

Facilitation Tips: Fun Ways to Form Small Groups

Facilitators often want to break a large group up into smaller groups, or “mix up” participant groupings to bring new energy or new ideas to a room, or just to get people moving a little. Here are some unusual, fun and interesting ways to group participants.

Note: It is a good idea to divide the room into groups **before** giving them the activity instructions. If you start with the instructions, often people will have forgotten what they were supposed to do by the time they form their groups. Be sure to let everyone know to take all their belongings to their new table if they are going to remain in their groups for an extended period.

Candy or Goodies Sort

- Prepare a variety of candies (kisses, toffee, mints, lollipops, rolls). The number of varieties will determine how many different groups you want to form. Put the candies into a bag or bowl and have participants choose a candy. They then form groups according to the candy they chose. You could put a different candy on each table and ask the group to find their ‘candy’ table.

Variations: You could use the same candy but different colors, all the reds are here are the blues there, etc. For some informality have everyone suck on their candy then stick out their tongue and find their fellow group members. If you wanted to mix up everyone at the beginning of the day, participants could choose a candy as they arrive and find their ‘candy’ table.

- Prepare a variety of ‘goodies’ (chocolates, pretzels, candy, bubble gum, cheese sticks) and place in a basket. The number of varieties will determine the number of groups. Pass around the basket and have everyone choose a snack. Ask ‘chocolates’ to form over here and ‘pretzels’ over there etc.

Variations: Use the goodies as the afternoon snack choice as well as to divide into groups. If you want to highlight diversity then choose goodies from other cultural groups. You could ask questions such as: Which snacks attracted you and why? Which ones were unappealing? Why? Was your preference influenced by your personality or cultural heritage? You could point out that our choices can reflect whom we are with or how we are feeling (tired, excited). How does this correlate to when we are working with diverse learners? Think of other ways to tie their choices into diversity.

- Make table signs with different flavours (caramel, strawberry, vanilla) or taste (sweet, salty, sour). Before dividing into groups, place the table signs randomly around the room. Have participants choose the table with their favorite flavour or taste. Ask participants to reflect on why they like the taste or flavour they chose. What life experiences taught them to value that taste? Might this enhance their cultural self-awareness?

Cards/Games/Puzzles

- Bring a deck of playing cards and give a card to each participant then arrange groups using numbers, colors, suits, higher/lower than, or other combinations.
- Bring pieces of a child's puzzle for each participant and form groups by finding the pieces that connect to each other. If you wanted to form groups of four then bring enough groupings of 4 connecting pieces of the puzzle for all participants.

Variation: Cut up pictures from magazines or old posters into the number of people you want in each group. Use the same number of pictures as total groups you want. Place all the cut up pieces into a basket or bowl and have each participant choose a piece. They need to find everyone who has a piece from the same picture. When they find each other they can put their picture together. Note: use distinctively different pictures (colors, shapes etc.).

- Print cards with the sound of various animals. Give participants each a card and have them walk around the room making their animal sound until they have found their group. If you want groups of 6 then print one animal sound on 6 different cards. Use as many different animal sounds as number of groups you want to form.
- Do you have some different board games around? Bring pieces from a variety of games and have participants find those who have a game piece from their game. Using game pieces from Sorry, Monopoly, Scrabble, Checkers, Chess and Life could lead to some interesting discussions if you have a diverse group of generations. Participants may have different experiences and childhood memories and the stories could help to break the ice, explore diversity, and see different points of view.
- Cut up various shapes (circle, square, triangle) according to the number of groups and how many you want in each group. Hand out the shapes and ask participants to find the rest of their shape.

Let's Get Physical

Here are some great ways to divide groups in half.

- Ask participants to jump in the air and land with their feet crossed. Which foot is in front? All lefts form one group all rights form another.
- Ask participants to clasp their hands together. Which thumb is on top? Thumbs on top form one group and thumbs under form another group.
- Have participants cross their arms. Which arm is on top?

Variation: You could use these ideas to divide a table up. All the 'on tops' stay at the table and the 'unders' move to the next table.

You can use these ideas to divide into three or more groups.

- Participants draw a dog in the air, was its tail to the left, to the right or absent? Curly or straight? Long or short?
- Participants pretend to lick an imaginary ice cream, did they do it clockwise, anti-clockwise or up and down? Long or short licks? One or more licks?

Another idea is to break the groups in half, then in half again and in half again until you reach the number of groups you want.

