

Games to play with international students

Notes on the games

- Be careful about using children's games with adults unless you're sure the atmosphere will take it.
- Recognise that some games work best with small groups, others with medium sized groups and others with large groups.
- Ensure that the game you play is appropriate to the level of English of the students playing.

Icebreaker games

Getting to know you

A game for a group of 3-8, which gets everyone talking about themselves.

You need: sweets of different colours (e.g. Skittles or M&Ms) in a bowl, a colour-coded list of subjects to talk about, e.g. brown – favourite film, green – family, red – where you come from.

How to play: Get everyone to sit in a circle or around a table. The first person to play closes their eyes and takes a sweet out of the bowl. That person talks about the subject related to the colour of their sweet for about a minute then eats it – then passes the bowl to the next person, for them to take a sweet with their eyes shut. Continue taking turns until each person has talked about each subject or until sweets run out!

Guess your identity

A game for a group, that gets people to mix.

You need: stickers with 'identities' written on them, e.g. famous people or countries (be careful when choosing identities so that all international students will know them)

How to play: A sticker is put on the back of each person in the room. Everyone wanders around the room, asking questions with yes/no answers to work out their identities (e.g. "am I a politician?" / "am I in Asia?"). It can also be played where people sit in a circle (with stickers on foreheads), asking questions and receiving answers in turn. The game can be played with the rule that after asking a maximum of 3 questions, the player needs to guess their identity.

WWW Dice

A game for a group of people who know each other a bit already (i.e. when other icebreaker games won't work)

You need: prepare a dice with words on each side such as: who, what, where, which, when, why, how.

How to play: The first person throws the dice and asks their neighbour a question starting with the word that is on top. Then the neighbour throws the dice, asking a question to the next person. Keep going in turn.

Fruit Bowl

A game to get people moving around and finding out a little bit about each other.

You need: a chair for each player

How to play: All players sit in a circle, on chairs facing the centre. One person stands in the middle, without a chair. The person in the middle says, 'anyone who...' e.g. has a brother, has been to London, is wearing black socks... Everyone in the circle for whom this is correct then needs to change places with each other – and the person in the middle tries to sit in an empty chair. The new person in the middle then thinks of the next, 'anyone who...'

People Bingo

An activity to get people (in a café or weekend away) to walk around and mingle.

Make a 5X5 table with attributes in each square - people mingle and try to find someone that matches the description in each square. The first person to get 5 straight squares (horizontal, vertical or diagonal) wins.

Examples of attributes: someone who enjoys cooking, someone who loves watching old movies, someone who speaks 3 or more languages, someone who has been to New Zealand, someone who loves spicy food, someone who has 5 brothers and sisters, someone who was born in the UK, someone who isn't on Facebook...

General Games

Kungfu/Mimicry

A fast and furious game.

You need: no equipment

How to play: The facilitator thinks of 4 unique actions (e.g. 4 animal actions), and teaches them to everyone. The game is played in rounds. Each round, the facilitator performs one action (making sure everyone can see them). All players must immediately respond with one of the four actions. The people who perform the same action as the facilitator are OUT of the game. Repeat, getting faster each round, until all but one is eliminated. That person is the winner.

Egg Drop

A good game for getting people to work in a team of 4-6 people.

You need: Eggs (raw/not hard-boiled) and a selection of materials, such as paper, glue, straws, toilet rolls, bubble wrap etc etc

How to play: The facilitator gives the team (or each team) an equal amount of materials. In ten minutes, the team(s) must build a structure that can catch an egg dropped from a height of two metres. The facilitator times the team(s) then drops the egg onto each structure. The facilitator can award points if more than one team is playing, according to how intact the egg is after being dropped (and if desired, how aesthetically pleasing the structure is). A variation on this game is for team(s) to build a structure to attach to the egg before it is dropped, to protect it when falling.

Fill in the gap

A game for teams, based on the BBC's 'Blankety Blank' quiz show.

You need: A4 paper and marker pens for each of the 'celebrities'

How to play: Before playing the game, the facilitator needs to prepare sentences with a word replaced by 'blank', such as:

I always eat my dinner in the BLANK room

Oh, no, I've forgotten my BLANK keys

It works best if you have double nouns or compound words in mind when composing the sentences, such as (dining, bath, bed...) room, (car, house...) keys here.

At the start of the game, the facilitator chooses approx 4 'celebrities', who each sit at the front of the room with a marker pen each and some paper. It helps if the 'celebrities' are native speakers. Everyone else sits in teams. The facilitator starts by reading the first sentence and asks the teams to decide what they think the 'celebrities' will choose to replace the 'blank' in the sentence. Meanwhile, the 'celebrities' each write one word to fill in the 'blank' on a piece of paper. The facilitator can give 1-2 minutes for this. Each team in turn gives their answer for the 'blank'. Then the celebrities reveal their answers. Points can be awarded to the teams according to how many celebrities (if any) chose the same word as them for the 'blank'. Repeat with the next sentence.

