

ICEBREAKERS / OPENERS

**PLEASE NOTE THE SELECTED MATERIAL ON
ICEBREAKERS / OPENERS ARE A COMPILATION OF
THE EXERCICES FOUND ON THE FOLLOWING
PUBLICATION**



**101 MORE GAMES FOR
TRAINERS: A Collection
of the Best Activities from
Creative Training
Techniques Newsletter**

*Bob Pike
Christopher Busse*

HRD Press

101 MORE GAMES FOR TRAINERS

A Collection of the Best Activities from
Creative Training Techniques Newsletter



by Bob Pike with Christopher Busse

Copyright © 1995, 2004 by Bob Pike and Lakewood Publications

All rights reserved. Any reproduction in any media of the materials that appear in this book without written permission from HRD Press is a violation of copyright law.

Published by: HRD Press, Inc.
22 Amherst Road
Amherst, MA 01002
1-800-822-2801 (U.S. and Canada)
413-253-3488
413-253-3490 (fax)
www.hrdpress.com

Foreword

This book, *101 Games for Trainers*, is one in a series drawn from the best content of *Creative Training Techniques Newsletter*. The newsletter was conceived in 1988 by editor and internationally known trainer Bob Pike to be a one-stop resource of practical “how-tos” for trainers. The idea was (and still is) to provide timely tips, techniques, and strategies that help trainers with the special tasks they perform daily.

When the newsletter began, it was largely fueled by Bob’s 20 years of experience in the field and by the best ideas shared by the trainers (more than 50,000 in all) who had attended his Creative Training Techniques seminars. As the newsletter grew in popularity, it also began to draw on ideas submitted by its readers. Today, the newsletter continues to search out creative approaches from the more than 200 seminars Bob and the other Creative Training Techniques trainers conduct every year, and from the more than 10,000 newsletter readers.

But no matter where the insights originate, the goal of the newsletter remains the same: To provide trainers a cafeteria of ideas they can quickly absorb, choosing those that best suit their special needs.

As stated earlier, this series of books represents the best ideas from *Creative Training Techniques Newsletter*’s seven years of publication. It is our hope that we’ve created a valuable resource you’ll come back to again and again to help address the unique challenges you face daily in your role as a trainer.

Sincerely,

The Editors

Introduction



Like it or not, the age of entertainment in which we live demands that classroom trainers must work hard to capture and *hold* the interest of participants. If we don't, we run the risk of being passed by in favor of "sexier" learning methods, such as high-tech computer- or video-based training.

Fortunately, trainers have long known that one of the best ways to entertain and engage adult learners is to encourage them to play games in the classroom. And one advantage we have over any of the high-tech mediums that are capturing the attention of "cyber-trainees" is that we're able to adapt the courses and the games we offer to match precisely the needs of our audience. We can assess participants, decide what kind of exercise is appropriate (and *when* it's appropriate), and use games that will ensure that trainees are entertained... and course material is retained.

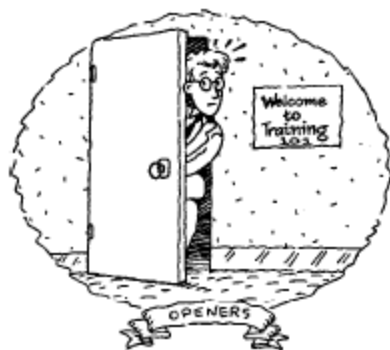
That's where *101 More Games for Trainers* comes in. Carefully selected and properly implemented, the exercises in this new volume (a companion to the earlier *101 Games for Trainers*) can help you actively involve trainees in course openers, bring a weary group back to life, develop communication skills, promote teamwork, lead an audience through a spirited review session, or address the special concerns of certain topical courses.

A brief description of its purpose is provided with each exercise, as well as a reference for the amount of time the exercise will take, the ideal group size for the exercise, and a checklist of the materials you'll need to make the exercise happen. And because these represent the best of the ideas collected in *Creative Training Techniques Newsletter*, you know they've been successfully "field tested" all over the world by trainers just like you.

