

Common Ground — Participant Workbook

The guide in print, a frame to write after every debrief question, and session notes pages.

Folder: common-ground · Category: icebreakers · 3–5 per group · 15 min · offline + online · print props · assessment-type

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Common Ground — Facilitator Run Sheet

Small groups hunt for facts that are true of **everyone** at the table — but scoring rewards the *surprising* ones. “We all work here” scores one point. “We have all moved countries for a job” scores three. The hunt forces the questions nobody asks in week one.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Found **non-obvious common ground** with colleagues — the kind that survives Monday.
2. Practiced **asking past the first easy answer** — the same move good interviews use.
3. Seen how fast a group turns strangers into “people who share X”.

Setup

Space: tables or breakout rooms, one group of 3–5 each.

Materials per group:

Item	Source
1 × recorder card	common-ground-prop-cards.pdf (card 1) — ten lines to write on
1 × scoring card	common-ground-prop-cards.pdf (card 2) — what counts, what scores

Scoring rule — say it out loud: “A common ground scores 1 point if it’s ordinary, 3 points if it makes the group go ‘wait, really?’. Facts only — opinions score zero. The whole group must share it, verified by every member.”

Grouping rule: mix departments and seniority deliberately. Common ground inside a silo is just the silo.

Minute-by-minute script

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
0–2	Frame + scoring	State the scoring rule. “You have ten minutes. The best score I have seen is 23.”	Form groups, take cards
2–12	The hunt (10 min)	Float. Kill opinion-claims gently (“likes coffee” is not a fact about everyone)	Ask, verify, write, score
12–14	Read-out	Each group reads only its two highest-scoring grounds	Listen, react, “wait, really?”
14–15	Bridge	“Keep the recorder card — one name per line. That’s your group, starting today.”	Transition

Then run the debrief — see [common-ground-debrief.md](#).

Known failure modes & rescues

1. **The group camps on one-point facts.** “We all have a laptop” — ten lines, zero soul. Rescue: announce at minute 5: “3-point grounds are now worth 5.” Inflation moves the hunt.
 2. **One member’s life dominates.** Every fact is checked against the loudest storyteller. Rescue: rotate the verifier — each new line must be verified by the *quietest* member first.
 3. **The group invents grounds to win.** “We have all...” — someone nods along, falsely. Rescue: verification is the game’s engine. If a member’s eyes slide away during verify, ask them directly and kindly.
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Variations

- **One-deep:** each ground may be used once in the room — read-outs stay surprising.
 - **Online:** breakout rooms of 4, recorder card shared on screen, one person types.
 - **Deep cut:** final two minutes, only grounds worth 3 points count. Groups go from jobs to journeys fast.
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Props in this folder

- `common-ground-prop-cards.pdf` — poker print-ready: recorder card, scoring card
 - `common-ground-guide.md` — this run sheet
 - `common-ground-debrief.md` — 8 debrief questions, 3 failure modes
 - `common-ground-assessment.json` — pre/post measure preset
 - `common-ground-paper-form.pdf` — the A4 answer sheet: the measure as a print-and-fill form
 - `common-ground-workbook.pdf` — participant workbook: the idea in plain words, guided items, notes and action pages
 - `common-ground-slide-deck.pdf` — the slide deck for teaching or projecting
 - `common-ground-slide-deck.html` — the same deck for any browser, speaker notes on N
 - `common-ground-license.md` — what you may do with all of this, in plain language
 - `common-ground-activity-poster.pdf` — The whole activity on one wall (A3): meta, run of show, debrief questions, watch-outs.
 - `common-ground-start-here.md` — one page, thirty seconds, then print and go
 - `SKILL.md` — machine-readable manifest for AI agents
 - `common-ground-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief sheet, bound as one A4 PDF
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Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the props, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The hunt itself runs on paper cards and curiosity.

Common Ground — Debrief Sheet

8 questions, 3 failure modes, one rule: verified ground is the only ground.

Use with `common-ground-guide.md`. Debrief runs 10 min after the read-out.

The 8 questions

1. The three-pointer.

“Read your group’s best 3-point ground again. What question uncovered it?”

→ The question is the skill; the fact is just the receipt.

2. The easy camp.

“Which 1-point grounds did your group write before it started hunting? What finally moved you off them?”

→ Targets: the cost of settling for the first answer — a daily-work habit.

3. The verification moment.

“When did verifying almost break a ground? Who almost nodded falsely, and what stopped them?”

→ Targets: psychological safety. Handle gently; the honesty is the win.

4. The quietest member.

“What did the quietest member contribute that the group almost missed?”

→ Almost always the best fact in the game came from the person who spoke least.

5. The surprise ranking.

“Which ground from *another* group surprised you most? Why that one?”

→ Cross-group learning; also tells you what this room values.

6. The daily version.

“Where does your week reward the first easy answer instead of the second question?”

→ Transfer question. Expect: stand-ups, requirements interviews, support tickets.

7. The one question.

“What is one question from this game you will ask a colleague this week?”

→ Commitment question. One question, named, with a deadline.

8. The group identity.

“Your recorder card has ten lines and your names on it. What is this group now — one sentence?”

→ Closing question. Groups keep these cards; the sentence becomes the group’s name for itself.

3 known failure modes of the debrief itself

1. **Read-out becomes a talent show.** Groups perform their funniest facts; nobody reflects.

Rescue: question 1 first — always the question behind the fact.

2. **A false verification gets exposed.** Someone admits they nodded along to a 3-pointer that wasn’t true.

Rescue: praise the confession louder than the fact — “verification just worked, in front of us.”

3. **The debrief skips the quiet.** Loudest groups dominate again.

Rescue: question 4 goes to a named quiet member, with a five-second silence buffer before they answer.

If you are running the pre/post measure (`common-ground-assessment.json`), note these observables during the hunt:

Observable	Points to
Group asks a second question after an easy “yes”	Curiosity habit
Quietest member’s line is written down	Information flow
A ground dies at verification and the group thanks the verifier	Safety culture

The report your participants receive is a self-comparison, never a group ranking — keep it that way.

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The easy camp.

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The quietest member.

What did the quietest member contribute that the group almost missed?

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