'A What' or 'Rhinoceros and Hippopotamus'

A fun game!

You need: 2 cushions (or other objects that can be passed around)

How to play: Everyone sits in a circle facing inwards, and two people (preferably opposite each other in the circle) start off with the cushions. The first person with cushion hands this to the person next to them saying, "this is a rhinoceros" the second person says "a what" the first person says again, "a rhinoceros". The second person then hands the cushion to the third person saying, "this is a..." etc. At the same time, the other person with the second cushion starts passing the cushion the other way round the circle saying, "this is a hippopotamus" etc. Chaos then occurs especially when the 2 cushions meet!

It may be easier to start the game with one cushion, so people get the idea, then introducing the second.

Who/what is it?

A game involving identification of people (if people know each other well enough to identify each other by touch; and would not be offended by this) or objects.

You need: gloves, scarf and a selection of things to be identified by touch (if playing with objects)

How to play (with people):

Three people (A, B and C) leave the room – they take the gloves and scarf. One of the people remaining in the room (X) volunteers/is chosen to be identified by A, B and C – X should stand in front of everyone else in the room. A – wearing gloves and blindfolded with scarf – is then brought into the room. When A has identified X, repeat with B and C. Alternatively, to involve more people, more people can volunteer to be identified. Preferably, the identifier (A, B, C) and the person to be identified (X) should be of the same sex.

How to play (with objects):

Again, three people (A, B and C) leave the room with the gloves and scarf. An object to be identified is set up in the room, for A, B and C in turn to identify. Repeat with different identifiers and objects.

Numbers Game

A good warm up game

You need: a chair for each player

How to play: Each person sits on a chair in a circle, facing inwards. They are each assigned a number, 1,2,3,4 etc. One person stands in the middle. The person in the middle calls out two numbers (e.g. 5 and 11) – the people with these numbers must swap places whilst the person in the middle attempts to sit on one of their seats. The (new) person in the middle again calls out a new combination of numbers. Any combination of numbers can be called out, whether two, three or more random numbers, ‘all evens’, ‘all odds’ etc.

Chocolate Game

An old party game, funny with all nationalities as they all seem to like chocolate!

You need: a dice, an unwrapped bar of chocolate on a plate, knife, fork, gloves, hat and scarf

How to play: The players sit in a circle and before the start of the game, the chocolate, knife, fork, gloves, hat and scarf are placed at the centre. The dice is passed around the circle – each person throws it in turn. When someone throws a six, they go to the centre, put on the gloves, hat and scarf and attempt to eat as much chocolate as possible using the knife and fork. They are allowed to keep on eating until someone else in the circle throws a six – that person then needs to take the hat, scarf and gloves and eat the chocolate until the next person throws a six. Keep going until the chocolate is finished!

A variation of this game is to replace the chocolate bar, knife and fork with chopsticks and a bowl of small sweets (e.g. Skittles or M&Ms – ensure they are not too big or easy to pick up).

Pictionary

There are various ways to play this; all based around the idea of one person drawing / modelling an idea and other people guessing what it is.

You need: pens and paper (alternatively, playdough for modelling rather than drawing; or newspapers to tear up in the shape of the items/concepts, or 10 toothpicks)

How to play: Before the start of the game, the facilitator prepares a list of words of items/concepts to draw. The players can be divided into two or more groups. A representative from each group goes to the facilitator for the first word – they return to their group and draw the item/concept. The first person in their group who correctly identifies the picture goes to the facilitator for the next word, then draws this. This takes place in each group at the same time, as a race – the first group to finish the last word on the list is the winning team.

For a smaller number of people, an alternative way to play this would be to separate into two teams. The teams then take it in turns to go: in team A, someone takes 1 minute to draw as many words from the list for their team while someone in team B times them. Keep going, alternating between teams and giving each person in the teams the opportunity to draw, until all the words have been used up. The winning team is the one that has guessed most words by the end.

Charades

A traditional British party game, which can be played in a variety of ways to suit your setting.

You need: a list of phrases (or a collection of pieces of paper with phrase on each piece) to be acted out – ensure that these will be known to all/most of the people present. A facilitator could put the list together in advance of the game, or all people present could put down a few phrases on a separate piece of paper for each. The traditional game involves books, films, plays and songs – some people have found that film titles have worked best with international students, as these are often well known across the world.

