



# Welcoming Routines – Setting the Tone

## Community Building Activities

- **This or That**

Time: 1-3 minutes

Ask students for their opinions about two random but connected things (e.g. beach vacation or mountain vacation, ketchup, or salsa as their preferred condiment, iPhone or Android, veggies or fruit, summer or winter, swim at the beach or in a pool, night owl or early morning, etc.) and stand up/sit down, or raise their hand, or move to a designated space in the room to answer.

**Debrief:** Ask students to identify one thing they had in common with someone else in the class.

- **How Many of You?**

Time: 1-5 minutes

1. Ask a main question and decide how you want the student to let you know their answer. Students could respond by raising hands, standing up, holding something up, etc.

2. After the first question is asked, invite other students (with your modeling and help) to ask follow-up questions until everyone's specific answer gets identified. You will also end up building students' vocabulary and their questioning skills.

Sample main questions and some follow-up questions.

- How many of you play an instrument? Which ones?
- Play a sport? Which sports?
- Like to read? Nonfiction? History? Fiction? Mysteries?
- Like to eat dessert? What are your favorites?
- Like pizza? With cheese? What kind? Other toppings?
- Know a quote from a book, poem, or music? Know the author or composer? Who can share an example?
- Like hot (or cold) weather? Being in the sun? Being in the rain? Thunderstorms? Windy days?
- Know someone with a disability? What kind of disability? What is it like to be with that person?
- Have ever been part of a team? In school? Out of school? Music-related? Sports-related? What teams? What was your role?
- Have ever been to a concert, play, show, or sports event? Indoors? Outdoors? What have you seen?

- **Greeting Frenzy**

Time: 3 Minutes

This activity provides an opportunity for each person in the room to make a brief connection with everyone else in the room.

Explain: "You have 3 minutes, and within that time your job is to introduce yourself, greet everybody in the room, by name, and elbow bump.

(Groups of 12 or less, one minute; larger groups, two minutes; huge groups, three minutes: "...greet as many people in the room as possible...")

2. Set the timer and use an agreed-upon attention signal to bring the room to full quiet before the debriefing comments.

**Debrief by asking one or more of these questions:**

"How's your energy? Notice a lift in the room? Why do you think that's the case?"

- **Mix and Mingle**

Time: 3-5 minutes

1. On a card or half-sheet of paper, ask students to write down a response to a prompt you give related to the learning topic e.g. "What's one thing you know already about [insert your content]?"

2. When you announce, "Mix and mingle!" and turn on music, students move around.
3. When the music stops, students find a partner near them. Help with pairing if needed.
4. Partners share their responses, listen actively to each other, and ask follow-up questions.
5. Start the music again and repeat the sequence with another partner or two, as your time permits.

**Debrief by asking one or more of these questions:**

- What were some of the things you appreciate about doing this activity?
- What was challenging about it?
- What skills did you use?

**Teambuilding: Small Group**

- **Who Are You?**

Time: 3-5 minutes

Begin group work by building relationships and a sense of working together as a team. Ask students some questions that will allow them to get to know things about their classmates. Here are some sample questions:

- What kind of music do you like?
- Where do members of your family come from? What languages do they, and you, speak?
- What holidays do you enjoy and how do you celebrate them?
- If you could travel anyplace for free, where would you like to travel? Why?
- What is a place that you have visited that you like the most?
- Have you ever been to a park, zoo, museum, or a farm? Pick one and tell us about it.
- When is your birthday and where were you born?
- What is a movie or a book you have seen or read lately that you really liked? Why?
- If you could be any animal that you wanted, what would you pick? Why?
- What is something you would change about this school if you could, maybe if you became the principal?

Use a timer and give them 30 to 45 seconds per student to respond. After the first round, help them learn how to keep track of time and to listen to what one another has said. Consider asking them to keep a list or find other ways to let their group mates know they are listening. Repeat more rounds over the next few days, or have kids share within subgroups of different peers.

**Check- In's**

- Begin with a sentence starter:  
"A success I recently had \_\_\_\_."  
"One thing that's new \_\_\_\_."  
"Today I am feeling \_\_\_\_."