Defining the Categories

The exercises in this book fall into one or more of these six categories. Just below the title of each exercise, you'll find a listing of these six categories. The small checkmarks beside each of the categories serve as guides for where best to use the exercise.

Please remember, however, that these are only suggestions. With the right amount of imagination, the exercises here can be adapted to suit almost any training need.



Openers

These exercises, commonly known as "ice breakers," serve as vehicles for getting participants to introduce themselves or for putting trainees into the right "frame of mind" for the coming session.

These exercises might vary according to the type of training being conducted, how big the group is, and

how well the group members know each other.

Also keep in mind the Law of Primacy: People remember best what we do first, so choose your openers carefully. (To be honest, nearly all of the exercises here could be adapted as some form of opener.)

Energizers

Designed to involve a group *actively*, these mid-course exercises are best used during the infamous mid-afternoon slump or anytime you feel a group's attention might be waning.

Often, these games take the form of energetic review sessions or stimulating brainteasers, or even a physical activity that gets people up and moving. The secret here is that these exercises aren't always planned.

The best strategy in developing a course is to have a handful of relevant energizers ready to go at a moment's notice and implement one when you see attention begin to slip.





Communication

Use these exercises to make a point to trainees about the importance of communication, or to show where certain communication skills need improvement. Exercises that help enhance listening skills also fall into this category. As with

“Openers,” a great many of the activities in this book could easily be adapted to make a point about communication skills, depending on how you position them.

Team-building

The purpose of these exercises is to help improve the relationship of individuals within a group—either a specific “work group” or simply a small group formed during your training session.

These exercises are extremely challenging for trainers because they call for participants to work independently in small groups (usually solving some sort of problem) for periods of time that exceed other types of exercises. Your challenge is to keep things moving and to monitor closely the progress of the groups.



Review

The last words any group of trainees wants to hear are, “Okay, let’s review.” To keep participants from completely tuning out, these exercises often help disguise a review session as a light, interactive competition. *One word of caution:* When the competitive juices of some attendees get

flowing, things can easily get out of hand. Your challenge is to keep the competition light and—whenever possible—to promote *cooperation* rather than competition.

Topical

One of the challenges trainers face is finding games and exercises that pertain to a certain kind of session (customer service or diversity training, for example). While many other exercises can be adapted for those kinds of training, we've identified several

"topical" games that work particularly well in specific situations.



A Few Words About Using These Games

Whether it's the first time or the five hundredth time you've used games in your classroom, I believe there are some fundamentals you should be aware of when implementing these exercises.

▼ **Assess your audience and know the risks.** Some of the following exercises will be natural hits with certain types of audiences, but others might bomb. Ultimately, it's up to you to decide what kind of game to play with what kind of audience. But you also need to assess your own comfort level with "pulling off" these games. A rule of thumb: If you're even remotely uncomfortable with an exercise, don't use it. Participants will sense your hesitation and share your discomfort.

▼ **Never use a game without debriefing afterward.** It might be obvious to *you* how a game enhances your subject matter, but it's dangerous to assume your participants are on the same page. Follow every game with a debriefing session to help participants ease back into the session itself, see the transition you've attempted to create, and assimilate the game's learning points.

▼ **Be creative. Adapt, adapt, adapt.** Nothing about *any* game in this book is set in stone. The trainers to whom these ideas are attributed were successful in using these games because they adapted the exercises to suit their own needs.

Though you'll be able to pluck many of them right off the page and insert them into your sessions, I challenge you to make these games uniquely your own whenever you can. The result will be an exercise that has even more relevance to you, your company, and your classroom. But most important, the result will be an exercise that's more *fun*.

GAME #2: Autobiographical Scavenger Hunt

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To break the ice and help introduce participants to one another.

◆ **Time Required:** 15 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** A list of autobiographical information for each participant, prepared in advance by the trainer.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Dale Ditmanson, training specialist for the National Park Service, asks participants to send in an “autobiography” before his courses. As a course opener, he selects a line or two from each autobiography and types them as a list.