How to play: Charades can be played two teams taking it in turns to go: in team A, someone takes the first phrase and acts it out until the rest of their team guesses the phrase or gives up (this could be timed if appropriate, e.g. 1 minute to act out the phrase – or as many phrases as possible). Keep going, alternating between teams and giving each person in the teams the opportunity to draw, until all the phrases have been used up.

Rules for acting out the ideas

To act out the phrases, you need to rely on gestures – not pointing at objects or making any noise. To act out a phrase, it is usual to start by indicating what category (if a variety of categories are being used) and how many words are in the phrase. From then on, the usual procedure is to act out the words one at a time (although not necessarily in the order that they appear in the phrase). In some cases, however, it may make more sense to try to act out the "entire concept" of the phrase at once.

To Indicate Categories:

- Book title: Unfold your hands as if they were a book.
- Film title: Pretend to crank an old-fashioned movie camera.
- Play title: Draw the outline of theatre curtains.
- Song title: Pretend to sing.
- TV show: Draw a rectangle to outline the TV screen.
- Quote or Phrase: Make quotation marks in the air with your fingers.

To Indicate Other Things:

- Number of words in the title: Hold up the number of fingers.
- Which word you're working on: Hold up that number of fingers.
- Number of syllables in the word: Lay the number of fingers on your forearm.
- Which syllable you're working on: Lay that number of fingers on your forearm.
- "The entire concept": sweep your arms through the air.
- "On the nose" (i.e. someone has made a correct guess): point at your nose with one hand, while pointing at the person with your other hand.
- "Sounds like": tug your ear.
- A small word: Hold up one hand, with your thumb and forefinger close together

Bring me a

A simple game with a competitive element.

How to play: The facilitator makes a list of items they will request, eg a pillowcase, a video, a mug, a sock (not attached to foot), a shoelace (not on a shoe), chocolate, a 5cm long blade of grass etc. The players are in two or more teams. The facilitator stands/sits somewhere that is an equal distance from each team. The facilitator asks the teams to 'bring me...' a requested item. Each team has to find the item and send a representative from the team to the facilitator with it. The facilitator awards a point to the team that brings the requested item first. The requested items can get more difficult to find and further away from the teams (depending on how active the players are).

Actions down the Line

How to play: The players are in two teams (eg boys and girls). Team A goes first – standing in a line, with team B watching. The facilitator/member of the opposite team gives an action to the first person in the line of team A (eg dancing, fixing a shelf to a wall, painting). The action is ‘passed’ down the line, with each person of team A doing it in turn. The last person in the line of team A must guess what the action was.

The real Chinese whispers

As passed on by Chinese students

How to play: the first player whispers a four character Chinese saying/idiom to the next person. It is then passed on by whispers from one to the next until it has passed through everyone present. The last person must say out loud what they have heard – and a Chinese student can try and guess what the original phrase was.

Pass the parcel

You need: a small gift wrapped up in many layers of paper (eg newspaper). Between some of the layers can be placed prizes (eg sweets) and forfeits (eg ‘tell a story from your country’)

How to play: The players sit in a circle facing inwards and pass round the parcel as the facilitator plays music (the facilitator must not look at the parcel as it is being passed around). The facilitator stops the music and the person who has the parcel in their hands at that moment removes one layer of paper. Keep going, with the music stopping for people to pass the parcel and stopping for someone to remove a layer of paper, until someone reaches the gift in the middle of the parcel. To make the game more interesting and last longer, prizes and forfeits can be placed between some of the layers of paper for these to be carried out as they are unwrapped.

Photo Challenge

In the context of a Café

A photographer goes from table to table. The challenge is for everyone at the table to express certain emotions together, e.g., happy, angry, confused, afraid, excited...

The photographs are shown at the end of the evening and a judge picks the winning table. The photos can go up on the cafe facebook page.

Chopsticks Challenge

Version 1: each table sends a rep to the front table, where there are bowls of malteasers opposite empty bowls. Competition to get the most malteasers transferred from the full bowl to the empty bowl within 1 min using chopsticks.

Version 2: each table competes to pass objects all the way round the table from person to person using chopsticks (you’ll need about 30 pairs for everyone in cafe). The objects can vary in difficulty - peppercorn, mushroom, toothpick, pea...

Version 3: could involve running to get objects from the front table using a pair of chopsticks.

Games involving food

Jam doughnut: eat it without licking your lips

Water biscuit/cracker: eat one, including swallowing, without any drinking, within 30 seconds

Eat a clove of garlic

Eat a whole chilli, chewing it up properly, without eyes watering

Eat a fairly thickly spread Marmite sandwich

Put an After Eight® on your forehead and get it into your mouth without using your hands

After Eight® wrapper: turn it inside out and flatten out the wrinkles without breaking it

Games to have lying around

These are games that work well to have lying around, eg for a quiet moment on a weekend away.