**Positive Thinking**

- Write a personal positive mantra.
- Write a positive or encouraging thought or quote on the board and ask students to write in their journals about their connection to the quote or thought.

**Gratitude**

- Ask students to keep journals in which they make entries about things big or small that they appreciate.
- Put a Gratitude Poster/Gratitude Board in your room that students can write on. You can have a different gratitude-related themes.

**Active Listening**

- **What's New?**  
Time: 2-5 minutes

1. Ask students to find a partner in a way that is appropriate for your group today.
  2. Say, "Think of something that is new with you that you want to share with your partner." Then give participants a moment to think of their news.
  3. Explain that each person will share their news while their partner fully listens silently, without comment or questions.
  4. Tell students that you will be keeping time and that you will let them know when it is time to switch roles.
  5. Give pairs a moment to decide who will go first, ask the starting partners to raise their hands to make sure everyone is ready, then give the go-ahead to begin.
  6. At the end of a minute or two, use your attention signal to bring the room to quiet and let participants know it is time to switch roles.
- Debrief:** After both partners have shared, ask them to reflect on the process with each other or with the whole group.

### **Brainstorming**

- **Synetics.** *Adapted from *Groups at Work: Strategies and Structures for Professional Learning*, by Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, and based on the work of George M. Prince*  
Time: 4-7 minutes

Students take part in brainstorming and metaphorical thinking that allows for a high level of inclusion and encourages the acceptance of offbeat or novel ideas. This activity promotes creative and fluid thinking. It sparks conversation, establishes readiness for further exploration of a topic, and can be explicitly connected to a literacy objective.

1. Project an image on a screen or supply picture card(s) on each table.
2. Explain that the task is to complete the sentence stem: "[Given topic] is like this [image] because..."
  - Divide students into small groups and ask them to generate and record as many comparisons between the image displayed and the topic presented as possible in one to two minutes.
  - After brainstorming, invite each group to come to consensus on one comparison to share out loud to the whole group.

Variation: Another time, shift the directions to generate contrasts, instead of likeness. "[Topic] is Not like [image] because..."

## Strategies to Engage Learners – Sense Making, Transitions, Brain Breaks

### Brain Break: Breathing

- **Mindful Minute Breathing**

Time: 1-3 minutes

This activity works well both to start class or a lesson—to help students focus—and as a classroom “brain break”—to allow students to decompress and refocus so they’re ready to re-engage with learning.

1. Explain that our breath can be used to calm our bodies and steady our minds.
2. Ask students to bring awareness to their breathing when you sound a tone or use a mindful minute from an app such as Headspace or CALM. Pure Edge, Inc. videos ( [grades 7-9](#), [grades 10-12](#)) may also be used for a mindful minute.
3. Invite them to either close their eyes or to rest them by looking at a spot they choose across the room. Remind them to practice nasal breathing, in through the nose and out through the nose.
4. After one minute, gently sound a triangle or bell or verbally signify the end.

### Brain Break: Movement

- **Give One, Get One, Move On (Go, Go, Mo)**

Time: 5-10 minutes

1. Ask students to write down three to five key learnings or important ideas about the topic at hand. Each idea or key learning should be written down on a separate index card or sticky note.
2. Explain the activity, reinforce your attention signal, and then invite the students to get up and mingle until you let them know it’s time to pair up and exchange their ideas.
3. After 30 seconds, bring the room to silence and call out, “GIVE ONE to a partner!”
4. Students form pairs and each “gives” (hands) one of their key learnings or important ideas about the topic to their partner while explaining what they wrote, so that each person “gives one” and “gets one.”
5. Give your signal and when the room is quiet, tell them to “Move on!” and mingle again.
6. Repeat the sharing process. This time, students can share their own card or the new idea they received from a previous partner.

Debrief: Invite a few students to share a valuable new learning that was shared with them.

### Student Agency

- **Discover, Discuss, Demonstrate** (*The 3 Ds learning model is designed to facilitate deeper learning and increase student motivation from Edutopia January 2021, by Stephanie Rothstein and Lainie Rowell*)

Time: 10-30 minutes

**DISCOVER:** Give learners opportunities to explore content before launching into direct instruction. This is a highly effective way to promote engagement from the start and encourage student agency.

