

Here is a collection of check in and check out icebreakers you could use in team meetings and trainings to get people talking

“Icebreaker of the Week” is a recurring feature of the [newsletter The Art of Noticing](#). Some are icebreakers I made up or experienced or found somewhere; many are submitted by TAoN readers. After many requests, I am collecting & sharing all the icebreakers here.

If you find this useful or enjoyable, consider buying a copy of the book that spawned the newsletter, [The Art of Noticing: 131 Ways To Spark Creativity, Find Inspiration, And Discover Joy In The Everyday](#). There's a whole section of the book with exercises designed to help you converse with, listen to, and connect with others! Plus it makes a great gift :) But if that's not your kind of thing, maybe just [consider subscribing to the free newsletter spinoff of TAoN](#). Either way: Thanks!

My name is [Rob Walker](#). I appreciate your interest. → Please submit your **icebreakers** (whether you made them up or heard/read them somewhere), or your experiences trying these, to consumed@robwalker.net.

[NOTE: **This is a read-only document, please do not ask for editing access!** But feel free to **just copy and paste the whole thing, and put it in a new document that you can edit per your needs.**]

October 7, 2020, [TAoN No. 54](#)

This week's icebreaker is a recent submission from reader Andi Foster.

If you had to survive as a fruit, what would it be?

Couple of notes about this one. First, I adore this kind of question. I know there are those of you who will find it too weird. I find it *just weird enough*. Second, Andi attributes this to “my college roommate.” Credit noted! Third, Andi clarifies some important extra parameters: “You are just surviving, you cannot move as the fruit. I heard [my roommate] ask this question many times and I always end up changing up my answer. **Currently I want to be a banana, because then I would be with friends!**”

September 21, 2020, [TAoN No. 53](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from [a tweet](#) by writer and friend of TAoN [Ben Greenman](#):

Dark question, but what song would you like to be played at your funeral?

Check out the answers he got, [here](#). And check out Ben's [work in general](#), he's brilliant!

September 7, 2020, [TAoN No. 52](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from [Wm Henry Morris](#):

Which book did you read in college or high school that was actually interesting enough that you still think or talk about it sometimes?

He adds: "This has the advantage of not only interesting talk about whatever nonfiction and fiction books the folks in the conversation mention, but, in my experience, it also **leads to talk about favorite teachers and classes, the merits and demerits of assigned reading** (and formal education, in general), post-formal education reading habits, reading recommendations, what makes a book or work of art memorable, **etc.**"

August 24, 2020, [TAoN No. 51](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from an anonymous reader:

If you had one opportunity to permanently change someone's life (better or worse) who would it be and how would you change it?

That probably doesn't need any further explanation. Although maybe I would add something like: "politicians excluded"!

August 10, 2020, [TAoN No. 50](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from [Yael](#), on [Twitter](#) (via [swissmiss](#)).

Without using the title of your job, tell me what you do.

As swissmiss notes, some of the responses are very fun. More about Yael (not someone I know) at [Patreon](#) and on [Twitter](#). A great one! (And yes, it's from 2019 — another product of my notebook dive.)

I'll get back to the backlog next time I promise, please be patient if you sent one in that I haven't used yet.

July 25, 2020, from [TAoN No. 49](#)

In a recent installment of Dan Ariely's [WSJ advice column](#), a reader's asked how to improve Zoom work-team happy hours. Ariely [replied](#):

"The problem isn't that your co-workers are unusually boring; rather, it's the social norms for your meetings. Research has found that people usually gravitate toward small talk even when they crave connection because sharing important things about ourselves can be socially risky. Talking about unimportant things carries zero risk, but it also doesn't offer much personal or social benefit."

Indeed, Ariely's Irrational Labs conducted experiments via networking events, testing the payoff of using unusually "probing" questions, such as (I've modified slightly):

What's something you would not tell someone about yourself on a first date?

"The results, showed that those who asked deeper questions had more meaningful discussions," Ariely writes. "You could try something similar in your Zoom happy hours by giving everyone a question to ask their colleagues."

Irrational Labs has [sets of "No Small Talk" question cards](#). And, as you may recall: A central collection spot for all of this newsletter's icebreakers to date is [here](#), and there's a free Icebreaker Slack app based on that list, [here](#). (Back story on that [here](#).)

