

How to Conduct The Mingle

The Mingle can be used as an ice-breaker or a discussion-starter. We introduce them differently and debrief them differently, and the timing depends on how you choose to set up the activity. We'll cover all of this below, starting with Preparation Tips for the Facilitator, then Using The Mingle as an Ice-Breaker, and Using The Mingle as a Discussion-Starter, and ending with Additional Ideas & Options.

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Preparation Tips for the Facilitator - Before you conduct The Mingle, read this:

- There are several options for timing, introducing and debriefing The Mingle depending on whether you use it as an ice-breaker or as a discussion-starter.
- As an ice-breaker, the best time is right after opening remarks. The debrief will provide a lead-in to any agenda or group process.
- As a discussion-starter, later in the agenda works best, where the sharing can be of new ideas or concepts.
- About timing – to use the activity as an ice-breaker, calculate a total of 2 minutes per participant to figure out how long to plan for the whole activity (this breaks down to 1 minute per pair interaction, see [“Asking the Questions”](#) and then 1 minute per introduction, see [“Sharing the Answers”](#)). To use the activity as a [discussion-starter](#), see the various options below to determine timing.
- The Mingle is not a sit down activity – people will need to move around to talk with each other.
- If using it as an ice-breaker, don't give yourself a question card, but feel free to answer questions if you're asked by the participants.
- The Mingle is a flexible activity – so let yourself and the group have some fun with it!

- When introducing it as an ice-breaker, provided you have at least one card left over, you can offer this: “Remember, you won’t have to answer the question on your own card. However, if you are uncomfortable asking it, then you can trade with me, sight unseen, for another card in the set.”
- When debriefing it as an ice-breaker, if the person who is introducing hasn’t talked with anyone who hasn’t already been introduced, ask someone who has talked with one of the people who has not yet been introduced to introduce them. It’s more important that everyone be introduced than that everyone gets to introduce someone.

Using The Mingle as an Ice-Breaker

Asking the Questions - [Note – allow 1 minute per participant for “Asking the Questions”]

Here is what we say when it is used as an ice-breaker (see the next section for our language when it is used as a discussion-starter):

1. We’re going to do an activity that will let you meet some new people, or get better acquainted with people you already know.
2. Each of you will get a card with a different question
3. *[Pass out the cards as you talk]*
4. Over the next (ex., 1 minute per person) minutes, your task is to talk, one-on-one, with as many people as you can. In each of these conversations, you will be answering each other’s questions. One of you will ask your question and write the other person’s response (and their name, so you don’t get confused later) on your card. Then the other one will ask their question.
5. There are no good or bad answers. It’s all about having an opportunity to share some information with each other that we don’t often share, and learn something about the other people in the room that’s outside of typical conversations.
6. Start with the people you don’t know at all, or don’t know well – even if this is uncomfortable. Begin by introducing yourself. This will turn these strangers into acquaintances and make the whole room seem friendlier.
7. Again, these are one-on-one conversations – you’ll have to get up and move around. Keep track of the answers. And, be brief - you only have (ex., 20 minutes) minutes, so you’ll need to keep moving.

Sharing the Answers - [Note – allow 1 minute per participant for “Sharing the Answers”]

Here is what we say when it is used as an ice-breaker (see the next section for our language when it is used as a discussion-starter):

1. The next part of this activity gives everyone an opportunity to introduce someone else in the room.

2. We need a volunteer to start [if nobody volunteers, choose someone that was active in the process]. They will read their question to us, and then they will share the answer they got from someone they interviewed. Then, the person who was just introduced will then repeat the process with someone new – reading their question to us and sharing the answer they got from someone they interviewed (not the person who just introduced them).
3. We want everyone to be introduced once – so please keep track of who has been introduced as we go along so you know who is still available when it's your turn.
4. A reminder – there are no good or bad answers, just an opportunity to learn about each other.
5. [Note – Conduct introductions around the room, ensuring everyone is introduced.]
6. Now, let's make the connections between this activity and what we are doing here today – what does what we just did have to do with working together?" (There aren't any right or wrong responses, and these are some we frequently hear – "builds trust because we know people better," "reminds us that everyone has something different to contribute than we might already know.")