1. Create or curate content and/or give learners an opportunity to research to find and validate their own sources of information.
2. Have students each find bits of information on a topic, putting a picture or icon on a slide, and then being ready to share out very quick takeaways. This piques interest and helps students find their questions.

**DISCUSS:** Discussion along with direct instruction provides an opportunity for shared learning experiences with peers through communication and collaboration.

1. Provide breakout spaces for partners or small groups where students have a shared slide or document to track their communication.
2. Use station rotation and assign student leaders as part of a station rotation.
3. Ask students to list the tasks needed for an assignment or project on sticky notes and move them as they make progress from To Do to In Progress, to Evaluation/Feedback, and finally to Complete.

**DEMONSTRATE:** Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding throughout the learning experience.

1. Present to an authentic audience. Invite guests in person or virtually to listen, provide feedback, and contribute expertise. Student creation is the best demonstration of authentic learning. Provide choices that are meaningful.

## Communication Skills: Speaking and Listening

- **Think, Pair, Share**

Time: 10-15 minutes

1. Before introducing the Think-Pair-Share strategy to the students, decide on your target for this lesson. You may choose to use a new text that the class will be reading, or you might want to develop a set of questions or prompts that target key content concepts that you have been studying.
2. Describe the strategy and its purpose with your students and provide guidelines for discussions that will take place. Explain to students that they will (1) think individually about a topic or answer to a question;(2) pair with a partner and discuss the topic or question; and (3) share ideas with the rest of the class.
3. Using a student or student(s) from your classroom, model the procedure to ensure that students understand how to use the strategy. Allow time for students to ask questions that clarify their use of the technique.
4. Once students have a firm understanding of the expectations surrounding the strategy, monitor and support students as they work through the steps below. Teachers may also ask students to write or diagram their responses while doing the Think-Pair-Share activity.

- **Think:** Teachers begin by asking a specific higher-level question about the text or topic students will be discussing. Students "think" about what they know or have learned about the topic for a given amount of time (usually 1-3 minutes).
- **Pair:** Each student should be paired with another student. Teachers may choose whether to assign pairs or let students pick their own partner. Remember to be sensitive to learners' needs (reading skills, attention skills, language skills) when creating pairs. Students share their thinking with their partner, discuss ideas, and ask questions of their partner about their thoughts on the topic (2-5 minutes).
- **Share:** Once partners have had ample time to share their thoughts and have a discussion, teachers expand the "share" into a whole-class discussion. Allow each group to choose who will present their thoughts, ideas, and questions they had to the rest of the class. After the class "share," you may choose to have pairs reconvene to talk about how their thinking perhaps changed as a result of the "share" element.

- **Fishbowl**

Time: 30 minutes

In this activity, participants are divided into two groups that are seated in concentric circles, all facing the center. The outside circle listens while the inside group discusses a topic. Then the groups switch places so the listeners become the speakers, and vice versa.

1. Set up two concentric circles of chairs, all facing the center of the circle, and have everyone take a seat.
2. Provide the question prompt or discussion topic and set a timer for 10 minutes. Only the inside group members may speak during this time. Instruct the outside group to quietly listen and notice their own ideas that surface during the discussion. Note-taking on a graphic organizer may be helpful.
3. When the time is up, ask the groups to trade places so that the outside group is sitting on the inner circle chairs and vice versa. Set the timer again and let the new inside group discuss the topic.

### **Debrief using one of these activities:**

- Ask participants to write down a response to one comment they heard and explain why they agree/disagree.
- Turn to a partner and discuss how it felt, both being a "listener" and a "discusser."
- Share one word or a short phrase with the whole group that was important about the discussion to them.

### **Variations:**

- You can assign the groups opposing views in an argument. This works especially well when you have read an article or watched a video prior to the discussion that shows opposing views.

- With adults, or students who are skillful and experienced with the Fishbowl strategy, place an empty chair in the inner circle, and invite a participant to join in to ask a question or have a speaker clarify a thought.
- If groundwork has been laid for the “inner/outer circle, support partner” mentioned in Step 2 above, provide debrief time after each discussion circle during which the observing partner provides feedback on specific areas the group has already agreed on (e.g., impactful idea or statement, eye contact, voice volume, connection to another speaker’s point).

