

## Reading Aloud to Break the Ice

Community college students who have a long commute may not be able to participate in peer interactions that are readily available to students attending residential colleges and universities. Also, these students often have jobs before and after class, which allows for even less socialization. Compressed classes also make it more difficult for students to get to know one another since they are together for a shorter period of time.

To address this issue, I used to try to learn students' names and something about them as quickly as possible by asking each of them to introduce themselves on the first day of class. Now, instead of an oral introduction, I put students in groups and ask them to write two or three paragraphs about themselves on a sheet of paper. Then I have the students take turns reading their brief autobiographies to each other. After they have finished reading, I give them five to ten minutes to discuss the information that was shared. I am not sure why reading the information to each other is more effective than an oral introduction, but it has proven to be a successful bonding exercise. As a side benefit, the exercise also provides me with an early sample of their writing skills.

Because I have taught remedial reading at a two-year college, I know that numerous students dread the thought of reading aloud. However, putting students in small groups and having them read their own words seems to make them more comfortable. Writing the information also gives them an opportunity to organize their thoughts rather than speaking extemporaneously. I tell them that their papers will not be graded for grammar or spelling, and I advise them to write only what they wish to be known publicly. During most courses, I use the method one more time, usually towards the middle of the semester. This second occasion provides students with another opportunity to interact with students who they may not have gotten to know quite as well as students in their initial group. Instructors who teach a full 16-week semester might prefer using this technique several times.

This method is an easy and expense-free strategy that can be used in a wide variety of disciplines. Instructors can, if they prefer, provide prompts for students to use when writing about themselves. The instructor and class time involved is insignificant when compared to the rewards that are gained for students and instructors alike.

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