July 13, 2020, from [TAoN No. 48](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from [Sandeep Chakraborty](#). It requires no preamble:

If you could rename yourself, what new name would you choose, and why?

For years I have wondered if I should have adopted a more unusual, memorable name — better branding for a writer;)

Thanks much [Sandeep](#)!

June 29, 2020, from [TAoN No. 47](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from [Bethany Crystal](#). It requires no particular preamble:

What's the most expensive habit you've started as an adult that you now wish you could break?

Here are [answers she got when she tweeted this question](#) — an experiment she tried “because it occurred to me that, the more you know, the better quality you grow to expect.” This is why I've resisted learning too much about wine ;)

Bethany (who admitted to developing some “expensive tastes” around candles) continued: “What was fun about asking this question was that it also lends itself to a lot of easy follow-ups. (When did you start that habit? Any fond memories you can share?)” Agree, this is a fun one. Thanks, [Bethany](#)!

June 15, 2020, from [TAoN No. 46](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from [Tony Brent](#). It requires no particular preamble:

If you could sing like any famous singer in the world (living or dead), who would it be?

I don't know about you, but I find it hard to choose. I'm not even sure which *Beatle* I would choose. Maybe that's just me. Anyway: Thanks, [Tony](#)!

June 2, 2020, from [TAoN No. 45](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from a reader who modestly deflects credit to “the wonderful training team in Bristol City Council, England.”

Describe something that's made you smile today.

"You get a huge range of responses," my correspondent says. "Everyone smiles along with the stories, and you get a short glimpse of the personal story behind each response."

Yes. And maybe this is a particularly good one to ask right now, when smiles are scarce but valued. Thank you!

May 18, 2020, from [TAoN No. 44](#)

A couple of weeks ago I got a very surprising email from reader [Stephen Chisa](#), who caught my interview on the [Hurry Slowly](#) podcast, checked out the newsletter, and became a fan of the icebreaker series. He wrote:

I built a Slack app that lets people shuffle through a list of icebreakers and post those icebreakers so their whole team can give their answers. It's been a fun project, I've always loved icebreakers, and they seem extra relevant now when more teams are trying to preserve their water cooler conversations in a remote setting and trying to find other things to talk about than the pandemic.

He sent along a "[super short video snippet](#)" demonstrating how it would work, and asked if it would be okay for [the app](#) to draw on [the TAoN icebreaker list](#), with credit. We had a short back and forth. After all, most of the icebreakers have come (with credit!) from you readers, so my first instinct was to be protective. But Stephen is not trying to profit off this — it's free!

Plus he's spreading a message that, obviously, I believe in: These icebreakers are an enjoyable way to connect with others, and connecting with others is central to a whole section of [The Art of Noticing](#). Also, connecting with others may be harder and yet more vital than ever right now. And I *never* would have thought of Slack as a venue. So: all good! I hope you agree.

You can read more about & download the free Icebreaker Slack app [here](#).

But one more thing: Stephen mentioned that he was also including his own favorite icebreakers in the app's mix. So I asked if he could share a few with TAoN. He did, and they're great, so here goes:

What was the first R-rated movie you saw? How old were you?

"I enjoy this question because it creates many different points of possible discussions: the movie itself, your parent's parenting philosophy, and the rating system in general," Stephen explains. "The first R-Rated movie I saw was *Starship Troopers* in a random motel in Wisconsin when I was 7. We were on a family

vacation to visit my Mom's aunt. It was the first time my parents let us purchase a movie at a hotel, which only added to the occasion. Yes, I did have nightmares but no I have no regrets."

What was your first concert? How did you get there?

"This question is often asked by hosts at [Sofar concerts](#) but it always sparks some great nostalgia, sharing of what parents were like, and maybe even some devious ways of getting there."

What is your favorite body of water? Why?

"It's interesting to hear why people pick what they pick—maybe it's historically interesting, childhood vacation nostalgia, or maybe even because it has a lake monster and monsters are cool."

I really like these! Big thanks for sharing, Stephen. Nice work!!

May 4, 2020, from [TAoN No. 43](#)

This week's icebreaker came in recently. It's from [Ryan Kushner](#). The subject heading was "Zombie icebreaker," and I had a feeling it was just what I needed.

