

VIRTUAL ICEBREAKERS AND ENERGIZERS

A reader who conducts virtual, synchronous Webinars on a regular basis is on the prowl for icebreakers and energizers that can be used in a synchronous online classroom.

"Obviously, my store of face-to-face classroom exercises won't work in an online setting," says the reader. "Do others out there have any great icebreakers or energizers for online environments that they can share? Or can someone point me to some good resources on this topic?"

Here's Katie Marietta-Tondin's (kmarietta-tondin@us.ibm.com) advice:

- 1.** Ask virtual students to post their bios as initial icebreakers so that they can "get to know" other students. "You can even post a student survey that probes for specific information, such as location, degree level, degree currently pursuing, certificates/accreditations, undergraduate major, where employed, area of work, prior work experience, experience that relates to the current course, strengths, hopes for the course, special needs, hobbies, and so forth," says Marietta-Tondin. The survey may also be helpful, she notes, in helping the instructor to learn what type of Internet connection students have and their level of familiarity with computers and with various types of software.
- 2.** If the medium allows, include an "online office" and "social cafe and chat room" in your course where learners can go to post social information and chat with other learners -- in a forum not related to the course.

Marietta-Tondin is an instructional designer at IBM in Tallahassee, Fla.

QUICK, SIMPLE IDEAS

Icebreakers and energizers may not be easy to conduct in an online environment, but they can and should be used frequently, says Ron Hackbart (ron.hackbart@firstdatacorp.com).

"There are several factors that influence what types of activities can be done online - - such as audience size and delivery tool." That said, simple actions, such as calling a person's name before asking her a question, will help students to focus, says Hackbart. "You can also provide presentation slides that ask a question and have people respond either through a text message or a text annotation tool. If you have a co-host, he can assist with the activity by collecting text answers to questions and helping to identify people by the sound of their voice. The main goal should be to provide an activity that requires a verbal, text or annotation tool response that is not dependent on body movement."

Over the years, Hackbart has found that many icebreakers done in a classroom can still be conducted in a virtual setting ("with a few alterations because you really have to focus on the learner's voice and inflection instead of his or her movement"). If you have a smaller audience, he suggests, ask participants to give their favorite or most memorable movie line either in their best character voice or as themselves. Other students should then try to guess what actor or actress said the line and from what movie the line originates.

"Lines such as, 'Hasta la vista, baby,' and, 'Go ahead, make my day,' are good ones that people recognize but may not remember the movie from which they originate. Later, you can repeat the quote and ask people to remember who stated it at the beginning of the lesson."

Along similar lines, Hackbart suggests creating a slide or two with movie character names on one side of the slide and the actors who portrayed them on the other. Then, ask learners to use their annotation tools to take turns drawing a line from the character name to the actor name. If an answer is incorrect, move on to the next learner.

Yet another energizer that is quick and easy to use at any time, says Hackbart, is to ask learners to introduce themselves. Then, the instructor states that during the presentation, he will be playing Marco Polo. "Explain that as you are going along, you will say 'Marco' at various times and someone has to respond with 'Polo.' The first person who says 'Polo' then has to be correctly identified by the other learners. Once a person has been correctly identified, she cannot say 'Polo' the next time 'Marco' is said."

Another simple energizer is to provide a quote on the screen that is not quite correct. The quote can either contain words substituted for the correct ones (e.g., "The stag terminates in this proximity," for, "The buck stops here," or, "One man that's for mankind; one small leap for giant step," for, "That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind"). "Then, you can have learners either say the correct quote or type it in using their text annotation tool or by sending their answer to the co-host."

For larger audiences, recommends Hackbart, you can provide a close-up of a well-known public figure or graphic and have learners guess what the larger picture is. "Examples include a close-up of Donald Trump's hair or the eye of George Washington from Mount Rushmore. If you utilize breakout sessions with your virtual tool, group learners and have them try to identify what they think the graphic is. You can also put up a famous person's photo with a unique expression and have each group provide a funny caption as to what the person is saying."

Hackbart's final bit of advice? "Look at the activities you do today and ask if they can be tweaked to work in the virtual world. That way, you'll be more comfortable because you already know the premise of the exercise and just have to modify it to fit the environment."

Hackbart is an LMS administrator at First Data in Omaha, Neb.

HAVE OTHER INPUT ... regarding VIRTUAL ICEBREAKERS AND ENERGIZERS?

If so, send your comments to sboehle@vnulearning.com with the subject line "VIRTUAL ICEBREAKERS AND ENERGIZERS" and we'll try to include your response in an upcoming issue!

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