Icebreaker questions for training sessions

Icebreaker questions for training sessions work best when they start the topic as well as the conversation. Choose from 48 original questions grouped by training situation, from mandatory courses to software training, then run them with the 10-minute opening plan, a starting-point worksheet and printable cards.

10 minutes | 4–24 participants | Online and adaptable in person

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The outcome

Each participant writes one answer that links their own work to the training topic and one question they want answered, and the trainer leaves the opening with a visible list of the group’s questions and starting points.

Before the session

- For trainers opening a workplace course, workshop or learning session with 4–24 adults, in person or online. The 10 minutes are the opening only; they come before your first content block.
- Choose one question from the group that matches your training situation. Keep one back-up question from the Finding out what people already know group.
- Put the question on a slide and in the chat, and read it aloud. Print or share the starting-point worksheet. Prepare a visible place to record the group’s questions without names.
- For more than eight people, plan pairs or threes for the sharing step. Online, prepare breakout rooms or use chat, and say in advance that cameras are optional.

Included in this kit

A facilitator run of show, participant worksheets with real tables, reference tables, debrief questions, adaptation notes and a follow-up plan. Use the editable Word copy to tailor examples and prompts before delivery.

Original material by Superglue. Timings are suggestions; adjust them to your participants. This resource has not been independently evaluated.

What is inside

The participant sheets come first so you can print one page per person. Your own facilitator section follows them.

- My starting point — Keep this sheet for yourself.
- First session with people who have not met — Keep answers about work, not private life.
- Finding out what people already know — Use these to activate prior knowledge.
- Groups with mixed experience — These questions let experienced participants contribute without making newer participants feel tested.
- Software, systems or technical training — Link the opener to the screens and tasks people will practise.
- Mandatory or compliance training — People may attend because they must.
- Day two, after a break or at a follow-up session — Reconnect people with what they tried since the last session before adding new content.
- Facilitator run of show, reference tables, debrief questions and adaptation notes — for you, after the participant sheets.

My starting point

Keep this sheet for yourself. Write before you speak, and share only what you choose. Look at it again at the end of the session.

Prompt	My notes
My name and role for today	
My answer to the opening question	
What I already know or do about this topic	
One question I want answered today	
A real task where I could use today's content	

At the end of the session: was my question answered? What will I try first?

_____

_____

First session with people who have not met

Keep answers about work, not private life. Everyone can answer in one sentence. Print this page and cut between rows for eight question cards. Choose a card for the situation, not by chance alone.

Card	Question
1	What part of your work brings you to this session today?
2	Which team or role do you work with most often, and what do you pass on to them?
3	What is one task you did this week that relates to today’s topic?
4	What would you like your practice partner to know about your work before we start?
5	Which tool or document do you open most often in a working day?
6	What question about this topic has someone asked you recently?
7	How do you prefer to take notes in a course: on paper, on a screen or not at all?
8	What name would you like us to use for you today, and how do you pronounce it?

Finding out what people already know

Use these to activate prior knowledge. Treat every answer as useful information for the session plan. Print this page and cut between rows for eight question cards. Choose a card for the situation, not by chance alone.

Card	Question
9	What is one thing you already do well that relates to today’s topic?
10	Where did you first learn how to do this task, and from whom?
11	What rule of thumb do you already use for this?
12	Which part of this topic feels clear to you, and which part feels uncertain?
13	What mistake in this area would you most like to help others avoid?
14	If you had to give a new colleague one tip about this today, what would it be?
15	Which word in today’s session title would you like me to define?
16	Between “new to me” and “I could teach it”, where are you on this topic, and why?

Groups with mixed experience

These questions let experienced participants contribute without making newer participants feel tested. Print this page and cut between rows for eight question cards. Choose a card for the situation, not by chance alone.

Card	Question
17	What would you like a newcomer to ask you about this work?
18	Which part of this task has changed most since you started doing it?
19	What question would you ask an expert if nobody else could hear it?
20	What is one shortcut you trust, and one you avoid?
21	Which step do people new to this work usually skip, in your experience?
22	What would make pair practice useful for you, whatever your experience?
23	Which part of today would you like to compare with someone from a different team?
24	What did you wish someone had told you when you first did this task?

Software, systems or technical training

Link the opener to the screens and tasks people will practise. Let people answer while they log in. Print this page and cut between rows for eight question cards. Choose a card for the situation, not by chance alone.

Card	Question
25	Which screen or feature do you use most in the current system?
26	What workaround do you use because the system does not do what you need?
27	Which task would you like to complete faster by the end of today?
28	What error message or warning have you seen more than once?
29	Do you prefer to follow along live, watch first or try first, and why?
30	Which setting or keyboard shortcut would you recommend to a colleague?
31	What do you check before you trust a report from this system?
32	What do you need open on your screen to practise today?

Mandatory or compliance training

People may attend because they must. Acknowledge that, and connect the topic to decisions they actually make. Print this page and cut between rows for eight question cards. Choose a card for the situation, not by chance alone.

