

Useful energisers

During meetings, workshops or training sessions there may be times when energy levels fall and people's attention wanders. This is particularly true at the end of the morning, just after lunch or towards the end of the day. Difficult presentations, high temperatures and challenging decisions can all be made easier if there are enjoyable breaks between sessions.

Enjoyable activities that help to refresh people are usually called *energisers*. They do more than just wake people up. They can help participants in workshops get to know each other better. They can break down barriers and bring people from different backgrounds together. There are many, many different energisers – and people can make up new ones themselves.

When using energisers, choose them carefully, taking account of the people

present. If people are unfamiliar with using energisers, begin with gentle, less energetic ones. Always join in yourself and set an example. Respect those who really do not want to take part. Be sensitive to culture, gender and disability, particularly in situations where it may not be appropriate for men and women to touch each other. If people have disabilities that prevent them from joining in, include them as judges or umpires. Whenever possible, try to relate energisers to the training subject.



Body writing

Ask people to mime writing their name in the air with different parts of the body.

Ideas include:

- right finger
- left finger
- right elbow
- big toes
- shoulders
- nose

Try to finish with the belly button!

What sound is this?

Someone makes a sound and everyone else tries to identify it – the person who guesses right makes another sound. Sounds could include animal and bird noises, machines, vehicles or food preparation.

All move who...

Sit in a circle with one person standing in the middle. Say: 'All move who...'

- 'are wearing something blue'
- 'can speak two or more languages'
- 'got up this morning before 6am'
- 'had egg/bread/fruit etc for breakfast'
- 'have the letter s in their name' ...etc.

Those concerned (which will usually include the person in the middle) move quickly to a space left by someone else. The person left in the middle makes the next choice.



Song

Singing songs that are easy to learn and join in with is always enjoyable. Action songs can be fun, or use songs that involve clapping or tapping out rhythms.

Buzz

Ask people to turn to the person next to them and talk about what has just been covered, an issue that has just arisen, the agenda or a decision to be made.

Numbers

Stand in a circle. Count in turn around the circle. Every time the number five or a multiple of five is reached, that person claps instead of saying the number. Every time the number seven or a multiple of seven is reached, that person turns around once instead of saying the number. If someone makes a mistake, they drop out of the circle and the next person goes back to 1 again.



Move

As leader, simply change your position. Moving to another part of the room will help people shift their chairs and heads and wake up. Invite people to get up and look at a poster or chart more closely.

Gentle rain

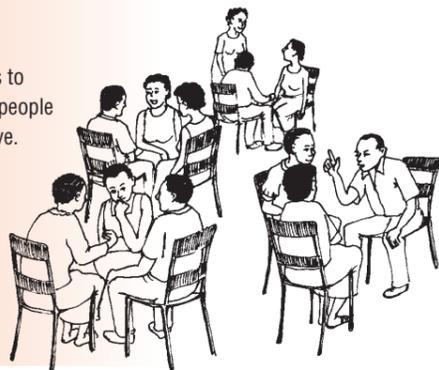
Make the sound of a rainstorm, starting gently, getting heavier and gradually stopping. Ask everyone to follow you in tapping the palm of one hand with one finger of the other hand; then two fingers, then three, then four, then the whole hand; and then back down again to one finger.

Trains

Ask participants to make train noises and actions with their arms. Take them on a journey, gathering speed through a valley, slowing to climb a hill, speeding up as they come down the hill, putting on the brakes to stop in a station and slowing starting up again. Relate the journey to local place names.

Form groups

Ask people to quickly form groups to discuss a topic or an activity. Ask people to form groups of three, four or five. You can count people off ('One, two, three, one...'), or ask them to form groups with people they do not know, from other organisations or other areas of work.



Role plays

Ask participants to use role play in small groups to highlight key learning points. You could ask people to present simple role plays to show both traditional teaching and the problems and benefits encountered in using facilitation skills. Role plays could be used to show cultural issues, sensitive situations with money and record keeping or to share new learning with others. People will usually need encouragement to use role play but are nearly always excellent! They will have fun in preparing the role play, in presenting it and in watching others.

Mirrors

Place people into pairs. One person is the actor, the other the mirror. The mirror does whatever the actor does, mirroring their actions. After a few minutes, change roles.



Ranking

One person secretly chooses something on which to rank everyone. This could be their shoe colour or size, the number of buttons, their age, their hair colour or length, their height, the number of pockets, the first initial of their name or their birthday, etc. Line everybody up according to the secret ranking system and let people try and work it out. For example, if you have chosen buttons, one end will have the person with most buttons on their clothing, and the other end of the line will have all those who have no buttons. You will need to be quite clever in not drawing attention to your secret. For example, if it concerns their shoes, try not to look down all the time!

Many of these ideas come from the book Participatory Workshops by Robert Chambers and are included with kind permission. The book is reviewed on page 14.