Each participant is given a copy of the list as they arrive, and is then sent on a “human scavenger hunt” in the classroom until they discover which person matches each line on the sheet.

GAME #3: The Winning Equation

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To help participants think creatively in any type of training class.

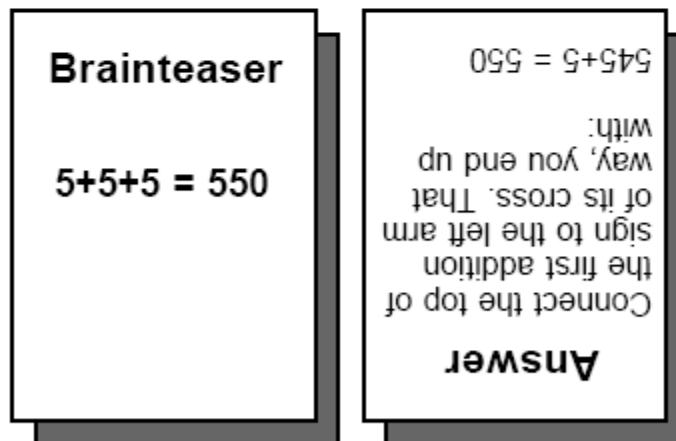
◆ **Time Required:** 10 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** Flipchart.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** To help participants begin thinking about creative solutions to problems, Gary Polain, vice president of business development with Priority Management in Bellevue, WA, poses the following brainteaser:

Polain writes the equation $5+5+5 = 550$ on a flipchart at the front of the classroom. He then instructs participants to copy the equation and to add one straight line to make it a correct statement. Polain tells participants that while adding a line through the equal sign to come up with $5+5+5 \neq 550$ is good thinking, it isn't the "right" answer he's looking for. See "Answer" graphic below for the solution.



GAME #8: A Matter of Taste

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To introduce participants to one another by uncovering their individual tastes.

◆ **Time Required:** 10 to 25 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** None.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Dave Dahlen, a park ranger with the National Park Service, helps participants get acquainted by asking a series of questions that reveal individual tastes and interests. For example:

- "I enjoy...
A. Classical
B. Jazz
C. Soul
D. Rock
...music."

Once each person has made a choice, participants divide into groups with similar musical taste. After a short get-acquainted period, another question is asked, such as, "I enjoy (A) Italian, (B) Chinese, (C) American, or (D) French cooking." The groups then change, based on those answers, and another short discussion period takes place.

GAME #12: Practice Makes Perfect

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To help participants recognize the innate ability they have to learn new material.

◆ **Time Required:** 10 to 15 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited, but participants should work in “rotating” pairs.

◆ **Materials Required:** None.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Carol Houseman, director of educational services for Mercy General Hospital, asks the class to form two concentric circles, with each person facing a partner. With the first partner, they share their answers to this question: “What is a skill you learned as a child that you still do well?”

Once each partner has given an answer, the inner circle rotates one person clockwise, and the new partners discuss a second question: “What is a skill you learned as a child that you can’t do well now?”

They rotate again and answer a third question: “Why did you retain that skill?”

They rotate to new partners once more and answer: “Why did you lose that skill?”

Finally, in small groups, ask participants to generate a series of learning points to help them retain the skills they learn from that particular class.

GAME #18: True Confession Toothpicks

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

- ◆ **Purpose:** To challenge participants to think creatively.
- ◆ **Time Required:** 15 minutes.
- ◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.
- ◆ **Materials Required:** A large supply of toothpicks.
- ◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Participants are challenged to think creatively, and also to make “true confessions” during this opener recommended by Lori Preston, training specialist at Electronic Data Systems.

Start by giving each participant 10 toothpicks or other counters. Then ask the first participant to talk about something they have never done, for example, “I’ve never jaywalked.” After the statement, anyone in the group who has jaywalked has to forfeit a toothpick to the kitty. Then the next person shares one thing he or she has never done, and again anyone who has done it loses a toothpick. The disclosures continue around the room until someone has lost all 10 toothpicks. It’s an entertaining way for people to get to know one another both by the things they have done, and the things they have not done.

