



ICEBREAKER FOR INTERNATIONAL WORKGROUPS

HOW TO GET A NEW PROJECT OR WORK GROUP STARTED IN A TRULY
RESPECTFUL AND FUN WAY – OPENING UP TO LIFELONG INTERCULTURAL AND
LANGUAGE LEARNING

Kick-off type, face-to-face training session with hand-outs, practical assignments, etc. By Olga Medvedeva
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The ICEBREAKER FOR INTERNATIONAL WORKGROUPS is a collection of resources, ideas, and activities designed to set up a friendly and supportive atmosphere in any international event or venture. In addition it is its aim to work as an eye-opener for each participant's uniqueness and deeper layers of culture, since it focuses on native languages.

If you work for an international company you know how important it is to ensure a smooth communication based on mutual respect among people of various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The resource offers a variable set of enjoyable activities that can be used as an icebreaker in various formats: international conferences and workshops, staff meetings etc.

The self-contained activities are provided with detailed teacher's notes and clear preparation guidance; if needed they can be easily adjusted to any languages of the world and/or any specific needs.

The authors are experienced teachers and language learning facilitators who share an interest in promoting intercomprehension and cultural awareness in various groups of learners.

All activities can be demonstrated in a workshop for potential users: company managers, PR officers, international event organizers, etc.



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ICEBREAKER FOR INTERNATIONAL WORKGROUPS

Kick-off type, face-to-face training session (about 3 hours) with hand-outs, practical assignments, etc. It consists of TWO sections: NAMES and GAMES, see below!

TARGET GROUPS

- Project groups
- Joint ventures and mergers
- Participants of international events (conferences, training seminars, etc)

OBJECTIVES

- To guarantee good in-group communication
- To make the best of the first impression
- To acknowledge and accept different cultures and to see them as assets
- To show that languages have many things in common which makes it possible to understand them

PURPOSE

When working in international teams, the outcome of our efforts is related to the quality of our in-group communication. If that communication can be improved it is definitely worth the effort. At no point in the life cycle of such a team are the odds as good as at the time of the first meeting. Therefore that is when a well designed ice breaker activity should take place.

RATIONALE

An Intercomprehension icebreaker has the advantage of putting the languages of the participants in focus. Why is that an advantage? That is because language is a unique code system that links the internal world of a person to the external world (which is shared by all). So, by knowing something about a person's language one knows something about how that person expresses herself. A person's language is also the main vehicle of her identity. By speaking another language s/he will tune her being into another key and will be a bit different. And good communication requires good knowledge of who one communicates with. And to show interest in my partner's native language is to show respect for (and acknowledge) her true self and her social environment (her culture) – a compliment that **really melts the ice**.

LIMITATIONS

Our icebreaker activities are based on European languages now, but can be adapted to other continents.



A. NAMES

Getting to know each other. The level of familiarity – tradition in different countries/languages: first name – second name (saint names) maternal/paternal names – surnames/family names. Variation – diminutives, nicknames... A number of activities that focus on our NAMES – magic combinations of letters that we have learned to live with and that represent our identities. At the same time our names and the forms of our names bear the imprint of our languages, even dialects, as well as cultural trends!

ACTIVITY 1: FORMS OF ADDRESS

Aims	To raise awareness of levels of familiarity in addressing in different countries To teach titles and other forms of address; levels of familiarity
Syllabus	Titles, social language for first contacts
Level appropriateness	Beginners - advanced
Interaction pattern	in small groups: circling to fill in/add to the tables;
Time	5-10 min
Materials/Preparation	3-4 copies of the table to be filled by the groups of learners

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask participants how one usually addresses a stranger? a colleague? a friend? a neighbour etc. On the first name basis? Why or why not? Elicit explanations/opinions
2. Divide the participants into several groups of 3-5 and ask them to fill in the table FORMS OF ADDRESS.
3. Ask participants to leave their copy behind and move to another table that has been filled by another group; they read and add what they can / remember; continue in the same way until all the copies are filled in by all the participants

FORMS OF ADDRESS

Country / Language	Male	Female	Other (professions, young people, etc.)
Germany	Herr		
Lithuania		Ponia	Panele
French		Madame	
English	Mister		
Russian	Gospodin		
Polish		Pani	
* to be added			



ACTIVITY 2: MOST FREQUENT NAMES

Aims	To teach common names and their forms To learn about the current trends (cultural aspect) in giving names
Syllabus	Personal names, countries
Level appropriateness	Beginners - advanced
Interaction pattern	in small groups; then whole-group discussion
Time	5-10 min
Materials/Preparation	copies of the table

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Divide the participants into groups of 3-5 and ask them to fill in the table MOST FREQUENT NAMES by guessing in which country the names are the most frequently given. Urge the participants to reach a consensus in their groups through discussions.
2. Share with the whole group how/why you guessed? Do you know any famous people from the country bearing the common names, or other famous people at all?

