

# FROM CANDY TO CLICKERS: INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES TO INVOLVE STUDENTS IN LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

Instruction librarians have lamented often about the difficulty of gaining student attention during what many perceive as “boring” library orientations. Having experienced this for many years, the authors have developed and used a variety of techniques and activities to get students involved in the library orientations. Sometimes these activities are prepared in advance when the class personality is well known, e.g., puzzles and games, and other times the activity is spontaneously presented, e.g., ice-breakers and brainstorming activities, when the class just isn’t interactively involved in the instruction.

This LOEX interactive presentation demonstrated some of the interactive activities used by the authors on such occasions.

## INTRODUCTIONS AND ICE-BREAKERS

A number of approaches can be used in the instruction classroom or lab to get students at ease. Encouraging students to relax and believe that it’s not the same old library tour can help create a more receptive audience. In this presentation the authors used a number of ice-breakers to create a relaxed atmosphere as the session started.

The authors began by greeting the participants as they entered the room, much as we do when students enter the classroom. This requires being in the classroom a few minutes before the session begins, but it conveys a message

to the students that their presence is important to the librarian. The authors emphasized the greeting by wearing matching red-checked shirts and by wearing yellow identification signs identifying the presenters as “Candy” and “Clicker”. The humorous atmosphere helps to create a receptive environment for the participants.

While the authors greeted the participants an automated PowerPoint show introducing the session was projected to focus the audience attention. To create a receptive mood and provide clues about session content the PowerPoint presentation background music from “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” played with the slides.

After the authors briefly introduced themselves and their institution, they began the interactive sessions and continued the ice-breaker demonstrations. The first ice-breaker was a simple exercise to encourage the audience to interact with their neighbors ...

[Randy] Let’s get started with an ice-breaker to create an interactive environment. Turn to a person close to you. Share your name and one of your hobbies, and then let the other person do the same. We will continue until the buzzer sounds.

[Richard] Activates Tick-toc and then Ding audio files on computer.

[Randy] This was a simple ice-breaker to help students feel at ease.

Next, the authors used the iClicker audience response system to demonstrate how it can be used as an ice-breaker at the beginning of a library instruction class.

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[Richard] Clickers are a tool that you can use to anonymously poll your audience. Clickers can be used as very effective ice-breakers, to assess and evaluate what your students have learned and even to stimulate small group interaction. I'm using the iClicker product today. I feel of the several products I've used, iClicker is by far the easiest to learn, setup, and use. We've placed 10-20 clickers on the tables. Since the responses are anonymous, you can work with as few as 10 clickers by taking a poll and then having students pass the clicker to other students to take another poll.

To demonstrate an ice-breaker using clickers please turn on the clicker (bottom button – blue light) and vote (A-B-C-D-E) in a moment when I give you the high sign. A green vote status light will let you know your vote was registered.

What's your anxiety level before teaching a library class?

- a. I'm cool – no worries
- b. I rely on lots of preparation time
- c. I need a script and lots of practice
- d. Can't sleep at all the night before
- e. Wake up at dawn in a cold sweat

Ice-breakers can be helpful in creating a friendly atmosphere and in preparing a group for instruction. Clickers can also be used to pre-test a group of students and to evaluate what they're learning. The key with clickers is to not over use them. The authors seldom use clickers more than 1-2 times in any library instruction session.

## INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

### 1) Knowledge Chase

After the ice-breakers, the "Knowledge Chase" activity was demonstrated. In this game the authors first divided the audience into teams. Comic relief was guaranteed by providing a rubber chicken which was tossed around the audience to select teams. A rooster crowing sound file was activated to emphasize each team member selection. A cow mooring sound was used when the chicken toss was botched.

Participants were told that they earn team points by answering questions. On hearing the question, the first person to slap the table has a chance to answer. Teams competed against each other to answer representative questions based on ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards, library databases, information literacy, and reference sources. An instructor using this game would tailor the questions to fit the instructional environment. To add excitement, an applause sound indicated a correct answer. Members of the winning teams received miniature Hershey's candy bars.

[Randy] Now that the ice is broken, I would like to demonstrate an activity that I call "Knowledge Chase." It could be used as a pre-assessment tool. It could also be used following instruction to see how much the students learned.

As we do this, I hope you will relax and participate. However, remember that it is voluntary.

In a classroom situation, I would have a table at the front, with team members lined up behind the table. Those on the first row would compete in being the first to answer. For the next question, people would rotate forward so new people answer.