GAME #19: Personal Introductions

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

- ◆ **Purpose:** To introduce participants to one another in a training session.
- ◆ **Time Required:** 10 minutes.
- ◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited, but participants should work in small groups of five or six.
- ◆ **Materials Required:** Several small paper bags.
- ◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Nina Policastro, training director for the Junior League in Dix Hills, NY, gives each participant a small paper bag. She then asks them to take from their wallet, briefcase, or purse three items that show something about their personality or lifestyle and put them in the bag. In small groups of five or six, people then share why they selected the items.

To make this opener more program-oriented, ask people to select three items that make statements about their jobs. If they're in customer service, for instance, ask them to select something that relates to how they help customers.

GAME #20: Baby Pictures

Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical: Change Management

◆ **Purpose:** To creatively introduce one another before a session and make a learning point as well.

◆ **Time Required:** 20 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** Baby photos of participants, sent to the trainer in advance of the session.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Using participants' baby photos can help break the ice and drive home some learning points, according to Lisa Monopoli of National Car Rental System. She has participants send a baby photo to her prior to the seminar. She numbers and displays the baby pictures, and has participants match them up by voting on who's who. When the votes are tallied, everyone has a good laugh, she says. Monopoli says this activity is especially effective for seminars that include a combination of work peers of different professional levels.

Monopoli says that aside from being fun, the opener helps make two learning points:

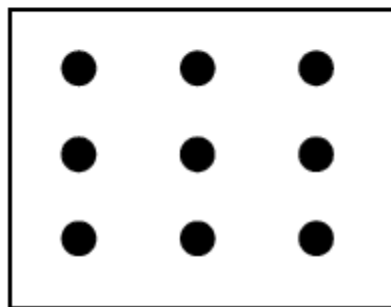
- When conducting a class with participants who are of different professional levels, the activity helps break the ice by pointing out that we all started out on the same level (at about six to nine pounds).
- When conducting courses where change is the focus, it helps to demonstrate how much change each of us has already been through and that change is inevitable.

GAME #27: Connect the Dots

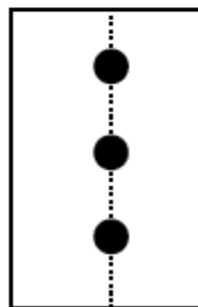
- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

- ◆ **Purpose:** To provide an exercise that challenges participants to think creatively.
- ◆ **Time Required:** 10 minutes.
- ◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.
- ◆ **Materials Required:** Sheets of paper (one for each participant) with the dot pattern shown below.
- ◆ **The Exercise in Action:** To show his participants the importance of an open mind, creativity, and problem solving, Jack McKown, process controller for Hallmark Cards in Kansas City, MO, uses a “connect the dots” exercise as a brainteaser opener.

Draw a dot pattern (shown below) on a sheet of paper (make dots at least ¼ inch diameter). Then tell participants that if they are creative, they can draw a line through all the dots with only one line. The only rule is that the line must be drawn straight.



To set up the brainteaser: Give each participant a sheet of paper with nine evenly spaced dots on it. Tell participants the objective of the exercise is to connect all the dots with only one line.



Solution: Fold the paper over onto itself toward the center (so one-half of each dot from the left side of the sheet connects with one-half of each dot from the right side). Then draw a line down through the aligned dots.

GAME #28: Experience Levels

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To satisfy participants' curiosity about their classmates' tenure with the company.

◆ **Time Required:** 10 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** None.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Most participants are naturally curious about how much experience others in a class have with their companies. Liz Seely, a market support sales trainer for MCI, starts her sessions by asking participants to write their guesses of the average tenure of all participants. Then she asks each table to add up their number of years with the company and uses that number to find her average for the room. The person with the closest guess wins a small prize.

Depending on the amount of experience represented within the class, Seely makes a point about the incredible amount of experience a group can bring to a class, and that participants shouldn't be afraid to ask peers for help when they need it.