Ideas & Options

- a. **About timing** – Calculate a total of 2 minutes per participant to figure out how long to plan for the whole activity (if you have 10 participants, allow 20 minutes). This breaks down to 1 minute per pair interaction, and then 1 minute per introduction.
- b. **More than 30 participants** – If there are more than 30 participants, instead of going longer than an hour, divide the group in half and encourage the options in "c" below.
- c. **People don't "finish"?** – What if everyone doesn't have time to talk with everyone else? This often happens, so we encourage people to continue asking their questions later – on the breaks, over lunch, back at work
- d. **Don't go too long** – The group will almost always want enough time for everyone to talk with everyone. Stick to something close to the original timeframe, and suggest the options in "c" above.
- e. **What about "late" participants?** – Give them a question and let them participate for as long as they can. If you're already "Sharing the Answers," give them a question and have them answer it at the end of the sharing (basically introducing themselves) and suggest the options in "c" above for them to connect with others in the group.
- f. **Talk with strangers first** – Continue to encourage people to talk to the people they don't know first. This is uncomfortable in the beginning, but the increase in the comfort level between people in the group overall after they've met others is so significant that it's worth pushing the point.
- g. **Short on time** – If you don't have enough time to "Ask the Questions" and "Share the Answers" (a total of 2 minutes per participant to both "Ask the

Question” and “Share the Answer”), choose 3 questions to post on the wall and have each person answer one of them to the whole group.

- h. **Tracking the introductions** – It can be helpful to chart the names as people are introduced so everyone knows
- i. **Time can get away from you** – Give the group regular time checks while they are "Asking the Questions."
- j. **Sharing a 2nd answer** – This is a great option when the group comes back together after lunch, or for Day 2. Often, you'll find that the answers that get shared on this 2nd round are deeper and more personal.

Using The Mingle as a Discussion-Starter

Each option covers “Asking the Questions” and “Sharing the Answers.”

Option #1 – This scenario is based on a group of 20 in table groups of five and has one-on-one sharing at the tables, followed by a table conversation and then a sharing of key learnings with the whole group.

Part One – (allot 20 minutes) – This is what we say:

1. This activity will let you hear what others at your table think and feel about the topic of _____ [Note: this comes from the title of the deck, i.e., sustainability, collaboration].
2. Each of you will get a card with a different question.
3. Over the next 10 minutes, your task is to talk, one-on-one, with the others at your table. In each conversation, you will be answering each other's questions. One of you will ask your question and make notes on your card about the other person's response (include their name so you don't get confused later). Then the other one will ask their question.
4. Once everyone has answered all the questions at the table, take the next 10 minutes to have a discussion about what you heard. Gather the key learnings to share with the whole group, and choose someone as spokesperson.
5. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, just an opportunity to share some information we usually don't share with each other, and to explore the topic. Again, one-on-one conversations, keep track of the answers, and you only have 10 minutes for the first part, and another 10 minutes for the table discussion, so you'll need to keep moving.
6. [Note – Conduct the conversations around the room.]

Part Two – (allot another 20 minutes) – This is what we say:

7. The second part of this activity gives everyone in the room an opportunity to hear some of the responses to the 20 different questions.

8. We need a table to start. The spokesperson will read the 5 questions asked at their table, and then share the table's key learnings. We will then repeat the process at the other tables until everyone has shared.
9. A reminder – there are no good or bad answers, just an opportunity to learn from each other. Stay curious.
10. [Note – Have each table share.]
11. Any final thoughts about the connections between The Mingle activity and today's session?

Option #2 – This scenario is based on a group of 20 in table groups of five and has one-on-one sharing at the tables, followed by each person sharing a comment with the whole group.

Part One – (allot 20 minutes) – This is what we say:

1. This activity will let you hear what others at your table think and feel about the topic of _____ [Note: this comes from the title of the deck, i.e., sustainability, collaboration].
2. Each of you will get a card with a different question.
3. Over the next 10 minutes, your task is to talk, one-on-one, with the others at your table. In each conversation, you will be answering each other's questions. One of you will ask your question and make notes on your card about the other person's response (include their name so you don't get confused later). Then the other one will ask their question.
4. Once everyone has answered all the questions at the table, take the next 10 minutes to have a discussion about what you heard. Gather the key learnings to share with the whole group, and choose someone as spokesperson.
5. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, just an opportunity to share some information we usually don't share with each other, and to explore the topic. Again, one-on-one conversations, keep track of the answers, and you only have 10 minutes for the first part, and another 10 minutes for the table discussion, so you'll need to keep moving.
6. [Note – Conduct the conversations around the room.]