### Collaboration

- **Gallery Walk**

Time 10 minutes

Like viewers at a gallery, small groups of participants rotate from poster to poster, stopping to view, discuss, and add ideas at each station.

1. Share an overarching question with the group, such as, "How can we make our school environment safer for students?"
2. Hang posters with headings that relate to the overarching question around the room. For example, for the question "How can we make our school environment safer for students?", the headings might be "Between Classes," "At Dismissal," "During Lunch," etc.
3. Divide participants into small groups, give each group a marker, and direct each group to one of the posters. Explain the overarching question, and what each of the poster topics is.
4. Allow groups to stand at each poster for three to five minutes to share, discuss, and write down their responses to the category.
5. When time is up, ask the groups to rotate clockwise so each group is in front of a new poster to continue the activity. Each group now reads the offerings of the previous authors, using sticky notes to add clarifying questions or comments/compliments. Rotate every three to five minutes, until every group has visited every poster.
6. Next, allow time for individuals to silently walk around the room and read the completed posters, noting ideas that they agree with or that seem like something they'd like to try.
7. Original group revisits their feedback and can add to their poster.

**Debrief:** Ask participants from each group to respond to one of the questions or comments they received and share out their favorite idea, an insight, or a proposed next step.

**Variation:**

If space is limited, the "posters" can be sheets of paper that are passed from table to table.

### Critical Thinking

- **Jigsaw**

Time: 20-40 minutes

Small groups each discuss a different excerpt of an article or topic. Groups then reorganize so that each new group contains one member from each of the original groups. The members of the new group now "teach" their excerpt to the members of their new group.

1. Select an appropriate text and divide it into numbered sections so that each group gets a piece that’s readable during the amount of time you’ll be providing. Preplan for students who will need a particularly accessible section, or who will benefit from receiving their reading ahead of time.
2. Divide participants into same-sized small groups and assign one section of the article to the members of each group.
3. Allow groups to discuss their section or topic for 5 to 10 minutes, with everyone in the group supporting one another to fully understand their piece.
4. Number off within each group, counting up to the number of new small groups you are forming. Then ask all the "1s," "2s," "3s," etc., to find each other and form new groups.

5. The new group members then take turns teaching their piece to their new group in the sequenced order of the article. Designate a "timer" within each group who ensures that each person has equal time to do their teaching, answer questions from the group, etc.

Debrief by asking participants to return to their original groups and:

- Share one new thing they learned.
- Offer an appreciation for “a teaching strategy that really helped me understand, because...”
- Write a silent reflection to self-assess on areas they thought they were particularly effective in when they taught their piece, and what they might try to do differently next time.

- **Socratic Seminar**

Time: 20-50 minutes

In a Socratic Seminar activity, students help one another understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in a text through a group discussion format. Students are responsible for facilitating their group discussion around the ideas in the text; they shouldn't use the discussion to assert their opinions or prove an argument. Through this type of discussion, students practice how to listen to one another, make meaning, and find common ground while participating in a conversation.

1. Select an Appropriate Text. The Socratic Seminar strategy is based on close textual analysis, so it is important to select a text that provides ample avenues for interpretation and discussion.

2. Give Students Time to Prepare. Before beginning the seminar, it is essential that students have time to prepare ideas. Teachers often assign a discussion leader who generates a few open-ended questions that can be used to begin the seminar.

3. Develop a Classroom Contract and Set Norms. It is important that everyone is aware of the norms. Typical rules used to structure a Socratic Seminar activity are:

- Talk to each other, not just to the discussion leader or teacher.
- Refer to evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Ask questions if you do not understand what someone has said, or you can paraphrase what another student has said for clarification (“I think you said this; is that right?”).
- You do not need to raise your hand to speak, but please pay attention to your “airtime”—how much you have spoken in relation to other students.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't “put down” the ideas of another student. Without judging the student you disagree with, state your alternate interpretation, or ask a follow-up question to help probe or clarify an idea.
- Common statements or questions used during a Socratic Seminar activity include:
  - Where does that idea come from in the text?
  - What does this word or phrase mean?
  - Can you say that in another way?
  - Is this what you mean to say...?
  - What do you think the author is trying to say?
  - What else could that mean?
  - Who was the audience for this text? How does that shape our interpretation of these words?
  - Who was the author of this text? What do we know about him/her? How does that shape our understanding of these words?
- Before beginning the seminar, it is also important to remind students that the purpose of the seminar is not to debate or prove a point but to more deeply understand what the author was trying to express in the text.

