

Games and energisers are a good way to break up a workshop, energise and refocus people. When you are facilitating games and energisers, it is essential to think of the group you are working with, in particular the diversity of participants in terms of what is culturally and physically comfortable for people to play. Prioritise the margin rather than the mainstream.

This list of games was compiled by Pru Gell, Sam La Rocca and James Whelan from the Change Agency. Many of the games have been around for a long time and it's difficult to attribute their source.

Name games

Names and balls/pillows/soft toys

You need a balls/pillows/soft toys. While holding a ball the first person says their name and they toss the ball to someone else across the circle who says their name and then passes it on until everyone has caught the ball.

Names across circle

After saying name slide hands off each other and 'shoot' to a person across the circle and then they repeat. Each person could also do a movement, make a sound or a combination of both.

Clap

As people are introduced themselves and say their name, the rest of the group claps once and repeats their name, or you can leave out the clap and just say "goodmorning Jack" or whatever as you go or just "Jack" straight after Jack says their name.

Strings

Equipment: You need a long ball of twine/wool.

While holding the end of a long ball of twine/wool the first person says their name and they toss the twine to someone else across the circle who holds onto the string and repeats. You then retrieve the string by reversing the path the string took and each person says their name and who they are passing it to.

Name Graffiti

Equipment: Sheets of paper and some large textas.

Each member of the group has a texta and writes their name on a large sheet of paper. They then write or draw something around their name or why they have come to the workshop that says or shows something about themselves and then people can then be asked to elaborate. You can leave this up for the whole workshop and others can graffiti on their wall too.

Pattern Ball

Equipment: 3 different toys/coloured bean bags .

Members of group sit/stand in a circle. A bean bag is thrown from the a person to another person in the circle to catch and their name is called. That person throws it to another naming them and so on until the bean bag returns to the first person. The pattern of who throws or catches in what order is memorised by the group. This pattern is repeated several times, and different coloured bags are thrown at different stages of the pattern to keep everyone concentrating. You can try reversing the order of the pattern.

Check-in activities

By check-in, we refer to 'how people are feeling'.

Grab a hat/find an object from inside or outside (ie: rock, feather, leaf, dirt) that matches your mood

Equipment: different hats or place to collect things from .

Collect an object that matches your mood and explain to group why you chose this object. You can use this to get people to introduce themselves and provide a pile of hats or objects in the middle of the space for people to pick and choose.

Say goodmorning/hello in different languages

Say goodmorning/hello in different languages and then how you are feeling or what you are looking forward to.

Say a colour that matches your mood

Chose a colour that matches your mood and explain to group why you chose this colour.

Share a movement/sound/both

Each person does a movement, make a sounds or a combination of both that matches their mood. The group then copies all together.

Metaphors

Could be a plate of food, a vehicle, an animal. Invite people to identify an animal that speaks to their mood or feeling about something specific, their expectations for the workshop or meeting or just how they're feeling and describe to the group.

Introductory games

Remember the circle

Ask the group to sit in a circle. Someone introduces themselves and saying one thing they enjoy for example, 'Hello! My name is Nicola and I love to eat chocolate'. The person next to the facilitator goes next. They introduce themselves and say something that they enjoy or like doing. They then introduce themselves for example, 'Hello! My name is Nombeko and I love singing, this is Nicola and she loves chocolate'. The game continues until each person is introduced. This game can be adapted to fit the theme of your workshop for example participants could introduce their name and a fact that they know about and issue/hope to change and so on. Good to encourage people to listen.

Human Bingo

Ask each participant to draw a grid with nine boxes. Ask them to write down (in any box they choose) a statement such as 'has brown eyes', 'has grandchildren', 'lives in a city'. Once everyone has finished writing their nine statements, ask the group to move around the room asking people questions to see if they match the statements on their grid. Each participant must get the signature of the person who matches the criteria for each square. The person who gets all nine boxes signed first wins. This game can be used as an introductory session and or fit the theme of your workshop if you suggest a theme for the statements, ie. about people's activist life or politics, or an issue you are working on.