MATERIALS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

Go to next page for copiable materials to distribute for this activity! Below is the key of the activity:

Name	Country
Nathan (M)	Belgium
Georgi (M)	Bulgaria
Luka	Croatia
Jákup	Denmark

Jack	UK
Emil	Finland
Clara	France
Sara	Iceland
Giulia	Italy

MOST FREQUENT NAMES BY COUNTRY (2007-8)

Name	Country	Your country / Variants	Country/Culture info
Nathan (M)			
Georgi (M)			
Luka			
Jákup			
Jack			
Emil			
Clara			
Sara			
Giulia			



ACTIVITY 3: NAME CHAINS

Aims	To teach national variants of international names; short versions, diminutives To learn about various levels of familiarity
Syllabus	Personal names, countries
Level appropriateness	Beginners - advanced
Interaction pattern	in competing teams
Time	5-10 min
Materials/Preparation	flash cards with international names (see below)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Divide the participants into two groups
2. Show the name (and the country) on the flashcard. Ask the teams to take turns in continuing the chain; it is advisable to use the whiteboard
3. The team that comes up with the “last” variant wins

MATERIALS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

Please find below a few suggestions for name chains.

POSSIBLE NAME CHAINS

Thomas (BE, UK,), Tomáš (CZ) Tomas (LT),.....

Davit (Armenia) David (UK) Dovydas (LT),

Jens (DK) Jānis (LT) Jan/Jannick(Licht) Jón (IS) Jonas (LT) Ján (Slovak),

Giorgi (Georgia), Georgios (GR), Gergő (HU),

Nikoloz (Georgia) Nikola (Macedonia),

Andrea/Andreas (Licht) Andrei(RO), Andrey (RU) Andrius (LT) Andriy (Ukrainian)

Mathias(NO) Matthew (IR) Mateusz(PO) Matteo (SZ) Mattias/ Matthias (EE)

Elizaveta (Belarus), Elisa (BE) Lisete/ Lisette/ Lisett (EE) Lizi (Georgia) Eliza/Elise/Lisa(Malta) Elsa(Sweden) Elisabet (Sweden) Yelysaveta (Ukraine)

Katharina (Austria) Kateřina (CZ) Katrin (IS) Aikaterini (GR) Yekaterina (RU) Katarina(Serbia)

Anna, Hanna, Ona, Ane (Basque) Ana (Slovenia) Hannah (UK) Anni (FI) Anete/ Anette (EE) Ani (Armenia)



ACTIVITY 4: MEANINGS OF NAMES

Aims	To raise awareness about national traditions in giving names; to learn some common names typical of various cultural environments
Syllabus	Personal names, common words in different languages
Level appropriateness	Intermediate - advanced
Interaction pattern	in groups or as a whole-class activity
Time	10-15 min
Materials/Preparation	Cards with names; cards with definitions

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The participants match the names and their definitions choosing them from the “bank” and justify/discuss their choice either in small groups or with the whole class
2. Follow-up: discuss what “language elements” help in completing the task: common roots or word-building patterns, phonetic similarities etc

CARDS: NATIONAL NAMES AND THEIR „ MEANINGS“

Each card is quite small and will contain ONLY a name OR a meaning. The participants will try to match them. This can be a competition between groups as well.

Rasa (LT, Sanskrit, etc.)	Divine Nectar
Guðmundur (IS)	Good man
Sigurður (IS)	One who gives protection in a battle
Boglárka (HU)	Buttercup
Snezana (Macedonia)	Snow woman
Vesna (Macedonia)	Spring
Ludmila (RU)	Love
Susanna	Lily
Spiros	Basket
Pierre	Stone
ADD MORE!	



