

Guide to Running a Book Club

Getting started

First of all, you need to select your group of readers – between five and ten committed attendees is a good size for your new club. The more diverse the reading habits of your core group are, the more robust the debate will be, so try to find people who enjoy different books to yourself.

Decide on a place, as well as a regular time and day to meet. Most groups meet once a month or every six weeks, often at a member's home or in a quiet café, park or local bookshop.

How to choose your titles?

Once you've found a group of people who want to start a book club, determine what you all want to get out of the meetings. Do you care about finding new books, or talking about old favourites? Is this a highbrow literary circle or an informal place to make new friends and get more out of the books you're reading?

A good book club book needs a bit of meat to it, usually involving complex characters, moral quandaries and/or interesting stylistic features. There are many different ways to select titles to read, including:

- Thematically; for example choosing debut authors, prize winners or designating a genre for each month
- Individually; every month, group members take it in turns to choose a title
- By ballot; in which a list is compiled (by group members or with help from your local bookseller) and the group votes

Some groups choose the books for the year at the first meeting, while some choose the next book the meeting before. Bear in mind that everyone leads busy lives – some book clubs even choose their titles based on length!

Stimulating discussion

Hopefully everyone will have a lot to say about each book choice, but if you need some help getting the ball rolling, here are some suggestions to move the discussion along:

- Reactions to the book, both emotional and intellectual, as well as how and why these reactions were elicited
- Strengths and weaknesses, memorable sections, author's vision and intent
- Stylistic features of the book, such as language, narrative voice, setting, plot and character development
- Overarching themes of the book and their relevance to current events

If choosing the book turn-by-turn, the host for each month may like to prepare four or five discussion questions to prompt conversation.

Etiquette

Presuming you don't want your group to disband after the first meeting, some rules of etiquette should be followed. Finishing the book is desirable, so own up if you didn't get all the way through and prepare to hear some spoilers.

Respect others' opinions (especially when disagreeing about a book's merit) and make space for everyone to be heard.

Try to separate socialising and book discussion – if you've got some particular gossipers in your group, perhaps designate time before or after the meeting to catch up!