GAME #30: Killing Closed-Ended Questions

Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To quickly and graphically demonstrate the limitations of closed-ended questions.

◆ **Time Required:** 15 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** A list of characters, prepared in advance by the trainer; name tags.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Many types of training emphasizes the importance of asking cogent questions to elicit the kind of information you are seeking from others. Cheryl Carter, an employee relations specialist at Philip Morris U.S.A., uses the following exercise to demonstrate the limitations of closed-ended questions:

Carter develops a list of characters based on popular figures as diverse as Woody Woodpecker, John F. Kennedy, and Cinderella. She writes one name per name tag, enough for the class.

She then places a tag on each participant's back and allows participants five to seven minutes to find out what their new identity is. The ground rules:

1. You can only ask questions that require a yes or no answer.
2. You must ask at least five different people a different question.

Once time is up, Carter reconvenes the group, discovers who has guessed correctly, and has participants share what types of questions they used to arrive at that information.

GAME #36: Opening Scavenger Hunt

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To open a course by putting in participants' hands some of the items they will use during the session.

◆ **Time Required:** 15 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** Stickers with letters on them. A variety of items participants use in class (for example, markers, handouts, etc.).

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Mandy Proctor, a nurse educator for Sinai Samaritan Medical Center in Milwaukee, starts some of her classes by sending participants on a scavenger hunt that she sets up in the training room. She places letter stickers above the items, and as the participants find each item, they remove the letters and place them on their instruction sheets.

When the participants are finished, the letters spell out the words "Welcome to 5A (Proctor's unit). We're glad you're here."

The items you list for the hunt could be items participants will use during the training programs such as flipcharts, markers, and other supplies, or the pieces of equipment they are going to learn about.

GAME #41: Gone in a Flash

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To symbolically rid participants of their greatest “learning fear.”

◆ **Time Required:** 5 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** A supply of magician’s “flash paper,” available at most magic shops; a candle.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** As participants enter Gary Weaver’s training room, each is given a small piece of magician’s flash paper (about 2 inches square). He doesn’t tell them the purpose of the paper, nor that it’s “trick” material. He also places a lit candle at the front of the room.

Weaver, an industry trainer with Canadian Valley Vo-Tech in El Reno, OK, asks participants to write their biggest learning obstacle or fear on the paper—for example, speaking up in class. They then walk up, one by one, to the front of the room, share the concern or fear with the rest of the class, and ignite the flash paper in the candle by tossing it—safely away from others—in the air toward the candle, where it burns quickly before coming down.

Weaver says the symbolism isn’t lost on participants who are comforted hearing others reveal fears of their own. “It’s a great way to watch learning obstacles ‘go up in smoke’ before the training begins,” he says.

GAME #46: You Bet Your Life

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To use a variation of a familiar game to break the ice in a session.

◆ **Time Required:** 30 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** 12 to 15.

◆ **Materials Required:** Poker chips with “secret” words written on them, prepared in advance by the trainer.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Linda Williams, a senior education and development specialist with First Trust Corp. in Denver, uses this opener modeled on the old Groucho Marx TV show, *You Bet Your Life*.

As participants enter the room, she gives each a poker chip with a “secret” word written on it and asks them not to share it with anyone. Once the whole group has gathered, she explains that the object of the activity is to meet as many people as possible. The incentive to do that is a prize awarded to the person who collects the most secret words.

To collect a word, a participant must say the word in normal conversation with the person who holds it. When the word is said, the owner of the secret word fesses up and shows the other person the poker chip with the word on it. Each person keeps track of his or her score. Williams chooses words with a high probability of being part of a “getting to know you” conversation. The secret words remain active throughout the activity so that participants can run up a large score.

Other guidelines include:

- In group discussions, the poker chips should be shown only to the individual who says the secret word.
- Variations on the word do count.

Williams dons a pair of Groucho glasses and carries a stuffed duck with a word tucked in its mouth as props to explain the original *You Bet Your Life* TV show.

GAME #51: Admission Tickets

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To get participants thinking about the training course before they even arrive.