If you had to make your own zombie movie, what would your zombies be like? How would they be different from stereotypical zombies? How would they be similar?

"It's fun to hear the different things people come up with," Ryan writes, "and they always seem excited to get to share some creativity and ideas of adventure. (My answer is always that in my movie, the zombies can get full after a big meal.)"

And he adds: "Hope it helps other people out there looking for some common things to think and laugh about." Agreed!

April 20, 2020, from [TAoN No. 42](#)

I've [mentioned](#) friend of TAoN Ingrid Fetell Lee's appealing book, [Joyful](#). Recently, she wrote on her terrific related blog, [Aesthetics of Joy](#), about "[joyful ways to change the subject](#)." You know, if there's some all-consuming subject that you're tired of but nobody seems to be able to stop going on about.

One way, in short, is to start another conversation. Ingrid suggests a couple of examples, drawn from her [Joyful Conversation Starters Guide](#), a set of “36 prompts to help you change the subject and bring more light and laughter to your conversations.” Here’s one that might be particularly interesting now — although it might not change the subject, so much as reframe it:

What’s something new you’ve learned about yourself in the last three months?

“This question offers a gentle way to zoom out from what’s happening in the moment and reflect,” Ingrid writes. Read the rest of her post [here](#), and download her (free) Joyful Conversation Starters guide [here](#). Her book is [Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness](#).

April 13, 2020, from [TAoN No. 41](#)

I want to stay short and upbeat, so let’s go with this one, submitted a while back by friend of TAoN [Daniel S Dunnam](#).

Have you been pleasantly surprised by anything recently?

A good time to ask that question, even of yourself.

April 7, 2020, from [TAoN No. 40](#)

Before I get to this week’s icebreaker: A recent writeup in *Forge* takes on the subject of conversation in this moment when we are all obsessing about the virus — “[How To Talk About Literally Anything Else](#).” It includes lots of conversation-starter prompts, some of which obliquely respond to the moment, but in ways designed to uplift; other prompts avoid current events altogether. So if you’re hungry for that, check it out.

But this week’s icebreaker comes from a casual friend in New York, and it is absolutely inspired by this weird era of quarantine and lockdown. I don’t want to make that a habit, but this really made me think, so I’ve decided to share it:

Have you had any unanticipated quarantine-specific cravings for comfort foods (and if so, what)? Have you rediscovered any old passions?

I know that looks like two questions — but I see them as variations on the same idea.

March 23, 2020, from [TAoN No. 39](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from [Mary Aviles](#), who got it from a [TEEN Hype](#) event last year:

What's one word you would use to describe yourself as a teenager?

My own answer, with no hesitation, is "jackass." I was a difficult kid.

Anyway, it's a fun question!

March 9, 2020, from [TAoN No. 38](#)

This week's icebreaker comes from [Amy Varga](#), who calls it her go-to:

If you had to describe how you're feeling right now as a weather pattern, what's your forecast?

She adds: "Another riff I also often use is: If you had to describe how you're feeling right now as an amusement park ride, what ride are you on?"

A two-fer! I like them both, and even more I like Amy's underlying thinking: "The invitation to use a metaphor really inspires more reflection and creativity." Very nice!

February 24, 2020, from [TAoN No. 37](#)

This week's icebreaker is from ... [me](#)!

What's the worst prediction you ever made?

Okay, this is a bit of a cheat, but I can't resist. Here's the deal. I saw a reference the other day to [some online debate about whether Leonardo DiCaprio was really "a star" before Titanic](#). It reminded me of something that, if you know me, you may have heard me talk about: My worst-ever prediction.

The reason this is a cheat is that I've actually mentioned it before in the *TAoN* newsletter, in a little riff on "being wrong" back in issue [No. 17](#). But I didn't make it an icebreaker — and now I realize it should *definitely* be on that list. (I also now think it's better to frame this as

being about a bad prediction, rather than just “being wrong.”) So whether you’re new here, or just need a reminder, the back story is:

E and I were at the movies one night long ago, and up came a trailer for a forthcoming aspiring blockbuster: *Titanic*. I thought it looked *horrible*, a surefire flop. I leaned over to E and said, referring to DiCaprio, who was an up-and-coming star, but not a superstar: “Well, that’s the end of *that* guy.”

