

THE Magic of Making Training FUN!!

CREATIVE OPENING EXERCISES

by Dr. Palan

Creative opening exercises produce a FUN learning environment. I call creative opening exercises as "warm-ups". They involve learners in a FUN way. Just as your fitness instructor requires **warm-ups** to prepare your heart before a rigorous workout, it is essential to prepare participants' mindsets before delivery of content. Participants come to a training programme with all kinds of preoccupation and perceptions. A FUN learning environment develops trust. It deals with all people who are willing to learn as well as with resistors on a conscious level.

A **warm-up** activity either singly or in combination would achieve the following:

1. Break preoccupation.
2. Get participants to know one another.
3. Create positive first impressions for learners.
4. Develop immediate learner involvement, igniting learner interest.
5. Provide on the spot assessment about the participants.

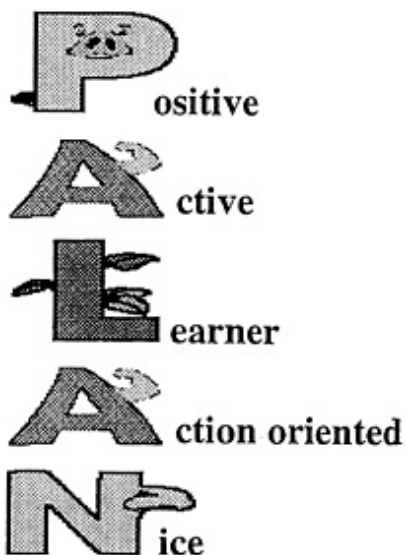
The amount of time we spend on warm-ups depend on the overall length of programme.

Of course, when using warm-up activities, we must take into account the cultural expectations, programme content and the style of the trainer. However, you do not have a choice on whether you should have warm-up activities or not. It is a must if you want learning to be FUN!!!

I have used some of the following exercises and found them to work very well in an Asian context.

Name introductions

Creative introductions can be a great warm-up. I always try to make it FUN by introducing myself through an overhead transparency. I reveal alphabets one by one using an A4 paper to mask the other letters. I make it as much FUN as possible by explaining each alphabet like why I am positive. No need to read a boring biosketch or brag about yourself. I achieve two goals - introduce myself as well as prepare the participants to receive the content by breaking preoccupation.



During a recent workshop, a participant from Estee Lauder introduced herself:

L - ean

E - legant

N - aughty

A - ttractive

You can imagine the fun.

Another activity that is FUN and a great get acquainted exercise is the **Balloon opener**.

People who know one another tend to sit together. Adults not only learn by themselves and from the facilitator, they also learn from one another. It is important to rotate them into new groups without offending them.

In the balloon openers activity, you give a coloured balloon to each participant. Just before the start, you advise them to do the following:

- i. Blow the balloon
- ii. Meet as many people as possible. Introduce yourself and get to know the other person. Collect a signature on the balloon from each new friend.
- iii. People with the appropriate colour balloons now move to the appropriate tables. i.e. the blue balloons move to the table designated as a blue table.

The activity is FUN. It gets the participants to meet as many new people as possible. Participants form new groups in a FUN way. It is short, simple and a relaxing activity.

Participants with the largest balloon and the most signatures on their balloons get prizes.

Issues to consider when using warm-up activities

Ask yourself what are your goals when opening the session. Some issues to consider:

- 1. Level of threat**
- 2. Appropriateness to group norms**
- 3. Relevance to training content**
- 4. Cultural issues**
- 5. Length of activity**

Does the warm-up activity, make them feel relaxed and create a positive learning environment? Or, does it make them tense because the activity is totally unfamiliar to them? An opener that exposes participants' lack of knowledge or skills can be risky: they may feel frustrated and the objective of the warm-up exercise can go cold.

Take care when you use opening exercises for the purpose is to make the participants open up **not** close off to the training session.

SUMMARY

Creative Opening exercises produce a FUN learning environment. It is important to break the preoccupation of the learners before delivery of content. The opening exercises known as "warm-ups" or "ice-breakers" must be compatible with the local culture and group norms.

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