◆ **Time Required:** 10 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** “Admission tickets” and a set of instructions, prepared in advance by the trainer and sent to each participant before the class begins.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Denise Pare uses a variation of the course admission ticket concept (which many trainers use as a “tickler” to the class) to encourage students to think about what they want from a training session before they attend.

Pare, a reading curriculum coordinator at Cy-Fair Independent School District in Houston, makes tickets about the size of a 3 x 5 inch notecard and sends them—along with a brief set of instructions—to participants a few days before her course begins. She then uses the cards as an opener in the session and refers to them over the course of the class.

The instructions:

- **First line**—Print your name.
- **Second line**—What are your expectations for the course?
- **Third line**—Explain your greatest need in the subject area.
- **Fourth line**—Get the signature of someone with whom you’ve shared those expectations and needs.
- **Fifth line**—Get the signature of a person who will not attend the session with whom you’ve promised to share something you learn from the course.

Thinking about these things prior to attending, Pare says, encourages participants to consciously think about ways that a course can benefit them specifically, rather than passively waiting for knowledge to be served to them in ready-to-use portions and coming away with less than they might have because they neglected to apply lessons to their day-to-day issues.

GAME #54: Murphy's Law

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical: Train-the-Trainer

◆ **Purpose:** To help break the ice, energize participants, and make a learning point in train-the-trainer sessions.

◆ **Time Required:** About 10 minutes at the onset of a course, then a couple of minutes at different times throughout a session.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** None.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** After revisiting the idea that “anything that can go wrong, will,” either Lillian Lancaster or Winzie Pollet, instructional support teachers for the training and development arm of Orange County Public Schools, Orlando, FL, shares a training experience that supports the axiom. Several volunteers are asked to recall a similar incident that occurred during the facilitation of a workshop or at some other point during their careers.

At regular intervals during their three-hour training session, a time for sharing examples of Murphy's Law is announced. “The examples often provide an opportunity for follow-up on how the situation was handled or how the problem was solved,” says Lancaster. “Through this ongoing exercise, the learning point about trainer flexibility and creativity is emphasized, and a high level of interest and involvement is maintained.”

GAME #59: Shoe Box

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To convince participants they can solve problems with teamwork more quickly and easily than they can by trudging along solo.

◆ **Time Required:** 10 to 20 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** 12 or more participants working in small groups of four.

◆ **Materials Required:** An object brought by each participant; a shoe box.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Angie Rohlman, a project manager at Kimball International, Jasper, IN, sends class registrants a note a few days in advance of courses asking them to bring a small object to be placed in a shoe box with items brought in by others.

At the start of the session, participants get 60 seconds to look in the box and then have a minute to list on paper as many items as they can remember.

Rohlman then divides the students into groups of four and gives them another minute to generate a list of the contents of the box as a group. They invariably do better, she says, which makes for an effective opener in team-building courses.

GAME #60: Listen with Your Eyes

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To demonstrate that listening is more than a passive skill, and that eyes can be as important as ears in perceiving a message.

◆ **Time Required:** 5 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** Copies of the American Sign Language (ASL) alphabet for all participants; a presenter who is familiar with ASL.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** At the outset of any class, there's always some last-minute shuffling around as participants settle into their chairs, pull out pens and notebooks, and so forth. This activity often continues even after the trainer begins the session, with participants assuming they'll get any valuable information by casually listening.

To demonstrate otherwise, Nina Hollingsworth, a trainer with Mead Coated Board, Phenix City, AL, asks an employee who "speaks" sign language to introduce the course. Each participant is given a copy of the American Sign Language alphabet and asked to record what they pick up. The employee slowly signs the word "welcome." That, Hollingsworth says, is when all extraneous shuffling stops, as the participants realize they cannot rely on their ears alone to "listen" to the introduction.

After the exercise, Hollingsworth leads participants through a discussion on the value of using all available resources in order to give someone your full attention.

GAME #62: Stupid Questions

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To help participants overcome the fear of speaking up and perhaps looking foolish in class.

◆ **Time Required:** 15 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** 8 to 10.