Part Two – (allot another 20 minutes) – This is what we say:

7. The second part of this activity gives everyone in the room an opportunity to hear responses to the 20 different questions.
8. We need a volunteer to start. This person will read their question to us, then share the answer from one of the people they interviewed. The person whose answer was just shared will then repeat the process with another person they spoke with until everyone at the table has shared an answer to his/her question.
9. We will then repeat the process at the other tables until everyone has shared.

10. A reminder – there are no good or bad answers, just an opportunity to learn from each other. Stay curious.
11. [Note – Have everyone share.]
12. Now, let's make the connections between The Mingle activity and today's session – what are the key learnings about how people think and feel about the topic (i.e., sustainability, collaboration)?

Option #3 – This scenario is very similar to Option #1, but has one-on-one sharing from the whole room (so it mixes people up a bit more), followed by a table conversation and then a sharing of key learnings with the whole group. The only changes are to Items 3 and 4.

Part One – (allot 20 minutes) – This is what we say:

1. This activity will let you hear what others at your table think and feel about the topic of _____ [Note: this comes from the title of the deck, i.e., sustainability, collaboration].
2. Each of you will get a card with a different question.
3. Over the next 10 minutes, your task is to talk, one-on-one, with 4 other people in the room. In each conversation, you will be answering each other's questions. One of you will ask your question and make notes on your card about the other person's response (include their name so you don't get confused later). Then the other one will ask their question.
4. Once everyone has talked with four other people, come back together at the table and take the next 10 minutes to have a discussion about what you heard. Gather the key learnings to share with the whole group, and choose someone as spokesperson. [Note – this will require careful time management since people may arrive back at their tables at different times.]
5. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, just an opportunity to share some information we usually don't share with each other, and to explore the topic. Again, one-on-one conversations, keep track of the answers, and you only have 10 minutes for the first part, and another 10 minutes for the table discussion, so you'll need to keep moving.
6. [Note – Conduct the conversations around the room.]

Part Two – (allot another 20 minutes) – This is what we say:

7. The second part of this activity gives everyone in the room an opportunity to hear some of the responses to the 20 different questions.
8. We need a table to start. The spokesperson will read the 5 questions asked at their table, and then share the table's key learnings. We will then repeat the process at the other tables until everyone has shared.
9. A reminder – there are no good or bad answers, just an opportunity to learn from each other. Stay curious.
10. [Note – Have each table share.]

11. Any final thoughts about the connections between The Mingle activity and today's session?

Ideas & Options

- a. **Expanded “meet more people” debrief** - have participants talk one-one one with more than just 4 people, or the people at their tables. This will require additional time, and has the benefit of people getting better acquainted with more members of the group, which is especially helpful if the group will continue as a group.
- b. **Expanded “share more with the whole group” debrief** – have each participant share an answer to their question and have the table spokesperson share the key learnings from the table group. This will require additional time, and has the benefit of sharing more of the conversations with the whole group which expands everyone's learning opportunity.
- c. **About timing** – We calculate a total of 20 minutes for the table exercise based on table groups of five, (10 for asking and answering the questions and 10 for the table discussion) and then 20 minutes for whole group sharing. If you have a larger group and can afford more time, increase the time for the first part if you have larger table groups, and increase the time for the second part if you have more tables.
- d. **People don't “finish”?** – What if everyone doesn't have time to talk with everyone else at their table, or you want them to talk with others in the group but don't have time? This often happens, so we encourage people to continue asking their questions later – on the breaks, over lunch, back at work ...
- e. **Don't go too long** – The group will almost always want enough time for everyone to talk with everyone. Stick to something close to the original timeframe, and suggest the options in “d” above.
- f. **Time can get away from you** – Give the group regular time checks while they are "Asking the Questions" and discussing their reactions and learnings.
- g. **Encourage connections** – As part of the debrief, encourage participants to make connections to the overall session topic. You can use the time to weave in the responses to where you are headed.