ACTIVITY 5: NAME BINGO

Aims	To raise awareness about national traditions in giving names; to learn some common names typical of various cultural environments
Syllabus	Personal names, common words in different languages
Level appropriateness	Intermediate - advanced
Interaction pattern	in groups or individually
Time	30 min
Materials/Preparation	One BINGO game board for each group or each player; caller's cards;

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Each group gets a game boards and markers to cover the nine fields
2. The caller draws the cards with definitions (see Caller's cards)
3. The players cover the fields accordingly
4. The first to cover three vertical or horizontal fields wins

CALLER'S CARDS

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. name=name of flower | 6. name/surname=name of animal |
| 2. name= name of natural phenomena
(like storm, rain etc) | 7. name/surname=name of bird |
| 3. name= dating back to the Bible | 8. name/surname= related to colour |
| 4. name=related to a month | 9. name= related to human characteristic |
| 5. name/surname= profession (Smith) | *to be added |

SUGGESTION FOR THE GAME BOARD

Card 1

Dahlia	Julian	Marina
Smith	Medvedev	Audra (Audrey)
Luka	Snezhana	Black

Card 2

Кузнецов (RU)	Björn (SE)	Pierre (FR)
Albina (SL)	Gül (TR)	Juratè (LT)
Ανδρεας (GR)	Joaquim (PT)	Gorski (PO)



Card 3

Αδάμ (GR)	Susanna	Соловьев
Leila	Crystal	Gabriel
Stella	Bella	Juratė (LT)

Card 4

Angyalka	Gemma	Hjörtur
Laima	Bianka	Felicia
Olivia	Pavils	Jasna

Card 5

Eha	Iris	Ernő
Katya	Juhan	Ciar
Ari	Maimu	Georgina

Card 6

Conan	Fearghas	Alba
Silvio	Delphina	Leon
Ari	Тодор	Pierre

1. Name of flower	Georgiana, Dalia, Susanna, Gül (rose),
2. Name of natural phenomena (like storm, rain etc)	Audra (storm), Aurora (dawn), Snezhana (snow), Juratė (sea), Eha (dusk), Iris (rainbow), Marina, Leila, Jasna,
3. Name dating back to the Bible	Pierre, Тодор, Katya, Pavils, Angyalka, Ανδρέας, LUKA, Juhan, Gabriel, Αδάμ
4. Name=related to a month	Julia, Julius, August, Maj
5. Name/surname= profession	Smith, Кузнецов, Schneider, Taylor, Pelletieri, Herrera,
6. Name/surname=name of animal	Hjörtur (deer), Conan (little wolf), Медведев (bear), Delphina, Leon, Björn,
7. Name/surname=name of bird	Ari (eagle), Соловьев (nightingale)
8. Name/surname= related to colour	Albina, Ciar, Bianca, Black,
9. Name= related to human features	Feargas (man of vigour), Ernő, Maimu, Laima, Felicia, Bella,
10. names/surnames=related to minerals and similar objects of natural world	Stella, Chrystal, Amber, Silvio, Olivia, Gorski, Gemma,



ACTIVITY 6: STAND IN LINE

Aims	To make sure everybody gets attention, to hear foreign languages, to repeat words in foreign languages, to train phonetics, to present one's own language to the group
Syllabus	Personal names, common words and numbers in different languages
Level appropriateness	Basic - intermediate - advanced
Interaction pattern	Whole-class activity
Time	10-15 min
Materials/Preparation	None

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The participants are asked to organise themselves in a line according to various parameters (age, height, shoe size, first names, last names, nick names, favourite food, favourite other things, etc.)
2. They are only allowed to use their own language when asking the others, or when responding, or trying to organise the group.
3. Every time the line is in place it is supposed to curl up and form a circle. Once the circle is formed the participants ask the following what the name or shoe size etc. was that motivated her/his place. If it is necessary it can be translated to another language.
4. Option: the circle can be used to transmit a message in the languages of the participants.
5. Follow-up: discuss what "language elements" help in completing the task: common roots or word-building patterns, phonetic similarities etc.



ACTIVITY 7: WORLD LITERATURE

Aims	To discover hidden talents as to guessing the meaning of words in unknown languages
Syllabus	Personal names, general knowledge put to active use
Level appropriateness	Basic
Interaction pattern	Group activity
Time	10 min
Materials/Preparation	Cards (can be really small)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Blow up the table below, cut it to pieces to separate the names/book titles/countries and let students arrange them as below.
2. Debriefing with discussions of how the deduction has proceeded.
3. One might want to add books written in English but with the names of the country, author, and book translated into another language (see Kipling below).

