

# Building an Online community

Discussed in the context  
of virtual student-starters

# How do students actually feel about “icebreakers”

Staff should be aware of these reasons, in order to break these negative connotations.

- Daunting - Forced to come up with ‘interesting’ information on the spot
  - Uncomfortable/Cringeworthy - Giving this information to people you may have never even met before
  - Awkward - Being unsure of how to respond to these
  - Embarrassing - Heightens self awareness and evokes anxious feelings
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# How to encourage student engagement

When placing students into small breakout rooms where you are not present

- Make your expectations explicitly clear
  - Assign roles within the group
  - Encourage students to speak in alphabetical order or utilise 'pass the ball' to get the conversation going.
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# Tips for creating a relaxed group dynamic

A less structured approach is needed when breaking the ice.

- Break the connotations

Stop the use of the title 'icebreaker' and exchange this for alternatives such as 'student starters' or 'warm ups'

- Don't pick on students

Although this helps to avoid awkward silences, it comes across as students being 'singled out' and may only lead to them withdrawing further

- Make them a group discussion

Helps students to feel less exposed as they are not sharing personal information and encourages group cohesion

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# How to build a group dynamic long-term

Student starters only help break the ice in the beginning of a new group. Here are tips to develop a long-term dynamic in, for example, tutorial groups/ PASS sessions

## 1) 10-minute rule:

Open the meeting for students to enter and then leave/ turn your camera off for 10 minutes before start of each session. This encourages casual conversations between students, which helps bond better as a group.

## 2) Group Identity

Encourage group identity by asking them to:

- Come up with a group name.
- Set up a group chat among themselves.

## 3) Expectations:

Set expectations of what they will achieve by attending these sessions. This also helps set the 'direction' of the meetings by allowing students to identify a **common goal** they are working towards.

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# Ensuring students well- being in groups

- To develop an online community, students safety and well-being is pivotal:
    - 1) Staff should reiterate the online learning space will not tolerate any form of discrimination or harrassment
    - 2) Have surveys time to time, where students can share their overall experience and voice any negative behaviors they have faced.
    - 3) Lecturers should highlight where students can find support on blackboard or through the university.
    - 4) With online learning, students can become more closed off, so lecturers should be vocal that they can be approached and they will provide support.
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