

# Make Your Own Icebreaker



When I was working on [50 Activities for](#)

[the First Day of School](#), I was reading so many icebreakers and getting to know you activities that I started to wonder if there was a common framework to icebreakers. Was there a standard set of steps teachers could improvise around? How could you make make your own icebreaker, something original, but not unfamiliar to students?

I played with a lot of ideas before I came up with this [Make Your Own Icebreaker Chart](#). The chart outlines the four major steps of an icebreaker activity, although you can usually skip or abbreviate one of those steps.

1. Students usually acquire information from each other or the classroom or teacher. From the other side of the coin, they are sharing or giving information
2. Then they usually have to record that information somewhere, and usually as they record it, they are manipulating it, doing something with it.
3. Then they share or distribute the information.
4. Finally, they use that information in someway. This step can be as simple as reporting back to the class or as complex as writing a biographical essay about a partner.

For each step, the chart has a number of examples of how that could be done. You can also think back on your favorite icebreaker and reverse engineer it to see how it accomplishes each of these steps.

You can find the [Make Your Own Icebreaker Chart](#) at Alphabet Publishing, along with other free downloadable worksheets for icebreakers and getting to know you activities. I probably shouldn't be sharing this, as it might put me out of business! Who needs a book of activities when you can make your own? But I can't resist sharing this, and maybe getting some feedback on it!

## So how does the Make Your Own Icebreaker chart work?

Make Your Own Icebreaker Chart

Acquire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From self</li> <li>• Guess</li> <li>• Mingle in class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview a partner</li> <li>• Use information from teacher</li> </ul>
Manipulate/ Record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write verbatim</li> <li>• Write in complete sentences</li> <li>• Make notes</li> <li>• Use vocab words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fill out a chart</li> <li>• Write clues</li> <li>• Record electronically</li> <li>• Memorize</li> </ul>
Distribute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give to partner</li> <li>• Throw around the room</li> <li>• Put in a hat</li> <li>• Teacher mixes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave in a special place</li> <li>• Attach to a map</li> <li>• Attach to an object</li> <li>• Go around a circle</li> </ul>
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to class</li> <li>• Report to group/new partner</li> <li>• Write in a paragraph</li> <li>• Fill out a worksheet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find a person based on clues</li> <li>• Find similarities or differences</li> <li>• Draw or create art</li> </ul>

This is a companion resource for the book: *50 Activities for the First Day of School* by Walton Burns  
<http://alphabetpublishing.com>



I identified four steps that students go through in a typical icebreaker, or getting to know you activity. I'll explain them below and illustrate them with a very simple interview-style icebreaker. I should not that not all icebreakers have these steps, or have them in this order. In fact, I'd say most icebreakers have three of the four steps here. And sometimes there's a prep stage, where you make a worksheet or students think about what they are going to say.

I'd also note that the steps don't always go in this order. In Find Someone Who, the teacher records information in a chart and then makes the students acquire it. Or sometimes the steps happen simultaneously. When students are asking and answering questions, they are acquiring and recording information at the same time.

## Step 1: Acquire Information

So usually the first step of an icebreaker is to get some information from a partner. It might come from asking questions or reading a name tag or a worksheet the teacher has handed out. In some cases, the teacher or student does some prep work before, in creating the information. You might have students fill in a profile.

In a simple interview-style icebreaker, students acquire information by asking their partner questions such as “What’s your favorite color?” or “What did you do over summer break?”

## Step 2: Record and Manipulate

Now that students have asked their questions of their partner, or read their teacher’s profile, they have to do something with the information. Having students manipulate information helps them to remember it and evaluate it. You want students to remember what they have learned from their friends and classmates beyond the first day. You also want them to make connections—“Hey, he likes baseball. I wonder if he likes other sports, too.” Otherwise, there’s point in doing a getting to know you activity at all.

In an interview, students would be taking notes on their partner, or perhaps filling out a class profile worksheet the teacher gave them.

## Step 3: Distribute

This may be the step that is most often skipped. Usually students jump from recording information to telling someone about it. In our interview example, students would now jump to step 4, reporting the information to the class or another partner.

But adding a step where students leave the information somewhere—on a

bulletin board, mixed up at random, thrown in a snowball, adds an extra element to the icebreaker. It allows you to have students find a new partner by chance, as in Who Wrote That? Or students can hang a fact they have collected about their partner on the wall, and every one in the class can read about everyone else. This opens up the icebreaker so that the whole class is learning about the whole class.

#### Step 4: Use the Information

Finally, you want students to do something with what they learned, whether it be report back to the class, report to another pair, or go home and write a paragraph about their new friend. In Two Truths and a Lie, students evaluate the truth of what they were told. As a wrap-up to Who Wrote That, students may expand on a simple fact to tell a whole story about themselves or their partner. Students can act, sing, dance, or do interpretive dance (although that might be a bit intimidating on the first day of class).

So there you go. You have all the tools you need to make amazing icebreakers. Let me know what you come up with!