MATERIALS

Gabriel García Márquez	Cien años de soledad	Colombia
Astrid Lindgren	Pippi Långstrump	Sverige
Anna Gavalda	35 kilos d'espoir	France
Лев Толстой	Война и мир	Россия
August Strindberg	Röda rummet	Sverige
Hermann Hesse	Das Glasperlenspiel	Deutschland
Sofi Oksanen	Puhdistus	Suomi
Σοφοκλής	Οιδίπους Τύραννος	Ελλάδα
Rudyard Kipling	Сәғәлликләрин kitabi	Böyük Britaniya/ Hindistan
To be added		



B. ICEBREAKING GAMES

To know the very most common expressions and to practice how to say them so they sound natural and relaxed, gives enormous advantages in the first contacts with locals. It is surprising to them in a pleasant way which makes them remember you and it gives you the goodwill you need to get the help you want. It is the perfect starting point for a deeper contact if you would like to have that.

In the following activities you will practice just that with the help from the other group members. Take the chance and teach each other the expressions that will break the ice!

Each activity is laid out on one page.



ACTIVITY 1: SMALL TALK

Aims	To hear a few phrases that are used as small talk in different countries To teach titles and other forms of address; levels of familiarity To discuss cultural differences in interaction
Syllabus	Social language for first contacts
Level appropriateness	Beginners
Interaction pattern	Individual (writing) and in pairs: pasting together dialogues
Time	15 - 20 min
Materials/Preparation	Arrow dialogue to be filled in and cut up and then reassembled

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Organise groups (pairs) in which at least two languages other than English are spoken.
2. Ask participants to write the dialogue in table 1 in their own language (unless it is English obviously).
3. Have them cut it up in rows (with one Q and one A on each). Mix the rows in a pile.
4. Circulate the piles so that each group gets new piles.
5. The task is to work in pairs trying to reassemble the dialogues in foreign languages, then to rehearse them and finally to enact them for the others groups.
6. The other groups are supposed to guess the language and finally to enact the

MATERIALS

1 st person		2 nd person
Hello! How are you?		Fine, thanks, and you?
I'm fine. Nice to meet you.		My pleasure!
My name is... What is your name?		My name is... You are not from here?
No, I'm from....		I see. Work or holidays?
I'm here for a conference.		OK. Have a nice stay!
Thank you. Have a good day!		The same to you!
Good bye!		Good bye!



ACTIVITY 2: YOUR TELEPHONE AND YOUR COMPUTER

Aims	To raise awareness about how non-linguistic cues are valuable in the verbal decoding process
Syllabus	Technical terms
Level appropriateness	Intermediate - advanced
Interaction pattern	Pair work
Time	10-15 min
Materials/Preparation	Telephones or computers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set your telephone on your native language. Alternatively: Open a well-known computer program in your native language.
2. Change phones/computers with your partner.
3. Play with the functions, try hypotheses, carry out commands.
4. Show your partner what words you have learnt.
5. Ask your partner to pronounce them and repeat.



ACTIVITY 3: ROBOT

Aims	Learning simple commands. Using intonation as a decoding device.
Syllabus	Verbs and prepositions
Level appropriateness	Basic
Interaction pattern	Pair work
Time	10-15 min
Materials/Preparation	Obstacles, scarves, pens, papers, any available object

A. OBSTACLE COURSE – INSTRUCTIONS

1. Blindfold your partner. Set up an obstacle course with objects or paper sheets on the floor.
2. Guide your partner through the obstacles with simple commands in your own language.
3. The blindfolded person repeats the actions and carries them out.
4. Give feedback whether your partner misunderstands or gets it right.
5. Sum up the commands used and change roles.

B. REMOTE CONTROL - INSTRUCTIONS

1. Assign the roles master and slave/robot.
2. Use the commands STAND UP, GO TO THE..., TAKE..., BRING..., PUT..., GIVE TO..., COME HERE, SIT DOWN, TAKE THE PEN, WRITE YOUR NAME, and so on. Use your own language.
3. The robot repeats and obeys the commands.
4. Give feedback and urge the robot actively. If the robot does not understand, s/he is supposed to ask in her/his own language.
5. Sum up words learnt. Discuss what was easy and what was difficult.



