



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Two Short Warm-Up Exercises

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Description

The resource provides an introduction to two short warm-up exercises that can be used in a responsible conduct of research course or workshop. It includes the non-quiz and the two-statement icebreaker.

Body

The non-quiz

The non-quiz is my elaboration of a well-established tool for teaching called freewriting, in which your students write for a specified time, such as 5 minutes. The only rule is that the students should write about anything at all the whole time. Freewriting becomes a non-quiz when the teacher provides a topic, just like a quiz, except that the non-quiz is not graded or formally assessed.

Example

1. Introduce the concept of the non-quiz.
2. Provide the topic: "One of your most important teachers."
3. The students write for 2 minutes. At 1¾ minutes, ask students to finish the thought or sentence.

4. Explore the non-quizzes.
 - a. Try to get each student to share one of the characteristics of the important teacher.
 - b. For each response, ask questions of clarification as needed and signify the characteristic in a very few words. Write it on a whiteboard, flipchart, or similar tool.

Initially, it may be necessary to choose students to provide a characteristic, but usually students offer characteristic on their own. Within a few minutes the participants are typically clearly engaged. Discussion starts to emerge.

As the end of the session nears, provide short closing thoughts.

Exercise: Two-statement icebreaker

I originally developed this exercise when I was invited to give a guest lecture in an undergraduate research seminar in psychology. It proved to be a quick and easy way to get the students involved and talking.

The exercise

1. Ask students to write a short phrase to fill in the blank in these two statements:
 - a. In research in psychology, _____ is ethical
 - b. In research in psychology, _____ is unethical.
2. Ask them to choose one of the two phrases and mark it with an X in the margin, circling or underlining the first words in a. or b. Do not provide any criteria for making the choice.
3. Ask each one to read her or his marked phrase without saying whether it was (a) or (b). Write the phrases on the board.
4. For each phrase, ask the students whether they think it is ethical or unethical. Optionally, allow them to answer “undecided” or “abstain.”
5. Tally the responses.
6. Discuss the results.

Comments

When I first used this exercise, we noticed that the items which we generally agreed were ethical were also quite broad and vague, including “animal experimentation” and “brain research.” I suggested that we could all imagine instances of brain

research that we would find unethical, and no one disagreed.

We also noticed that many of the statements which we generally agreed were unethical posed real temptations to researchers.

The statement with the lowest degree of consensus (“experiment on children with their consent and the consent of their parent or guardian, but without a full explanation of the research”), disagreement turned on interpretations of the word “explanation.” We all agreed that failing to explain some things (like potential risks) would make the research unethical, but failing to explain some other things (like the subtle implications of the working hypothesis) probably wouldn't.

Notes

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Also available at <http://teachrcr.us>

The non-quiz is adapted from my “Using Short Writing Assignments in Teaching Research Ethics,” which includes more tips on writing, including freewriting. <http://teachrcr.us/rs-tre/kdp-writing.pdf>

My first version of “Exercise: Two-statement icebreaker” was published in Trends 4:4 (September 1997), the newsletter of the Teaching Research Ethics Workshop project. <http://teachrcr.us/trends/tre4-4.html>

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