- To divide into the first half ask participants if they prefer sun or snow. Then for each half group have them divide again based on whether they like dogs or cats. Continue dividing using similar questions below or make up your own.
 - Do you like rain or wind?
 - Do you crumple or fold toilet paper?
 - Do you squeeze toothpaste from the bottom or anywhere?
 - Do you say TomaTOE or ToMAYto?

Up Close and Personal

There are different ways to divide into multiple groups based on personal information related to each participant. Beware though; you may not get the same number in each group.

- Have participants find those who have the same birth month as theirs, or the same date, or which quarter of the year they were born, or by season.
- Group participants by the type of shoe they are wearing, or type of jewellery, similar type of clothes or what dominant color they are wearing.
- Group by favorite season, favorite type of food (meat, bread, snacks, cereal).

- Use the first letter of their last name, last digit of their telephone number, birth order in their family/only child, or the distance they traveled to attend the training.

Words, Words, Words

- Choose key words from the training with a variety of syllables. The number of different syllables should correspond to the number of groups you want. For instance if you want to form five groups you would need words with 1-5 syllables. Write the words on small cards and hand out randomly to participants. They form the groups according to how many syllables are in their word.
- To form pairs you could cut up quotes related to the theme or topic of the training. Type up the quotes on slips of paper and cut in half at a natural break in the quote. Fold them up and place in a basket. Participants choose a slip of paper and then find the person who has the other half of their quote.

Variations: If you have longer quotes you could cut them up into 3-4 slips of paper and form groups of 3-4 participants. If you cannot find any quotes to fit the theme look at cutting up phrases used in the training.

- Give participants cards with half a name on it such as 'Bugs'. They need to find their other half 'Bunny'. Use other paired words such as 'Peanut Butter' and 'Jelly' or 'October' and 'Halloween'. Put a tent card on each table with a group name such as 'Cartoon Characters' or 'Food Pairs'. Each pair needs to find their respective table. Create enough group names as groups you would like to form and enough paired words for that particular group to correspond to the number you would like in each group. You could have a Sports table with pairs such as 'bat' and 'ball'; 'skate' and 'puck', and 'basket' and 'hoop'. Other group names could be Famous People, Children Games (hop/scotch; frozen/tag) or Holidays. The limit is your imagination.

Variation: Instead of creating similar pairs to form a group use similar words to form a group. For instance, you could create a tent card for a table labelled 'Dog Breeds'. Then you could have the number of cards with different breeds as you want to have participants at the table. Randomly pass out the cards and participants need to find the group that matches their card.

- Write the phonetic pronunciation of greetings from different languages on cards based on the number of participants you want in a group using as many different languages as you want groups. Participants walk around the room greeting everyone in the language on their card. When they find others with the same greeting, they gather as a group and find the tent card on a table that matches the language of their greeting.

Here are a few different languages with the phonetic pronunciation of their greeting.

Spanish: 'Bweh-nos dee-as!"

Thai: "Sa-wat di!"

German: "Goo-ten-tahk!"

Chinese: "Knee how!"

Italian: "Bwonjor-nor!"

Japanese: "ko-nee-chee-wa!"

Arabic: "sahl-ahm!"

Russian: "Do-bree-den!"

Swahili: "Jambo!"

Indian (India): "Nah-mahs-tay!"

French: "Bon-jour!"

Bits and Bobs

- Write the names of favorite childhood songs such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star", "Row, Row your Boat", and "Mary Had a Little Lamb" onto cards. Use the same number of songs of groups you want. Have participants hum their song as they walk around the room finding others who are humming the same song. They form a group and go to the table with the tent card of their song.
- If you're using nametags, put a different colored dot on each nametag. Use as many colors as you have tables. When participants arrive, they can go to the table with the tent card of their color. The tent card could be the same color as their dot or the felt pen could be their color.

Variations: Place a colored dot on their training materials if they pick them up when they sign in.

- Place on each table a different coloured paper for name tents. When you're ready to form groups all those who used the same colored paper become a group. If you don't have coloured paper then supply the same colors of markers at each table and the groups form based on the color of marker they used.
- Place different colored post it notes under their chairs. Those with the same color form a group.
- During a break place a different number on a slip of paper at each person's spot. After break they find the group with their same number.
- When forming groups you can either use tent cards at each table to guide them to their table or you can verbally state which table is for which group. For instance, all the reds gather at this table and all the pinks at that table etc.

Sources

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