Geo-exercise

To gauge where people are from (ie: Australia, a state, country) and warm the group up, ask a person where they are from and invite them to place themselves in a position in the room, or as facilitator you can place yourself and call it the place you are all meeting, or the place where you are from. Outline an imaginary map of Australia or the country or region you are in, keeping in mind where internationals might be placed and orient people – ie. Either by identifying north-south-east-west or by saying Melbourne is here, Perth there, etc. Then invite the group to place themselves where they feel is relatively appropriate, a place in the room they feel represents where they are from. Get people to talk to folks around them to work out where they might be in relation to each other. The facilitator can then invite each person to introduce themselves to the group, where they are from and an image that they see ie. when they walk outside of their home or other prompts about expectations or their heritage. Close the exercise by inviting the group to bring themselves into the workshop space, carry with them the comfort of their home but leave aside the stresses or worries of their other life so they can be fully present and focus on the workshop. Training for Change has a similar exercise 'I am the centre': <http://trainingforchange.org/content/view/186/39/>

Paired Interviews

Members of the group pair up with someone they don't know so well. They go to some part of the room for about 5 minutes to find out 5 pieces of information about each other that they will be happy to share with the whole group. They return to the group to share all the information they have learnt from each other, each person introducing their partner.

Hand Prints – an alternative to paired interviews

In pairs describe something about yourselves using the palms of your hands.

- Palm = what relationships and values do you consider as being very important to you?
- Thumb = what activities are most important to you?
- Fingers = what 'things' are you interested in but are perhaps less important
- Wrist = what group/organization would you describe yourself as being most associated with?
- Introduce each other to the rest of the small group

This may work best with smaller groups who are wishing to get to each other a little better. Of course other questions can be asked that relate to expectations of the workshop or evaluation.

Fun fun games/energisers... and games In a circle

Have you ever...

Form a circle of chairs (one for each person) and then take one away. One person stands in the middle and calls a question beginning with "Have you ever", for example "Have you ever eaten watermelon". Everyone who has eaten watermelon then jumps up and moves to a place vacated by someone else who has moved. The last person who is left without a seat remains in middle to call out something else beginning with "Have you ever.....?"

Seeds for change have a version called the **Green Trousers Game**: Form a circle of chairs (one for each person) and then take one away. One person stands in the middle and calls out something like "Everyone with green trousers". Everyone with green trousers then jumps up and moves to a place vacated by someone else who has moved. The last person who is left without a seat remains in middle to call out something else.

What are you doing?

Participants stand in a circle. One person moves to the centre and begins acting an activity, such as building a sandcastle. It is important that the people *really do* the activity. A second person enters the circle and asks, "What are you doing?" The first person then responds, while still doing the original activity: "Brushing my hair." The second person then begins brushing their hair, and the first person leaves the centre. Another person enters and asks, "What are you doing?" The person in the center, while still doing her activity, replies: "Climbing a tree" (or any other activity whatsoever), etc. etc.

It can be suggested that actions relate to workshop content to consolidate/have fun with learnings if you want to. Good to use once people at least slightly know each other. As the game grows there are lots of laughs. It is good to encourage people not to think of 'what to do' and just say/do anything. You can also play it and have everyone stay in the circle until everyone is in.

Hand beat

Group kneeling on the floor on their knees with their hands out, palms down in front of them, close together if possible. One person lifts and slaps their left palm and then right palm down one at a time and then the beat rolls around the circle as each person repeats. Variations are infinite such as everyone raises their right hand and places it to the right of the left hand of the people beside them. You can add that someone slaps a hand down twice then the beat is reversed. Can be useful in diverse groups.

Train smash

Standing in a circle holding hands 3 or so people are nominated as 'train stations' (TS) and 2 as 'junctions' (J) depending on the size of the group. Facilitator squeezes the hand of a person next to them and sends a 'pulse' which is the train around the circle. When the train reaches a TS they make a sound ie: "toot toot" and when it reaches a J it can change direction if the J chooses. Then a person has to go into the middle of the circle (train spotter) to guess where the train is at by touching the person they think has it. When they are correct they swap with that person and the game continues.