4. The Socratic Seminar. A Socratic Seminar activity often begins with the discussion leader, a student or the teacher, asking an open-ended question. A typical opening prompt is: What do you think this text means? Silence is fine. It may take a few minutes for students to warm up. Sometimes teachers organize a Socratic Seminar activity like a Fishbowl activity, with some students participating in the discussion and the rest of the



class having specific jobs as observers. At least 15 minutes should be allotted to the activity, and it can often last 30 minutes or more. As students become more familiar with the Socratic Seminar format, they will be able to discuss a text for longer periods of time without teacher intervention.

**Debrief:** After the Socratic Seminar activity, give students the opportunity to evaluate the process in general and their own performance specifically. Reflecting on the seminar process helps students improve their ability to participate in future discussions. Here are some questions you might discuss or have students write about when reflecting on the seminar:

- At any point, did the seminar revert to something other than a dialogue? If so, how did the group handle this?
- What evidence did you see of people actively listening and building on others' ideas?
- How has your understanding of this text been affected by the ideas explored in this seminar?
- What parts of the discussion did you find most interesting? In what parts were you least engaged?
- What would you like to do differently as a participant the next time you are in a seminar?

## Intentional Closures – Reflections and Looking Forward

### Forward-Thinking

- **My Next Step**

Time: 1-3 minutes

Close the engagement or class by asking students to make a commitment to take immediate action.

1. Ask students to think of their first next step based on what they learned during the engagement. It might be a conversation, more reading, or thinking more about a topic.
2. After giving students a minute to think about what that step would be, ask them to share their next step with a partner or at their table.
3. Ask students to write their “next step” on a sticky note and post the note somewhere they will be reminded of their task, such as on their desk, inside the cover of their related text, or in their assignment notebook, or take a photo with their phone.
4. Help students set up an “accountability partner” from the group to check in on their action step during the following week.

- **One Takeaway I’m Going to Try**

Time: 3-5 minutes

1. Ask students to reflect on what they learned, then ask, "Thinking about what you learned today, what is one takeaway you want to try, and why? A takeaway can be an idea, a strategy, a tool, or an action step.
2. Give students a minute of silent think time.

Debrief by pairing students and setting a timer for one or two minutes for each student to share their takeaway and thinking with their partner. If time permits, invite several students to share their own takeaway and thinking (not their partner’s) with the whole group.

### Gratitude

- **One-Minute Accolade**

Time: 1-3 minutes

The facilitator invites a moment of reflection on the current experience, then sets a timer for one minute to allow the group to contribute toward seeing how many voices can be added to the room during that time.

1. Inform students that you are going to set the timer for one minute (or longer if you have more time). During that time, the group will see how many people from whom it can hear.
2. Invite students to think silently for a minute about ONE reflection question that you provide, such as: Something you appreciated about today, something you learned, something you want to thank someone for, or something that went very well, something you are grateful for, etc. Tell them to raise their hand when they have an idea of what they’d like to share.
3. Once several hands are raised, select one person who will start off. Explain that when you start the timer, the first person will go. Then anyone can share, whenever they’re ready.
4. Encourage students to listen attentively to each speaker. When one person finishes, someone else begins. It’s okay if there is quiet between people sharing; that is natural.
5. Repeat the reflection question and start the timer.
6. When the timer goes off, listen as the person who is already speaking finishes. Then thank the group and move on. It’s okay if not everyone who wanted to share had a turn this time. With repeated opportunities, the group grows more fluent and also more comfortable with silence between sharing. This closing activity can be used over and over without losing its impact!

## Positivity

- **Closing Frenzy**

Time: 3 minutes

As you wrap up the end of class or a lesson tell student they have two minutes to connect with as many people as possible in the room, greeting them by name and asking, “what are you looking forward to tomorrow,” or sharing an inspiring comment, intriguing idea, or an act of kindness noticed during the class or lesson today.