I was, um, incorrect. Even better: This is back when I worked in an office, and later I entered the office Oscar pool — and in effect predicted *Titanic* would win zero Academy Awards. I came in dead last in the pool.

I now consider my total, stubborn failure to understand the alleged merits of *Titanic* to be a defining marker of my personality.

February 10, 2020, from [TAoN No. 36](#)

This week’s icebreaker is from the excellent [Amy Santee](#):

What material are you most like? (E.g., plastic, porcelain, dirt, silk, stone etc.)

I’m still mulling my own answer to this one. As Amy adds: “The interesting thing about this question is that it forces you to really focus on one or two or maybe three major qualities of yourself.” And the more you think about it, the more other dimensions might come into play, leading to answers like blue porcelain or 20,000 year old granite or sparkling water “We’re all so complex,” Amy concludes, “but this provides a fun and challenging exercise.” I agree!

January 27, 2019, from [TAoN No. 35](#):

This week’s icebreaker is extracted from [this icebreaker guide](#) I read on Medium. In general, the guide is a little too calculated and practical for my taste, but it’s worth a look. And *this* question jumped out to me as a really great one:

If you did not have to sleep, how would you spend the extra 8 hours?

December 27, 2019, from [TAoN No. 34](#):

This week’s icebreaker comes from reader [Becky Terry](#):

If you weren't doing your current job, what would your dream job be?

Becky, a CPA, explains she's found this to be a great question to liven up networking events: **"One guy said he would have been a concert pianist, and proceeded to the piano to prove that it might have been a reality. My dream job? A *National Geographic* photographer."**

I love it. (I'd be a radio DJ — although I'd need a degree of freedom that probably no longer exists, outside of public/indie radio. That's why it's a "dream" job!)

December 8, 2019, from [TAoN No. 33](#):

This week's icebreaker comes from reader [Lassie](#):

What thing from nature are you? (Excluding animals.)

"There are so many interesting responses," Lassie reports. Including: **stone at the bottom of a river; a smoldering ember; a geyser; a vine; moss; an unattached leaf.** "It really seems to get people thinking hard. I say I am dirt — dirt can take on many different qualities under different situations, and it's the stuff from which plants grow, so there is an element of creativity to it."

Nice. I'm going to go with "weed" for me. Thanks, [Lassie](#)!

November 14, 2019, from [TAoN No. 32](#):

This week's icebreaker comes from [an episode of the podcast *Startup*](#). It's an old episode (the podcast has concluded), and it deals with Gimlet Media getting acquired by Spotify. In one crucial meeting leading up to the acquisition, the head of Spotify asked the Gimlet founders:

What would you do if I gave you a billion dollars?

His point (as I see it) was to get a better sense of the nature of the Gimlet folks' ambitions — and to prod them to think at a bigger scale. As one of the Gimlet founders says: "Of all the questions we prepared for, we did not prepare for that." (The Spotify guy says he asks the question often, and good answers are rare.)

All that said, of course this question can be extracted from the context of a startup, or work.

October 31, 2019, from [TAoN No. 31](#):

This week's icebreaker is stolen from the smart and talented writer Matt Klam. (I don't think he'll mind; we've always gotten along.) Here it is:

If you could do something that you don't do because it's bad for you, but you could do it without any repercussions — what would you do?

As it happens, this thought exercise led to some trouble, [which you can read about here if you wish](#). I don't want to wade into that, beyond saying that I like Matt, and I like this question.

October 22, 2019, from [TAoN No. 30](#):

This week's icebreaker is adapted from the latest episode of a podcast called [Scene By Scene with Josh & Dean](#). Basically this is comix artists Josh Neufeld and Dean Haspiel discussing the movie *American Splendor*. It's extremely fun.

Toward the end of every episode, Dean always has a question for Josh (and their guest, in some cases), inspired, however loosely, by something from the movie scenes they've just talked about. The questions are always provocative. I've modified the most recent one to this:

Have you ever quit doing something that you used to be really passionate about? Do you regret it? Or are you happy you quit? Either way: Do you think you'll ever take it up again?

