the group members discuss the meaning, asking the teacher for assistance, if necessary.

Vo-back-ulary

- Write a word on a card. (Use word wall words)
- Tape the word-card to the student's back without revealing the word to the student.
- Have the class give hints and clues to help the student guess which word is taped to their back.
- Continue the game using different students and different words.
- Alternate version: have all students with a card on their back at once and they mingle around the room. The student asks others questions that would have a yes or no answer to help them figure out what the word on their back is.

Run to the Board

- Split students into two teams. Give each team a different colour chalk.
- Divide the board into two halves.
- Give students a topic they have learned in a previous lesson i.e.: sports
- Instruct students that they take turns in a relay to run up to the board to write a word related to the topic.
- After 3 minutes count the words. The team with the most words wins.

A Cup of Conversation

Write one question per student on separate slips of paper and put them in a container. Each student picks a slip of paper from the cup, find a partner and talk for two minutes. Change partners as often as you feel they are enjoying and getting something out of the conversation.

Running Dictation



- Prepare 5 sentence strips in advance that tell a story or poem. It can be as easy or complex as required to meet student needs.
- Post them around the class
- Divide the students into pairs
- One student is the writer and the other is the runner
- Give the writer a scrap piece of paper.
- The runner has to find a sentence, read and memorize it and run back to tell the writer.
- Writer copies what the runner says.
- Once they have all five sentences they must put them in order.
- Take up as a large group.

Who am I?

Pin the name of a different famous person the back of each student so that they cannot see it. Then ask students to walk around the room asking each other questions about the identity of their person. The questions can only be answered by yes or no. The game continues until everyone has figured out who they are.

Jeopardy

Play a Jeopardy review game with your class, using your own questions.

You can create a game here: <https://jeopardylabs.com/>

More

Visit the website here <https://www.eslgamesplus.com/classroom-games/> for some more ideas for ESL review games.