Spoon and fork

Equipment: 2 objects, spatulas, whisks, tongs are our favourites but other random objects can be used.

You can stand, sit on the floor or in chairs in a circle. Pass one of the objects to the person on your left and say 'this is a fork' (best if not a fork), and then make them ask 'what is it?' and then you say 'this is a fork'. Tell the group that you are the only person who knows what the object is. And then have them pass to next person and say 'this is a fork', and the third person has to say 'what is it', and then the second person has to turn back to you and say 'what is it?' and you say 'it's a fork' and so on. Once people have got the ball rolling on one side, turn to the person on your right and say 'this is a spoon' and start the whole process again so both forks and spoons head around the circle. It starts getting messy when the objects have to cross over, and you can get people to start again if they make a mistake.

Finger and hole

Standing/sitting in a circle invite people to hold their right thumb and index finger in a circle to their right (shoulder height-ish), then hold up your left index finger and place inside the hold created by the person on your left, and get others to do so. When each finger is placed inside the circles, the facilitator says, "go" or counts to three and each person has to try to 'free' their finger and catch the finger that is inside their right hand circle.

Zip Zap Zop

Standing in a circle people place their palms together in front of them, explain that inside their palms is a ball of energy. The facilitator explains to the group that Zip Zap Zop all refer to different directions that they will point their hands. Zip: left; Zap:

right and Zop: across the circle (or whatever you like). Whoever starts chooses one of Zip, Zap or Zop says it out loud for example "Zip" and passes/points their hands to the person on their left, it carries on (domino effect) with each person turning to the left with their hands and saying "Zip" until someone says something different such as "Zap" and then the direction changes to the right. It can just get faster or people who slip up sit down. And you can add different sounds like 'boing' that bounce the energy back to the person who sent it to you.

InterPlay have a slightly different version: Everyone stands in a circle. One person quickly claps and points at another, while saying "zip." The person who received the "zip" then claps and points at another, while saying "zap." That person then claps and points to someone while saying "zop." The pattern continues, "zip, zap, zop, zip, zap, zop..." The goal is to pass the words and energy around as quickly as possible, which is harder than it seems. Many theatre companies use this as a warm-up before going on stage, to establish teamwork and to encourage quick thinking. If you use this with a group who find it takes several tries to get into the rhythm of the game. Don't give up! Eventually, the group will begin to go at lightning speed.

I'm talking to you

Standing in a circle people one at a time say "I'm talking to you" in different ways. Each person clearly says "I'm talking to you" to a particular person and as they say it they walk towards them. Before they reach that person they have spoken to that person needs to say it someone else and start walking to the person they spoke to. The person who says "I'm talking to you" take the place of the person they spoke to. Great to reinforce clear communication.

Zoom

Standing in a circle this game can be good to focus a group. One person at a time zooms their attention, hands and clear eye contact to another. (Bit tricky to explain without actions but here goes) first 'zoomer' places both of their hands next to their face, parallel to cheeks. At the same time the people either side of the 'zoomer' also become involved. Whatever side of them is next to the 'zoomer' they raise that hand to their cheek so that for a moment there is a trio of people involved the 'zoom' across the circle. Then the 'zoomer':

1. make eyes contact with someone across the circle
2. says 'zoom' clearly and points their hands to them.

Then whoever received the zoom 'catches' it by placing their hands to the face/cheeks and the people next to them place one hand to the face (the one next to the new 'zoomer'). Then 'zooms' to someone else. It can just keep going or people can go out if they are watching or quick enough to catch or support the zoom. Pru was taught this in Timor by some young people during and a theatre project, they loved it. You could use any word other than 'zoom'.

Share a stretch

Invite people to do a physical stretch and the rest of the group copies.

Games moving around the space

Jack be nimble

Sing the words to 'Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over, the candle stick. Have the whole group join in and then together repeat and bob down on every word with a specified letter ie: J keep repeating and add more letters each time so people bob down on any words with ie: J, E and I. You can use any rhyme or song that the group knows.

Origin of the words: Apparently the most commonly agreed origin for the Jack be nimble rhyme is the connection to Black Jack, an English pirate who was notorious for escaping from the authorities in the late 16th century hence Jack be nimble.