Because of our seating arrangement here, I am changing the logistics. We will select eight tables. All of the people sitting at a table are members of a team. People at four tables will compete against each other in the first round. Those at four other tables will participate in the second round.

### Example questions used:

#### ACRL Standards

- a. How do you direct students through developing keywords and synonyms for their research?
- b. How do you assess your library instruction?
- c. What tools do you use to help students develop appropriate research thesis statements?

#### Information literacy

- a. What is the difference between a popular and a scholarly article?
- b. How could you convince students that information found on the Internet might not be reliable?
- c. What criteria do you use in evaluating information sources?

### 2) PowerPoint Templates

The authors then used PowerPoint game templates that can be downloaded from the Internet. These templates can be customized by adding your own questions to create an impressive game with minimal effort. The authors demonstrated "Are You Smarter than a 5<sup>th</sup> Grader?" which was customized with questions based on the development of the atomic bomb in New Mexico in areas adjacent to the conference. These PowerPoint games can be found by searching Google for "PowerPoint game templates." The game chosen for demonstration can be found at <http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/PPT-games/>.

[Randy] By a show of hands, how many of you like to achieve spectacular results without very much effort? Let's explore a way to produce a professional looking game based on questions you might use in your teaching. Let's do a Google search for "PowerPoint game templates." Let's choose the link for "PowerPoint Games," which is at <http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/PPT-games/>. As an example, let's choose, "Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader?"

What is a question that you might ask in an instruction session? Type the question in a slide where it indicates "Click to add text."

Now click on the next slide and type the answer.

You can see how easy it is to enter questions and answers. In order to save time, I have prepared a game with the questions and answers already done. Since we are in New Mexico, which is so closely linked to the development of the atomic bomb, I chose that theme. (Start the 5<sup>th</sup> Grader PowerPoint.)

When a question is displayed, raise your hand to answer.

Thanks for proving that you are smarter than 5<sup>th</sup> graders.

Games such as this are free and easy to adapt to almost any teaching activity. Add your subject content, and you have an interactive game that appeals to even the most cynical students.

### 3) Brainstorming

Next the authors demonstrated how to use information visualization Web sites to help students brainstorm and develop keywords and research topics. Leslie Silko's first novel, *Ceremony*, was the theme for topic development. The following visualization Web sites were used to demonstrate topic brainstorming:

- EBSCO Visual Search
- Visuwords: <http://www.visuwords.com>
- Visual Thesaurus: <http://www.visualthesaurus.com>
- Webspiration: <http://mywebspiration.com>

These tools can provide interactive opportunities with students to develop synonyms and derive keywords for improving database searching. For example, in a real world classroom situation English composition students were asked to develop a topic from the *Ceremony* novel and compare that topic to current affairs. The visualization Web sites prompted students to explore and amplify themes such as atomic testing fall out, racial tensions, Native American tensions, and the experience of returning veterans.

## FEEDBACK ACTIVITIES

Two concluding activities exhibited techniques that could be used at the conclusion of library instruction to solicit student feedback to assess what they've learned.

### 1) On-the-fly clickers

The authors demonstrated an "on-the-fly" use of the iClicker system, first asking participants to provide answers to the question, "What is the most important library research skill?" As people answered, the responses were typed into iClicker's "Question on the Fly" tool, and displayed on the screen. Finally, the audience was asked to use the clickers to respond to the question choices. The results of the poll were displayed as a bar graph.

"On-the-fly" questioning gives the instructor the ability to involve students in generating personal responses and to get spontaneous feedback.

### 2) Cell phone response programs

In the concluding activity, participants were asked to relate how they could implement interactive learning activities in their own situations. Using the Poll Everywhere Web site, <http://polleverywhere.com>, audience responses were recorded on the Web site, and then participants were asked to use their cell phones to vote on their choice using text message codes provided by Poll Everywhere. Results of the poll were displayed as participants voted.

This program is available free for up to 30 participants per poll. Other online polling programs are also available on the Internet.

## CONCLUSION

This presentation intended to give live demonstrations of several interactive activities that can be used to enhance library instruction. The presenters used sound, visual images, and props to engage the audience. Topics for activities utilized New Mexico situations and were focused on the target audience, in this case, instruction librarians. All of these interactive activities could be adjusted for specific classroom situations.

Teaching with interactive activities can involve more preparation and work for the instructor, but there is the great reward of students being highly motivated through participation.

Participants in the "From Candy to Clickers" session demonstrated the value of active learning. Even experienced library instructors, such as those attending LOEX, were engaged, interested, and in many cases excited by involvement in interactive classroom activities.