◆ **Materials Required:** None.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Every trainer has repeated the classroom cliché, “There’s no such thing as a stupid question.” But the simple fact is some participants *are* reluctant to ask questions for fear of sounding foolish, and that can lead to a serious lack of interaction in a session.

To get participants over that hump at the outset of a course, Darren Patton reads aloud a list of some of the silliest, most irrelevant questions he’s ever had to answer in a corporate classroom. Examples include, “What color were the walls in this room before they painted them blue?” and “How many vacation days do you get per year?”

Once the list is read, Patton, a trainer with The Vanguard Group, Wayne, PA, asks small groups to have some fun and come up with a single bizarre question to share with the large group. The query judged most irrelevant by the entire class wins that group a small prize.

“After a few laughs, people start realizing that nothing they ask can be as silly or irrelevant as the previous questions,” Patton says. “That tends to make the class more comfortable with voicing questions later in the session.”

GAME #64: What's in a Name?

Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To help participants relate with more ease at the start of class. (This exercise is tailor-made for team-building sessions.)

◆ **Time Required:** 10 to 15 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** Flipchart paper.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Yvonne Thornton, a training specialist with UT Southwestern in Dallas, asks participants, one at a time, to write their first names on a flipchart at the front of the class. They're also asked to write a nickname they've had in their lives, explaining the nickname's origin as they write. Someone nicknamed "Bones," for instance, might trace it back to being skinny as a child.

Thornton says the exercise is well-suited for team-building efforts within departments because "it helps team members begin training with reduced tension and increased rapport. It also provides more insight into personalities and backgrounds." Many times participants are called by their old nicknames throughout the rest of the session, she says.

GAME #66: Alphabet Soup

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

- ◆ **Purpose:** To help large groups mix and mingle.
- ◆ **Time Required:** 10 to 15 minutes.
- ◆ **Size of Group:** No more than 26 (but certain letters of the alphabet can be repeated if the group is larger).
- ◆ **Materials Required:** One Post-It Note with a letter of the alphabet on it for every participant, prepared in advance by the trainer.
- ◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Rhonda Gordon, human resources training manager for the Bureau of National Affairs, Washington, D.C., conceived of the following opener when preparing a training course for 26 people. The number 26 sparked an idea, and the “Alphabet Opener” was born, but she says it can be used for smaller or larger classes if the instructor prepares properly. Here are the instructions for the exercise:

Give all participants a Post-It Note with a large letter printed on it, and ask them to place the letter on their shirt fronts. Avoid letters like Q, X, or Z, and offer about twice as many consonants as vowels. Gordon recommends making the vowels a different color from the consonants so that they’re easily recognizable.

Tell participants they have five minutes to form any word with at least three other people, but explain that longer words are fine. Gordon says participants are rarely left out, and if they are, other groups often break their words and make a new one to include the additional person. She keeps extra Post-It Notes with letters handy, and if a straggler is spotted, she steps in to ask another group to break their word and make a new one. Extra vowels and the letter “S” for making plurals work best, she says.

After five minutes, give each group a sheet of flipchart paper to post and ask them to form a sentence or phrase using the word to describe their expectations of the course.

GAME #70: The Danger of Assumptions

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical: Diversity

◆ **Purpose:** To show participants how appropriate or inappropriate it is to make assumptions about others.

◆ **Time Required:** 10 minutes at the outset of class.

◆ **Size of Group:** 10 to 30.

◆ **Materials Required:** Slips of paper, each with the name of a different participant written on it, prepared in advance by the trainer.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Leslie Huerter, religious education director for St. Mary's Church, gives everyone a slip of paper with the name of another person, which they're not to reveal to the other participants. Participants are asked to observe their "designated person" throughout the day and write down on index cards positive observations and assumptions. At some point, she has each person read out loud the qualities they've observed and give the index card to the other person. "This activity is great for helping people see themselves as others see them," says Huerter.

GAME #81: A Letter from the President

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To inspire participants about the training course—even before it begins.