(PAUSE.) Take a moment to look around and think about appreciations you may wish to share.

(PAUSE.) Ready? Go!” Set the timer and use an agreed-upon attention signal to bring the room to full quiet.

“Thank you for that optimistic closing! I can feel my energy lifted for what lies ahead!”

## Reflection

- **Suit Yourself.** Source: Adapted from *Playing with a Full Deck: 52 team Initiatives Using a Deck of Cards*, by Michelle Cummings (2006), Training Wheels, Inc.

Time: 4-6 minutes

Students reflect on and then share valued takeaways from the experience using playing card suits as a focus area.

1. Randomly pass out a playing card to each student. Each suit describes a category of responses:

- Hearts: Something from the heart. How did you feel? What did it mean to you?
- Clubs: Things that grew—new ideas, new thoughts, a new point of view.
- Diamonds: Gems that last forever. What are some of the gems of wisdom gathered from people or content?
- Spades: Used to dig in the garden. Generate conversation about planting new ideas or things students dug up during class.

2. Give one minute of quiet time for each student to jot down (or think about) their answer.

**Debrief** using one of the following:

- Ask for one volunteer from each ‘suit’ to stand and share their response. Do not comment during the sharing.
- Ask students to turn to a neighbor and share their response.
- Invite each participant to answer aloud to you as they walk out the door or hand in their written response as an exit ticket.

- **One-Word Whip Around**

“One-Word Whip Around” brings all voices into the room and enables the teacher to quickly get a sense of the group in a short amount of time.

Prepare a statement or question prompt that is aligned to the content of the engagement. For example, “Decide on one word that sums up your learning for today.”

2. Invite students to form a circle.

3. State the prompt, explain that everyone should prepare a one-word response, and allow a minute of private think time.

4. Ask for a volunteer to start off stating their prompt. The volunteer then chooses a direction to go (left or right), and students continue to respond in turn around the circle. As always, it’s okay to pass by saying, “Pass.”

**Debrief** If time allows, debrief the activity by asking students if they noticed any themes or similar responses and ask what that might tell us about the learning of the lesson.

Variation: If there is not enough time or space to form a circle, students can do a whip around from their seats.

- **I Am Curious**

**Time: 1-5 minutes**

At the end of an engagement, participants are asked to reflect on something that they are curious about as a result of their day/meeting/lesson. They will then share their reflection with a partner or with their table group.

1. At the end of a class or an engagement, ask participants to complete this sentence: "I am curious to learn more about..." or, "I am curious about..."

2. Give participants a minute or so to think and write a "note to self" that they will share aloud.

**Debrief by inviting participants to share their "curiosity" with a partner or table group.** Collect the reflection notes if you are using this as a formative assessment for future planning. Tell participants ahead of time if this will be the case. Write on sticky notes and have a poster near the door for people to add their thoughts as they leave.

**Variation:** If your group is small enough, allow more time for reflection and discussion and/or hear from everyone. It will give you and the group a sense of shared learning and help prepare for the next engagement. You can debrief this option by asking whether anyone notices any themes or recurring curiosities raised by the group.

## Checking for Understanding

- **Human Bar Graph**

Time: 5 minutes

Participants form a human bar graph by standing in the line that best represents their current level of understanding.

Identify a range of levels of understanding or mastery (e.g., beginning–developing–accomplished OR confused—I'm okay—I am rocking!) as labels for three or four adjacent parallel lines. Using removable blue painter's tape makes it easy to lay down and take up the lines.

2. Invite students to form a human bar graph by standing on the line that best represents their current level of understanding.

Debrief the process by asking for students to share:

- Why they chose the line they stood in.
- What would have enabled them to stand in a different line.
- What this means for a future session.
- What they most need or want next to make progress.

Variation: Prepare a piece of chart paper with the labels at the bottom and invite students to add a sticky note to their bar in the graph. Add names if you are using this as a targeted formative assessment; no names are needed if you are getting a general pulse of the group.

## Celebration

- **"Yay" For the Day**

Time: 1-3 minutes

Ask students to share a "yay" for the day with a partner or in a small group, or as a class exit activity.