Balloon in the middle

Throw a balloon into the middle of the group and everyone has to keep it from touching the ground, you can add rules like people cannot touch it more than once in a row. You can also do this by having everyone lay on the ground with their feet or heads touching in the centre of a circle and then throw the balloon in the middle.

Stuck in the mud

Tiggy or chase game where once someone is tagged they stand still with their legs apart. 'Free' people can run between their legs and then the person is no longer 'Stuck in the Mud' and free to free other people.

Bob tiggy

Tiggy where once someone is tagged they bob down. 'Free' people can touch them on their head and then the person is no longer bobbed down and free to free other people.

Paired tiggy

Define an area for people to play in, have people line up in two rows so they are facing another person. This person becomes their partner for the game. Tell one side their "it" and then people play chasey/tiggy in their pair trying to get each other.

Hospital tiggy

One person is the chaser when they tag someone they are also 'it'. Wherever they were tagged they cannot use ie: if it was their leg then they must hop or if it was their arm of hip they must hold that and not use it. Game ends when the first person falls over.

Rabbit in a hole (could be a native animal)

One person is 'it' everyone else is in groups of three with linked arms. The two people on the end of the trio have their hands on their hips. It is a fast moving game where the person who is it loops their arm around a person in a trio and then the person on the end of that trio is 'it' and has to run and loop onto someone else so they are no longer 'it'.

Octopus tiggy

One person is the chaser and when they catch people they join up holding hands and the ends of the 'octopus' catch people and add them to the line until everyone is the octopus.

Elephant-toaster-cloud-tree

Standing in a circle the facilitator explains the objects people will be acting out in trios:

- Elephant: person the middle is a moving trunk; people either side make big ears with their arms
- Toaster: person the middle is jumping on the spot (toast popping out of the toaster); people either side hold their arms around the jumping toast
- Cloud: person the middle is a makes a circle with their arms other their head; people either side loop their arms around the middle circle
- Tree: person the middle is the strong tree trunk with arms held up; people either side make fronds with their arms swaying in the wind

Ask a few people to demonstrate so that people are clear on how each trio acted object looks. Person in the middle points to people and says one of the objects and people make them in trios. Either one person stays in the middle and just gets faster and faster or whoever is the slowest to join the acted object swaps with the person in the middle and points to people so that people just keep swapping.

Ozone and sun

Before the game begins each person chooses someone who is their sun (S) and ozone (O) and keeps this to themselves. People start to move around the space and make sure that for the entire time the O is between them and the S.

Systems game

The following game is from 'Coming Back To Life' by Joanna Macy, Molly Brown (1998) New Society Publishers. It has gone down well with adults and teenagers.

Needed: about 15-20 people, a large room or space.

Illustrates:

1. That life is composed of many different relationships (this is true for ecosystems, societies, economies etc)
2. That these relations are continually self-organising and re-adjusting as individuals try to make the best of things.

How to play: People stand in a large open space, either indoors or out. The guide may introduce what the game illustrates. The guide then gives 2 instructions. The first is: 'Select two other people in the group, without indicating who it is you have chosen. The second is: 'When the game starts, move so as to keep at all times an equal distance between you and each of these two people.' This, as the guide makes clear, does not mean just staying at the midpoint between the two others.

To do this, people immediately begin to circulate, each movement triggering many others in an active, interdependent fashion. Participants find they are, by necessity, maintaining wide-angle vision and quick responses and concentration. It is quite a silly activity and unpredictable but at the same time needs concentration and purposefulness. The process usually speeds up for a while, then may abate, accelerate, and again slow down toward equilibrium, but it rarely comes to stasis. The guide lets it continue for four or five minutes, then as activity lessens, invites people to pause where they are and reflect.

The question "What did you find?" can bring fruitful discussion.

