



Promoting Interactions among Students During the First Week of the Quarter

(These ideas were collected during faculty inservice,
September 2011)

Take the Edge Off	While taking role the first day of class, ask students to come up and field a couple of questions as a way of introducing themselves to the class.
Human BINGO	Start with a blank BINGO board and write a combination of personal and content questions on the board (like what state were you born in, who is your favorite actor, etc.) Ask students to fill it out for themselves. Then ask them to circulate and find matches with other students (i.e. two people born in the same state) and have the other person initial your board where you match. The first person to fill up enough squares to make “BINGO” wins chocolate.
Student Nation	Have students form groups and develop their own nations, including a name, rules, etc. Randomly assign students to their groups, and don’t be surprised if they stay together for the entire quarter.
Walden Pond	Ask your students to define what group work would look like in a perfect world. As part of the process, have them write guidelines that should be used by all groups. Additionally, debrief after group sessions to determine what went well and what didn’t go so well.
Syllabus Critique	Instead of having the instructor review the syllabus, form student groups to answer (prepared) questions and critique the document. Make sure the students have the first opportunity to answer other student questions (before the instructor chimes in). Ask what is clear about the information presented, and what is “muddy.”
Top Three List	After reviewing the syllabus, have students work in groups to come up with the top three things students should do to be successful in the class.
The Original Icebreaker	Primarily for science classes—bring in 10 pound blocks of ice for students to break-up. Talk about what ice is.
Puzzle Me This	Use models or puzzles for students to assemble in groups. Discuss relevant course content (portrayed in model or puzzle) as they are working on the project.
Safety Map	Use a physical map to orient students to lab/shop setting, paying particular attention to location of safety equipment and safety issues. Group new and experienced students together so experienced students can assist others.
SID scramble	Sort SID numbers numerically, then scramble to ensure a mix of newer and more experienced students in each group. Assign group activity such as how to design an experiment to test a particular hypothesis; the

	experienced students can assist the new students.
Hot Topic	Ask a student to pick a “hot topic” that begins with the first letter of their first name (relevant to discipline) to start group discussion.
So Random	In order to break up groups of friends, ask students to count off so that they end up in random groups of four. Within the groups of four, students interview the person to their right to get their name and a few other pieces of information (like why they’re in school) and then introduce that person. Ask each group to define a concept critical to the discipline—for example, ask “what is art.” Write definitions on the board. The instructor looks for commonalities and guides the students into developing a common definition they have ownership in.
Common Denominator Song	Ask groups to write a song or rap about things they have in common. Laughter is a good icebreaker.
C-Force	Select a concept that students are going to be studying in class, like centrifugal force—and engage them in discussion about what they think it is. Make sure it’s an easy enough topic for them to discuss without prior knowledge.
Three Truths and a Lie	After introductions, present four facts—three truths and a lie—and have students discuss which they think is true, and which they think isn’t true.
Scavenger Hunt	Send students on a scavenger hunt to different parts of the campus to learn about available resources (library, student ID machine, etc.). For new students.
Interview 101	Ask students to interview their neighbor, and then report out to the group on that person.
Fact vs. Opinion	Ask students to present both a positive statement, which can be supported by evidence, and a normative statement, which cannot be supported by evidence (i.e., “the government is too large”) to the class. Discuss the difference between the two kinds of statements.
Career Link	Assign a project to a group of students based on something they have in common, such as a career goal. Have students work on a career research project together, for example.
What’s Your Issue	Have students interview each other to find out something they’re passionate about. Report out to the group. Example, Environmental Science—what topics interest them most.

A few recommendations about group work:

- Take steps to ensure that students don’t form cliques.
- Providing guidelines for group work is a must.
- Tell students in advance about upcoming group work (if possible).
- Peer evaluations can be very useful, particularly if built into the grade.

- Monitor what goes on outside of class in group work; ask students to provide minutes from the meetings outside of class and/or monitor discussion forums.
- Many students need to be taught how to disagree. They may avoid disagreement, or lack the ability to disagree respectfully.
- Sometimes “off task” discussions can be beneficial.
- Structure things in a way that encourages student-to-student learning.
- Classroom configuration plays a key role; set-up should encourage face to face interaction.
- Try to mix newer with more experienced students.
- Always set a positive tone for the discussion.