September 29, 2019, from [TAoN No. 29](#):

This week's icebreaker comes from an anonymous friend of the newsletter, who credits a sample question from a college admission interview process. (I've tweaked a bit.)

Imagine you could devote a year to researching someone's biography. Who would your subject be?

I think my answer would be P.T. Barnum. (And yes, I know about the existing books.)

September 12, 2019, from [TAoN No. 28](#):

This week's icebreaker comes from *Art of Manliness* podcast producer [Jeremy Anderberg](#).

If you had to take a bath in a food, which food would it be?

"It's my favorite icebreaker question; I've used it dozens of times," Jeremy reports. "Answers range from chocolate to cheese to **my own answer: mashed potatoes and gravy**. Answering involves considerations of liquid vs solid, textures, etc. Some people ask about champagne showers." I'd say champagne doesn't count as food. But mashed potatoes and gravy? Anyway, a very weird and very fun one!

August 27, 2019, from *TAoN No. 27*:

This week's icebreaker comes from [Michael Shiloh](#):

What question do you wish people would ask you?

"You can imagine various variations on this," he adds, "but I think this captures the essence." Agreed. **I'm definitely going to use this.**

August 12, 2019, from *TAoN No. 26*:

Today's icebreaker comes from Jason, from New York (childhood home Knoxville, TN):

Of the places you have lived or spent significant time, which one had the

most pleasing view out the front door/main window/etc for you and why?

Jason explains that he “thought of it on a recent trip back to my hometown, where I stayed in an Airbnb instead of my childhood home. It felt very interesting to see the sunset that felt mostly familiar but yet a little odd.” I like this a lot. It makes me remember a lot of views, and makes me want to make sure I appreciate the one I have now.

July 31, 2019, TAoN No. 25:

Today's icebreaker comes from artist [Amy C. Evans](#):

Who is your pick for the most underrated character in a movie or TV show?

I asked Amy for her answer, but she wouldn't tell me! What's yours?

July 18 2019, TAoN No. 24:

Today's icebreaker comes to me via [Tom Weis](#):

Tell me about a time when you changed your mind.

Tom mentioned this to me in conversation the other day and I knew I'd have to use it, but there's a bit of a back story. He teaches at RISD, and this came up in the course of a collaboration between RISD industrial design students and West Point cadets. Then-department head [Charlie Cannon](#) brought the two groups together with a set of five questions originally devised by [Barry Frew](#). This is the last of Frew's five prompts — and my favorite. (The others are: Tell us your name; where you are from; about your family structure growing up; about your family structure now.) Charlie adds that the family-structure questions "encouraged people to share personal information without feeling invasive," and that taken together the responses helped encourage an "emotional candor" within the teams.

Having said all that, I think this last one works pretty well on its own. *Thank you Tom and Charlie!*

July 4 2019, TAoN No. 23:

This week's icebreaker comes from [Dave Adair](#). "For years," he writes, "I've enjoyed asking friends and strangers":

If you're going to win the lottery, would you rather win \$10 million, or \$100 million?

He explains: "Most people look cross-eyed and ask, 'Is that a trick question??' I ask it because I think \$10 million would make you comfortable without ruining your life, while \$100 million might ensure that you couldn't really trust new people you meet, and guarantee a stream of financial requests that could be overwhelming. More interestingly, **the question leads to conversations about what people really care about if money is not an issue.**" Thanks, Dave!

June 20, 2019, TAoN No. 22:

Today's icebreaker comes from [Whitney Teubner](#). It might be my all-time favorite, and it has a bit of a back story. But first, here it is:

Imagine you are backpacking through a remote jungle and the guide you are with has you spend the night with a native tribe. During the evening they treat you as if you were their guest of honor. They put on a show for you and cook you a giant feast . . . part of which includes human flesh. A delicacy for them. Would you eat it? Or, at the very least, would

you be curious to know what it tasted like?

Whitney adds: "I like phrasing it this way because it gives people a complete 'out' to try it: They're dinner guests so it would be rude NOT to... You really get good responses that way. Some people are flat out 'no's and others have conditional questions (where did the meat come from?, etc.)."