- Key features of self-regulating systems, such as the interdependence of all parts, and their continual activity in seeking and maintaining balance.
- People may realise that they thought the point of the game was to achieve stasis; the guide can bring out and challenge this. The self-regulation of open systems requires constant internal activity.
- The game shouldn't stop, unless people swap the people they are moving with, or lots of people all have selected the same few people. One way to prevent the last could be for people to draw names out of a hat rather than choose for themselves.
- The guide may ask, 'Would anyone volunteer to organise this process?' It is obvious that no party or person on the outside could direct the movements necessary to keep this system in balance. Relations within systems are so complex they can only self-regulate. That is why life scientists came to the discovery of self-organising systems in their efforts to understand life-forms with more than one variable or moving part (ie anything more complex than a helium atom, which has only one electron).

Variations:

1. Have two people stay out of the room during the instructions, then call them in at some point, and ask them to try and work out what is happening. At the end ask them if they could organise the process from outside.
2. The observers move through the game quietly without blocking anyone. (This is supposed to be like humans moving through a forest or swamp but not harming it). Then they move through again several times; this time blocking or bumping into people. Ask players to comment on their experience of disturbance.
3. As a follow on to the original game, decide with the group to keep two players still, then repeat the game and see any difference. This is to represent some dysfunction in the system.
4. If the group seems to be slowing down and approaching equilibrium, the guide can move if they are part of the game.

'Mother' duck

As everyone has their eyes closed for the whole game. At the start the facilitator chooses one person to be the 'mother duck' that stays quiet throughout the entire game, the rest of the people are ducklings. Facilitator says "go ducklings" and every 'duckling' walks around quacking looking for their mum/parent (etc). Each duckling knows when they have found their 'mum' because they are the only quiet one. They then stay quiet close to their 'mum' and eventually all of the ducks are huddled together quietly.

Rain: A facilitator talks the group through this energiser. Get everyone to stand up. Start tapping your head lightly with your fingers imagining soft rain. Let it slowly get heavier the further you move your hands down your body. Let the rain turn into a thunderstorm on your calves. Clap them hard with your hands. Then move your hands back up your body, ending with soft rain on your head. Everyone copies. There are multiple versions of this game.

Touch blue: Have everyone touch something blue on someone else, something yellow, a knee, some glasses, etc. Call the next thing as soon as people touch whatever has been named.

Waking up in the Jungle: Ask people to think of their favourite animal and its noise, and to pretend that they are that animal waking up. As they wake up, the noises should get louder and louder. A good quick game for sleepy groups.

Clapping game: This game mixes the logical and creative sides of the brain. It is a good preparation for tackling complex issues that require both logical analysis and creative solutions. Sit in a circle on the floor or around a table. Everybody then places their hands flat on the surface, the arms crossing over with those of the neighbours. Start the game by clapping one hand on the surface. Let the clap run around the circle, so that always the hand claps that is next to the one that clapped last. After practicing this for a couple of rounds, introduce a complication. If a hand claps twice, the direction of the clap changes direction. Again, practice. When everyone has understood the rules, start the game proper. Any hand that claps out of turn or doesn't clap should be put behind the person's back. When somebody has both hands out of the game, then they have to drop out of the game. Increase the speed of the game as you go along. The more people there are in the group, the less exciting it is for the individual player. It is a good idea to form two or more groups for the game if there are more than twelve people. Clapping games from Seeds for change: <http://seedsforchange.org.uk/free/tools#energ>

Fun ways to get people into groups

'Numbering' off

Using numbers, fruits, emotions or any theme it could be 'role play' characters related to the workshop content, if you want 5 groups use five things and have people yell out around the circle 1,2,3,4,5 or whatever.

Fruit salad

Ask everyone to sit on a chair in a circle. Ask one volunteer to stand in the middle of the circle. Remove their chair from the circle to the side of the room. Go around the circle and name everyone 'apple', 'banana' or 'orange'. Remember to give the volunteer in the middle a name too! When you shout out 'Apple' everybody who is named apple must jump up out of their place and try to sit on an empty chair. The person standing in the middle must also try and sit down on an empty chair. The person left without a seat must stand in the middle. People named 'banana' and 'orange' must do the same if their fruit is shouted out. If you shout 'fruit salad', everybody in the circle must jump up and rush to find an empty seat! Another fun version is **Zoo** or **Animals** where rather than fruit people are animals and act/voice their animal. This game can be adapted to fit the theme of your workshop for example rather than fruit use interest groups or roles people take on in groups. You can also ask people to move across the room acting out their character. After the game people can go into the groups/categories that they were in.