ACTIVITY 4: A NORMAL DAY

Aims	Learning about other people's routines and words for them. To understand expressions of preferences.
Syllabus	Very frequent verbs and nouns as well as numerals (telling time)
Level appropriateness	Basic – intermediate
Interaction pattern	Group work or pair work
Time	10-15 min
Materials/Preparation	A picture of a clock or a table with 24 rows – one for each hour.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Look at the picture of the clock or 24-hour table. Point at a certain hour and state what you normally do at that time.
2. Ask the other participants what they do then, alternatively when they do that which you said you do in your own language. Use very short phrases, perhaps single words.
3. Try to make sense of the statements you hear. Give feedback.
4. Feedback can be sounds like aha or mmm, but if you ask follow-up questions the activity get more interesting.
5. Sum up the words for meals used and the numbers in the other languages.



ACTIVITY 5: AN ENCOUNTER WITH CONSEQUENCES

Aims	Practicing pronunciation. Using logic and cultural cues as decoding devices.
Syllabus	Names, prepositions and simple verb phrases
Level appropriateness	Intermediate – advanced
Interaction pattern	Group work or pair work
Time	20 min
Materials/Preparation	A paper divided into 8 fields, see below !

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Each participant gets a paper and draws a grid consisting of eight cells on it. The cells will be filled with short parts of a scene with two people in which something is said and done.
2. S/he writes typical names in the first two cells and the equivalent of MET after the woman's name.
3. In cells 3 and 4 s/he writes a place and a time of day.
4. In 5 and 6 s/he writes what they said, starting with "she said" and "he said". The statements have to be very simple and short.
5. In 7 and 8 s/he is to write what they did. Keep it short and simple.
6. Go through the scenes with the partners. Have the others repeat your lines. Translate if necessary.
7. Enact the scenes with two roles for the other participants. Use one person as story-teller.
8. Compare the words between the languages. Are there synonyms that can be used so as to enhance the understanding?

MATERIALS

Divide the A4 paper into 8 cells as below.

1. [a woman's name] [followed by MET]	2. [a man's name]
3. [a place]	4. [a time]
5. [what she said]	6. [what he said]
7. [what they or she did] [followed by AND]	8. [what they or he did]



ACTIVITY 6: MY FAMILY (A)

Aims	Practicing pronunciation. Using logic and cultural cues as decoding devices.
Syllabus	Names of people and places, family relations, and numbers
Level appropriateness	Basic – intermediate
Interaction pattern	Pair work
Time	20 min
Materials/Preparation	A paper with a simple family tree structure

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Each participant gets a paper and draws a family tree on it beginning with her/himself in the lower middle. The names of the people are to be inserted.
2. Ask each other about the people. The basic questions are listed under materials. Back up your words with non-verbal cues or a common language if needed.
3. Ask follow up questions. Try to be very logical, not changing the topic wildly. Point at the tree to make sure you're talking about the same person. Use intonation, gestures, and stress to make clear what you say.
4. Try to retell the basic family in your own language and see if the person whose family it is thinks that you had got it right.
5. Make a poster presentation of the family tree and organise a little exhibition.

MATERIALS

The basic question words. List for all the languages used in your group:

English	Lang. 1	Lang. 2	Lang. 3
Who (is s/he)?			
Where (does s/he live)?			
How (old is s/he)? How (many children, etc)			
What (is her/his ...)?			
Which?			
When?			
Why?			



ACTIVITY 6: MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS (B)

Aims	Practicing pronunciation. Using logic and cultural cues as decoding devices.
Syllabus	Names of people and places, family relations, and numbers. Physical features
Level appropriateness	Basic – intermediate
Interaction pattern	Pair work
Time	20 min
Materials/Preparation	A photograph (or a few) of your family and friends

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Each participant shows a photo with family and friends.
2. Ask each other about the people. The basic questions are listed under materials. Back up your words with non-verbal cues or a common language if needed.
3. Ask follow up questions. Try to be very logical, not changing the topic wildly. Point at the tree to make sure you're talking about the same person. Use intonation, gestures, and stress to make clear what you say.
4. Try to retell who is in the photo in your own language and see if the person whose family it is thinks that you had got it right.
5. Discuss physical features and mental characteristics of your family and friends

MATERIALS

The basic question words. List for all the languages used in your group:

English	Lang. 1	Lang. 2	Lang. 3
Who (is s/he)?			
Where (does s/he live)?			
How (old is s/he)?			
How (many children, etc)			
What (is her/his ...)?			
Is s/he tall/short?			
Is s/he dark/blond/bald?			
How is s/he?			
ADD MORE!			