The back story is that Whitney used a version of this as an actual icebreaker at a group lunch I was part (most attendees didn't know each other) some years ago — and I *loved* it, and have since used a variation of it myself in various situations. I suspect this one may not be for everybody, but I hope you'll agree that it's quite original! (Thanks for letting me share it, Whitney!).

June 13, 2019, TAoN No. 21:

Today's icebreaker comes from [Noel Franus](#):

If you could live in the setting of any book or movie, without necessarily being involved in the story, which would you choose?

"Lots of people choose *Lord of the Rings*," Noel reports. My answer would probably be *Stranger Than Paradise* — but that's my answer to almost any movie-related question. Or maybe I'd choose something from Almodóvar. Nice colors in his worlds. Anyway: Thanks, Noel!

May 30, 2019, TAoN No. 20:

Today's icebreaker comes from [Marco Romano](#), who actually sent in a few ideas. This was my favorite:

If you could be one other person, who would that person be and why?

This seems like one that could be played with: Maybe being another person, but just for a week, or a day, or an hour. How would your answer change? (And for those who resist this

question: Who would you be if you absolutely *had* to be another person?) Fun. Thanks, [Marco!](#)

May 23, 2019, TAoN No. 19:

I have a backlog of icebreakers to share, but this recent idea grabbed me. Via the [Smarter Living newsletter from The New York Times](#):

One of my favorite party games is to ask a group of people this simple question:

What is your oldest or most cherished grudge?

You can read about some of the responses writer Tim Herrera got, [here](#). An icebreaker and a party game aren't quite the same thing, but I think this works. Even better, this idea does double duty. Because while Herrera argues that you should let go of your grudges, there's an argument to be made against his intuitive advice.

I've written in an earlier newsletter about [the case for an enemies list](#). But even more on point: I'm reminded of [this interview](#) with Sophie Hannah talking about the upside of a grudge. My tl;dr gloss: **A grudge is not a feeling, but a memory of a story – something useful, not painful, and potentially even constructive. Write down your deepest grudge and learn from it.** Listen to that [interview](#) or check out Hannah's book, [How To Hold A Grudge](#).

May 14, 2019, TAoN No. 18:

Okay, I'm really focused on the book this week — forgive me, I'm excited. I'll get back to more diverse offerings soon, but let me have my moment! What I'm saying is, this week's icebreaker is pinched from *The Art of Noticing*, part of an exercise on interviewing a friend (or loved one or stranger or even an enemy).

What is your earliest memory?

This is one of many questions cooked up by the amazing [StoryCorps](#) project, cited in the book. I chose this one because it's so simple, yet I think it can work with not only with someone you just met, but someone you've known for ages. Check out more great StoryCorps questions [here](#) — a *really* nice resource for those of you who have been enthusiastic about the icebreaker series and have asked about whether I'll compile them. I might! Meanwhile: **There's a whole section of the *The Art of Noticing* with exercises designed to help you converse with, listen to, and connect with others.**

May 2, 2019, TAoN No. 17:

This week's icebreaker comes courtesy of [John Baglio](#):

Tell me something about yourself that I could never tell from looking at you.

A teacher and camp counselor, Baglio says he uses icebreakers all the time, and this rather simple one is useful because "it leaves the option of going deep, but the person answering really has control over how exposed they want to be." I like that!

April 18, 2019, TAoN No. 16:

This week's icebreaker comes courtesy of Friend of AoN [Richard Nash](#):

If you could own one building, any building, what would it be?

Actually, this question came from Richard's daughter, who further stipulated that you cannot *sell* the building, but you don't have to live in it full time (although you can, whenever you want). "I just realized **kids ask the best ice-breakers**," Richard adds. "She comes up with stuff like this 10 times a week. I struggle to give a good answer." That's kinda the idea!

April 3, 2019, TAoN No. 15:

This week's icebreaker comes courtesy of Friend of AoN [Erin M. Routson](#):

If you could only use three condiments for the rest of your life, what would they be?

"I love to ask people this, and then get yelled at because my definition of condiment includes guacamole," she adds. And while it may sound silly at first, it's actually a subtle test of creativity, among other things. "It's interesting to see what people think they can use across so many things, and where their preferences lie." I love it!

