

How to start a Reading Group

Why join or start a reading group?

Reading groups offer a fantastic opportunity to spend time with people who have similar interests to you and want to read great books. You can start one with people you already know, or find a local group to join and meet new people.

If you often read books and are desperate to talk to other people about it, a reading group is the place for you. Or perhaps you don't often read, and want the motivation of being part of a group to inspire you to read more regularly. Maybe you just love spending time with people, eating, drinking and talking!

Benefits of being part of a reading group

Research shows that being part of a reading group can help you to feel happier, connected to others and helps you enjoy your reading more.

We asked reading groups to tell us about their experiences:

- 95% of members read things they wouldn't typically read since joining their reading group
- 84% of members feel more connected to other people because of being part of a reading group
- 71% said their mental wellbeing has improved
- 72% read more since joining a reading group
- 71% enjoyed reading more when they discuss a book or text as part of their group

Research also shows that participation in shared reading groups is linked to enhanced relaxation, calmness, concentration, quality of life, confidence and self-esteem, as well as feelings of shared community and common purpose.

Set up your own group

If you want to set up your own reading group, start with people you know. Invite family, friends or colleagues to join, and you can even encourage them to bring another person.

There are no set rules on how a group should run – it's up to you! Here are a few tips to help you get started:

- The group can be any size you like, but we think 8-10 is a good number of people. It's large enough to allow for no-shows and small enough to make sure everyone can have their say
- Most groups meet once a month, giving everyone a chance to read the book and regular enough to keep people engaged, but you can meet more or less regularly depending on what works best for your members
- Host the group at home, in the library, or a local café or pub



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Choosing what to read

There are lots of different ways to choose your books – take turns to pick one, vote on a selection, or do a lucky dip. Some groups like to focus on specific genres or themes, and others are open to anything. Many people say that, as a result of being in a reading group, they've read books that they wouldn't otherwise have chosen, so we recommend being open to different suggestions.

Libraries are the perfect place to get books for your group, and many libraries have specific reading group collections, or booklists that you can use to choose your next read. If you're struggling to choose, ask a librarian to offer a recommendation.

If you prefer to buy your books, booksellers can also provide great ideas and expertise to help you select a book. They can order in sets for your group, and paperbacks might be the best option as they're cheaper.

On Reading Groups for Everyone, we work with publishers and other bookish organisations such as prizes to offer sets of books for reading groups. These are free and all you need to do is send a review back to us. Keep an eye on the noticeboard and sign up to our newsletter to hear the latest offers.

You can also take a look at our booklists for inspiration from The Reading Agency and our partners.

Your reading group discussion

So, you have the people, the book, the snacks and drinks – now what? Your discussion can go in any direction. It might last 20 minutes or more depending on how much you find to talk about.

Start simple:

- What did everyone think of the book?
- How did you feel about the characters?
- Did you like it?
- Would you recommend the book to others? Why/why not?

You can use the icebreaker questions to help your discussion, or for a more structured conversation, many books have online discussion guides. Some groups like to give books a rating at the end of the discussion. You can set up a WhatsApp or Facebook group to keep chatting between meetings and recommend other books.

Managing the conversation

We know you're excited to get talking about the books you're read, but what happens when the discussion doesn't go as planned?

Everyone comes to the group with their own opinions and experiences, and it's important that people are respected and able to share their thoughts. There may be things that people disagree on, but healthy debate isn't a bad thing! Remind everyone to consider the language and tone they're using, and to listen to others and acknowledge their perspectives.

Make sure everyone has a chance to contribute if they want to, and understand that some people prefer to listen, while others are more vocal.

Get involved

Sign up to our newsletter to hear the latest offers and opportunities from the Reading Groups for Everyone team at The Reading Agency, and keep an eye on our noticeboard. Follow us on social media and share your reading with us:

X (formerly Twitter) : @readingagency
@reading_groups

Facebook: The Reading Agency

Instagram: @readingagency