◆ **Time Required:** 5 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** A letter from the president of the company, prepared in advance.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Katherine Bird, training specialist for Fidelity Federal Bank, sends a letter from the company president to all participants prior to a course to inspire people a little before they ever enter the classroom.

The letter consists of two paragraphs: one explains why the president feels the course is important to business success; the other explains why they've been invited to the program. Bird then uses the letter as an opener to the session.

GAME #83: What Will the Future Hold?

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

- ◆ **Purpose:** To help participants judge themselves in a positive light.
- ◆ **Time Required:** 15 to 20 minutes.
- ◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.
- ◆ **Materials Required:** None.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** Use this futuristic scenario as an ice breaker or point of departure in your courses, suggests W. Greg Lanier, a training specialist with Duke Power Co. He reads them this text:

“In the somewhat distant future, people begin to explore the galaxy and to colonize other planets. In view of the great distances and traveling times involved, potential colonists may be put in suspended animation for transport. Some colonies certainly receive more colonists than can be accommodated, so there will be warehouses full of frozen people, ready to be defrosted as needed...if ever.

“You are a colonist about to be put in cryogenic suspension. You are filling out a lengthy form in which all of your demographic and professional characteristics are listed. You come to a question that asks you to list up to six adjective-noun combinations (such as “hard worker” or “good parent”) that describe you as a person. What would you list? What qualities do you have that would make someone else decide that you are worth thawing out?”

He has participants write out their list of six characteristics and then discuss them with each other. In larger classes, it is best done in small breakout groups; in small classes, a round-robin works well.

GAME #85: Sound and Motion

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To help participants introduce themselves to one another... and to *remember* those names.

◆ **Time Required:** 15 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** 8 to 20.

◆ **Materials Required:** None.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** With groups of 20 or less, Bryan Cooper uses an introduction that energizes while aiding participants' recall of their class members' names.

Cooper, a claims trainer at Nationwide, Inc., Columbus, OH, asks participants to stand in a circle and introduce themselves by first name and one adjective that begins with the same letter as their name—for example, "I'm brilliant Bryan." He asks each person to add a simple movement or gesture, such as a bow, a two-handed wave, or a dance step.

Participants are asked to repeat the names, adjectives, and actions of all preceding group members before adding their own. This makes people uncomfortable at first, but they tend to loosen up as introductions progress. In the end, participants are laughing and having fun. And, on a more practical note, they've received two aids (an alliterative word and a silly action) to help them link names with faces.

GAME #100: Pig Personality Profile

- Game Opener Team-building
Categories: Energizer Review
 Communication Topical

◆ **Purpose:** To get people talking, and give participants an unusual and interesting topic of conversation for their first course break.

◆ **Time Required:** 15 minutes.

◆ **Size of Group:** Unlimited.

◆ **Materials Required:** Drawing utensils and paper for all participants.

◆ **The Exercise in Action:** If the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator leaves you cold, try a substitute: the Pig Personality Profile. It might not be sound science, he says, but it's good for a lot of laughs and effectively breaks the ice, says Gordon Cotton.

Cotton, a trainer at Marine Atlantic, Inc., Monchton, New Brunswick, gives participants the following instructions: "On a blank piece of paper, draw a pig. Don't look at your neighbor's pigs. Don't even glance." He provides no further guidance and does not explain the purpose of the exercise. (Note: You may find it interesting to follow the above instructions before reading the rest of this exercise.)

When participants are finished, he shares his tongue-in-cheek explanation that the pig serves as a useful test of the personality traits of the artist. He tells the class if the pig is drawn:

- Toward the top of the paper, you are a positive, optimistic person.
- Toward the middle of the page (top to bottom), you are a realist.
- Toward the bottom of the page, you are pessimistic and have a tendency to behave negatively.
- Facing left, you believe in tradition, are friendly, and remember dates, including birthdays.
- Facing forward (looking toward you), you are direct, enjoy playing devil's advocate, and neither fear nor avoid discussions.
- Facing right, you are innovative and active, but don't have a strong sense of family, nor do you remember dates.
- With many details, you are analytical, cautious, and distrustful.