March 28, 2019, TAoN No. 14:

I am pleased to report that y'all have sent in a *bunch* of icebreakers, so I'm a bit behind — but keep them coming! This week's short & sweet icebreaker comes from my pal [Adam Harrison Levy](#), a writer/interviewer/educator who has used this one in classes:

What is your secret skill?

He adds: "Standouts: an amateur contortionist (she bent her legs behind her head to demonstrate to the class), a kid who learned how to handle poisonous snakes while an intern at a zoo, and a guy who could ride a unicycle." Delightful.

March 14, 2019, TAO N No. 13:

[Mark Lehman](#) points to something he saw from [@aedison](#) on Twitter:

If you could say one sentence to your pet and know they would understand it, what would you say?

(Coincidentally, a few days after I got this suggestion, I heard [a Radiolab podcast with a story about trying to determine if dogs can be "racist"](#). Toward the end, they talked about **what you'd say to your dog if you could understand each other for two and a half minutes.**)

March 7, 2019, TAO N No. 12:

I'll get back to your icebreaker submissions next week, but I've got a few others I've saved up, and wanted to share this one. It comes [from Mike Kim on Twitter](#), via [Tyler Cowen's blog](#).

Tell me about something you love doing that you're terrible at. And tell me about something you really do not like doing that you're great at.

February 28, 2019, TAoN No. 11:

Icebreaker of the Week: "I share your enthusiasm for icebreaker questions and wanted to pass on one I came up with that I've found to work well," a reader tells me:

Would you rather be able to speak every language in the world fluently, or be able to play every musical instrument as well as a virtuoso?

"What makes it great is trying to get people to explain *why* they would prefer one over the other. Their explanations reveal a lot about their personalities." Nice!

February 22, 2019, TAoN No. 10:

Icebreaker of the Week: "I've found people surprisingly enthused about this one," writes McKinley Valentine, who has a newsletter called [The Whippet](#):

If you could safely eat any inedible object, what would it be?

"In my experience," Valentine adds, "you need to give your own example for the other person to get what you mean by the question. For me it's a lit lightbulb. They seem crunchy and like they would fill you with goldenness."

I love this one *so much*.

February 14, 2019, TAoN No. 9:

Dave Sandell suggests:

What are you into now that you never thought you would be into? And conversely, What's something you used to be into that you're not anymore?

He speculates that he may have picked these up from someone else. Whatever the source, I like 'em; thank you Dave!

February 7, 2019, TAoN No. 8:

This week I'm departing from your contributions to pluck one from [a recent David Brooks column](#). Whatever you make of Brooks' politics, I hope you'll allow that his theme of tips for **cultivating kindness** is well-intended. Among his notions for an imagined get-together that includes people with cultural disagreements:

To start such a gathering, have all participants go around the room and describe how they got their names. That gets them talking about their family, puts them in a long-term frame of mind and illustrates that most people share the same essential values.

January 24, 2019, TAoN No. 7:

Here's one from [Jen Mayer](#): "I like to ask this question, based on the great title from David Foster Wallace":

What is a supposedly fun thing that you did — that you'll never do again?

(She adds that she has two answers: "1. We took the train from Chicago to San Francisco—beautiful, uncomfortable and glad that we did it, but I don't need to do it again! 2. A production company filmed scenes for a TV pilot in our house—some parts were fun, some weren't, we got paid, but too disruptive to do again." Thank you Jen!)

January 17, 2019, TAoN No. 6:

[Last time](#), I mentioned my fondness for creative or unusual icebreaker questions to help when I'm meeting new students (or anybody else). I asked for your icebreakers and got

several good replies. Here's one from [Emerson Dameron](#) (who in turn credits someone he dated years ago):

If you had unlimited resources, what frivolous thing would you collect? Not books. It has to be frivolous.

January 9, 2019, TAoN No. 5:

Ask A Thoughtful Question. The other day, Braden Bell had a handy piece in *The Washington Post* listing "[25 prompts to get teens talking about gratitude.](#)" Teens and gratitude aside, I'm always interested in icebreaker-type questions (particularly ones I can use when I meet a new group of students). Several of these qualify. Here's a good one from the list:

What is something you didn't like but you are glad happened?

I'm going to use some variation of that.

Do you have a favorite icebreaker question? I'd love to hear it! consumed@robwalker.net