Card	Question
33	Where in your normal week does this policy affect a decision you make?
34	What part of this rule is easy to follow, and what part is awkward in practice?
35	Which situation from your work would you like us to test against the rule?
36	What would you need to know to answer a colleague’s question about this policy?
37	What has changed in your work since you last completed this training?
38	Who do you ask now when a situation does not fit the rule?
39	What example would make this topic more realistic for your role?
40	Which part of the policy wording would you like explained in plain language?

Day two, after a break or at a follow-up session

Reconnect people with what they tried since the last session before adding new content. Print this page and cut between rows for eight question cards. Choose a card for the situation, not by chance alone.

Card	Question
41	What did you try since the last session, and what happened?
42	Which idea from last time have you not used yet, and why?
43	What question came up after the last session ended?
44	What do you remember most clearly from last time without looking at your notes?
45	What would you like to practise again before we add something new?
46	What got in the way of using what we covered?
47	Which example from last time still does not fit your situation?
48	What could we spend less time on today, based on what you already know?

Facilitator run of show

1 Frame the opener | 1 minute

Say: “We will start with one question that links to today’s topic. Write first, then answer in a sentence or two. You can pass.” Show the question and the time available.

2 Write privately | 2 minutes

Everyone writes an answer on the starting-point worksheet or in a private note. Add one question they want answered today. Stay quiet during this time so people can think.

3 Share in pairs or threes | 4 minutes

In pairs, each person has two minutes. In threes, each person has about 80 seconds. The listener asks one follow-up question. Online, use breakout rooms, or ask people to post answers in chat and reply to one other answer.

4 Hear a few answers | 2 minutes

Invite three or four voluntary answers in the main room or in chat. Record the questions people want answered where everyone can see them, without names. Do not ask every person to report.

5 Link to the agenda | 1 minute

Name one or two recorded questions that the session will answer and say when. Park any question outside today's scope and say what you will do with it. Move straight into the first content block.

Reference tables

Choose a question for your training situation

Situation	Start with	Avoid
Strangers on a public course	First session with people who have not met	Questions about family, holidays or personal history.
You do not know the group's level	Finding out what people already know	Public quizzes that expose what people do not know.
Experts and newcomers together	Groups with mixed experience	Asking only the most experienced people to answer.
System or software rollout	Software, systems or technical training	Long discussion before people are logged in.
Required course	Mandatory or compliance training	Pretending attendance is voluntary.
Second day or follow-up	Day two, after a break or at a follow-up session	Restarting as if the first session did not happen.

Worked example: opening a software training session

A fictional 10-minute opening for 12 people learning a new expense system. The answers are samples, not evidence of effectiveness.

Minute	What the trainer did	Sample participant answers
0–1	Showed the question "What workaround do you use because the system does not do what you need?" and read it aloud.	—
1–3	Gave two minutes of silent writing while people logged in.	"I keep receipts in a spreadsheet and enter them monthly." Question: "Can I submit from my phone?"
3–7	Put people in pairs with two minutes each and one follow-up question.	A pair found they both re-enter mileage by hand.
7–9	Took four voluntary answers and wrote the questions on a visible board.	Phone submission, mileage, approval delays, currency conversion.
9–10	Said that phone submission and mileage were in the next hour and that approval delays would go to the finance team.	—

Debrief and next steps

Questions for reflection

- Which answers showed what the group already knows, and how will you use that in the next block?

- Which of the group's questions did the session answer, and which need a follow-up?
- Did the question connect to the topic, or would a different group of questions suit this audience better?

Adapt the session

- For 4–8 people, skip the pairs and let each person answer in the main room in a sentence or two. For 16–24, use threes and take only three answers in the main room.
- Online, post the question in chat and allow typed answers. Cameras are optional. Read the question aloud for people using screen readers or joining by phone.
- Offer the question in advance for participants who need processing time, and accept a written answer handed in or sent privately. Passing needs no explanation.
- Avoid questions about family, health, beliefs, money or personal history. If an answer reveals something sensitive, thank the person, do not ask follow-up questions and move on.

After the session

Keep the visible list of questions and return to it before the final break. Mark which questions the session answered and name an owner and a date for the others. At the end, ask participants to look at their starting-point worksheet and write one thing they will try first.

Questions people ask

What makes a good icebreaker question for a training session?

It is easy to answer in a sentence, links to the training topic and needs no personal disclosure. It also tells the trainer what people already know or want to ask.

How long should a training icebreaker take?

This plan takes 10 minutes, including private writing, pair sharing and a link to the agenda. For a short session, use only the writing step and two answers in chat, which takes about four minutes.

How is this different from the virtual icebreaker kit?

The virtual icebreaker kit opens online meetings and team sessions. These questions open a training topic and are grouped by training situation, such as compliance or software courses.

What if participants do not want to take part?

Make passing acceptable and say so at the start. Private writing comes first, so nobody has to speak. In mandatory training, acknowledge that attendance is required and use a question that links to a decision people actually make.

What is included in the free and editable files?

The open PDF and editable Word file include all 48 questions on six cut-apart card sheets, the starting-point worksheet, the 10-minute plan and a worked example. The Excel workbook holds the timed plan and the full question list. The subscriber ZIP contains the PDF, Word, Excel and CSV files with the usage terms.

Use and sharing

Free to use and adapt in your own training sessions, including paid client work. Do not resell or redistribute the unmodified download as a standalone product. Share the resource page instead.