- Jenga®
- 'Jenga® with questions': a variation of Jenga is for someone to ask a question (eg these can be icebreaker questions). After answering the question, the person can go ahead with removing a brick.
- Uno®
- Jungle Speed®
- Rapidough®
- Playing cards (including Italian ones, which are different to UK cards).
- Pick up sticks
- International Opinion (available from Friends International)

International Games

Country Shapes

A test of everyone's geography knowledge.

You need: numbered sheets of paper with the outline of countries traced onto them/card cut out in the shapes of countries – perhaps indicating where there is a coast; pen and paper for each player/team

How to play: Put the country shapes around the room. Give the individuals/teams a time limit to identify the countries, perhaps adding the names of capital cities.

International Objects

The more unusual the range of objects you can find, the better!

You need: a range of objects from around the world, all numbered; pen and paper for each player/team

How to play: Arrange the objects, with their numbers. Ask people to identify which country they each come from and maybe what purpose they serve, if this is a relevant question.

Recognise the Language Game

Put different nationalities, in turn, behind a big sheet/screen in the doorway of the main room.

Then ask them to say something -a few sentences.

Those in the main room have to guess 'which country'.

It is necessary to smuggle students away, perhaps when everyone is distracted with another game, into another room to prime them and making it more difficult to recognise the language.

Also there needs to be a big crowd of students/different nationalities to make it work.

With 8 different languages, the highest score for a single contestant is usually just over half.

Weekend Away Games

The Atom Game

Prepare n balls and n chairs. Divide the participants into n groups of 6 people.

Each group must nominate 1 person to be the PROTON-A (a=attacker), 4 people to be the ELECTRONS & 1 person to be the PROTON-D (d=defender).

Site the n chairs in a large circle, each about 4 meters apart from their nearest neighbours.

Get the PROTON-Ds to sit on a chair each. That chair would be the ATOM-D of the group. During the course of the game, the PROTON-D may not lift his bum off the chair. Place a ball 50cm in front of each of the chairs.

Get each group's ELECTRONS to huddle in a circle, and join hands. The PROTON-A of each group should now stand in the middle of the circle formed by his ELECTRONS. During the duration of the game, the ELECTRONS must not break the circle and the PROTON-A must remain in the circle. This combination of the ELECTRONS & the PROTON-A is called the ATOM-A.

The aim is for the a group's ATOM-A to go over to another group's ATOM-D and steal their ball. The only person that can grab a ball is the PROTON-A. If the PROTON-D of a group touches the PROTON-A of the another group, the ATOM-A must cease their attack, and find another group to prey upon. If the ATOM-A of a group manages to steal the ball of another group, they must return it back to their ATOM-D, and place it with their own ball. Other groups are now free to steal both balls.

The group with the most balls at the end of 5 minutes is the winner!

Cheeseburger

A good game for the Maths inclined??

Get the participants (around 4-6) to sit in a circle. Going clockwise one by one, get the participants to count: one, two, three etc.

The catch is: if the number is a multiple of 3, the person must say "cheeseburger" instead and not the number. If it is a multiple of 5, the person must say "hamburger" instead. And if the number is a multiple of both 3 and 5, the person must say "Big Mac". An example would be: 1, 2,

cheesburger, 4, hamburger, cheeseburger, 7, 8, cheeseburger, hamburger, 11, cheeseburger, 13, 14, BIG MAC!

Virus

This game can involve as many people as you have. The more the merrier. The proportions given here are for around 20 people. Stuff all the people into a basketball court. This is the boundary of the game. Nominate three people. They have been INFECTED. What this means is that they have to hold hands into a chain. Their aim is to infect as many people as possible by touching them. Every time someone is touched, they join the chain by holding hands. The last person UNINFECTED wins. If anyone steps out of the boundary, they are automatically INFECTED.

Spoons

Props needed: playing cards and spoons

Best played in groups of 5-8. You need to prepare the cards by extracting a set of four playing cards for each person (e.g. four aces, four twos, four queens, etc.). Shuffle all the cards together and deal (everyone should have 4 cards).

In the centre of the circle you have a pile of spoons, but with one fewer spoons than people. Someone counts 'one, two, three, *pass*' and on '*pass*', everyone puts one of their cards face down in front of the person to their left and then picks up the card that has just been placed in front of them by the person on their right.

The first person to acquire a set of four matching cards (e.g. four twos etc.) they take a spoon from the centre. Anyone who sees them doing this also takes a spoon, until eventually there is one person left without a spoon. They are out.

One set of cards is removed, also one spoon is removed and the game is repeated until you have a winner. Alternatively, just keep count of whoever loses and when someone reaches 3, have them do a forfeit.