Balloon stomp

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Equipment: balloons and cut out statements (below)

Chose a set of questions (Q) and answers (A). Write each Q and A on separate pieces of paper. Roll each one up and place it in separate balloons. Blow the balloons up. People walk around the room (could be to music) until facilitator says "jump" then each person stands on a balloon to burst it and releases the statement inside. Each then looks for the person with the A to the Q they have, or the Q to the A.

Depending on the statements written this is a can be used for:

1. fun
2. getting people into pairs or
3. opening up a range of learnings. It can be a way to begin a discussion about any issue as after people have tried to match up the Q and A a discussion could then take place about the risk of stereotypes, myths, different value judgments and beliefs that lead people to believe certain Q and A matched up and some of the problems these might pose and or how they influence what we do.

Clumps

Have the group walking around and then call out numbers that they clump into. Repeat with different numbers. Whatever number you want in each group call out that number for the final clump.

Body parts and number/Body bump

(Very similar to clumps) Have the group walking around the space and then call out a number and body part, for example 5 elbows. So people get into groups of 5 and touch elbows. Repeat with different numbers and body parts. Whatever number you want in each group call out that number for the final clump.

Dots

Equipment: Sticky dots in a range of colours.

Dots encourage non-verbal communication. Fix a coloured dot onto the cheek of each participant. You can give some thought to how you want to mix the groups. Ask the participants to stand up and move around the room in silence.

Participants must find out what colour their dot is without talking. Once they know what colour their dot is, they find others with the same colour and that will be their group.

Jigsaws/photos/pictures

Equipment: A set of jigsaw pieces, one for each group, from a range of jigsaws. It could also be a photo or picture cut up.

Give a jigsaw/photos/picture piece to each participant. Ask them to walk around the room and try to find people with pieces that would go with theirs. Eventually the various members of the small groups find themselves together joining up their pieces to make the picture, and they become a group. If you want to look at a particular theme: environment; gender; community relations; unfair trade; this can determine the pictures you will use.

Peruvian Ball

Number of participants: 10-50

Uses: This game is excellent to practice and create dialogue about communications skills and styles, being specific with non-verbal communication, and body language. Also good as a fun all-around energizer and warm-up. Everyone in the room has an imaginary ball. Each ball has its own special movement pattern, and its own sound. The participants practice "throwing" or "bouncing" the invisible balls by themselves, while simultaneously making the sounds ("boi-oi-oing," "zip-zap," "wheeeee," ..)

After everyone has the movements and sounds decided, the participants start walking around the space. The facilitator calls "freeze," and then instructs everyone to trade balls with someone. There is no talking allowed, only demonstrating the sounds and movements of the balls. Once everyone has traded, everyone starts walking around the space again, this time with their new balls. The facilitator calls "freeze" again, and instructs everyone to trade with another person. After four to six trades have been made (depending on the size of the group), the facilitator instructs everyone to find their original balls. Everyone must then move about, demonstrating the balls they are holding, while searching for the ball they originally created. If a participant finds his ball, they trade with the person who has it, and then takes their ball to the side out of the playing space. It is rare for everyone to find their original balls in this game. If some people can't find them, ask the participants why. This is a great way to start talking about miscommunications at work, how to give specific instructions, or communicating without words.

Some places where you can find some of these games and more:

- Augusto Boal Games for Actors and Non-Actors by: Fantastic book for some theory and heaps of games
- InterPlay: Interactive theatre for dialogue website has some are energizers and some are a vehicle to initiate dialogue on a topic. Click on Games and Energisers. <http://www.interplaytheatre.com/Games/ZipZapZop.html>
- Seeds for change: Energisers and Games: <http://seedsforchange.org.uk/free/tools#energ>
- Non-violence Trainers Manual: <http://www.nonviolence.org.au>
- Woodcraft folk games: <http://www.naturenet.net/education/woodcft.html>