

West Sussex Library Service

Setting up a new Reading Group

How do I set one up?

The easiest way to start a Reading Group is to begin with friends, work colleagues, neighbours and acquaintances.

How many members?

Between 6 and 12 is probably an ideal number. Usually not all members will attend every meeting. If you have too few people you may not get a range of views for discussion but too many and it is hard for everyone to have a say. The most important thing is that group members feel comfortable with each other and able to contribute to the discussion if they want to. Even if members have not read a particular book, they should still be welcome to participate.

Things to think about before your first meeting

- Where to meet?

You could take turns to meet in each other's homes or a public venue such as a community centre, church hall, library or local pub.

- How often to meet and what time of day?

Most groups find that once a month works best, this gives plenty of time to read the book. The time of day depends on what is most suitable for all members. The most important thing is to keep venues, times and dates regular, so it is usually best to arrange dates in advance.

- How long should meetings last?

It is probably best to allow between 60 and 90 minutes for your discussion.

Things to decide at your first meeting

- Who will be responsible for coordinating the group? ie looking after the Reading Group ticket, taking members' addresses, emails and phone numbers, placing requests with the Library Service, collecting the books from the library and collecting payments for overdue or lost or damaged

books. It is advisable to note down which member has borrowed which copy (from the barcode at the front of the book) so it is clear who has incurred any charges.

- Will you have refreshments? If so, who will be responsible for organising them or will you take it in turns?
- How will you choose which books the group will read? You could read a variety of contemporary or classic fiction, biography, travel, or do you just want one type of book e.g. crime?
- Are there any members of your group who will need books in large print or audio? If so, you will need to be careful to select books that are available in different formats.

Tips on choosing books

- It is important to choose titles that will encourage debate and stimulate discussion.
- One idea that works well is for each member to suggest a title and then that member can host the discussion.
- Alternatives to this: reading around a theme e.g. childhood, journeys, food, historical period, or reading different novels by the same author and comparing them.
- You might like to choose two titles for each meeting to keep the discussion going.
- There is a Reading Group booklist of suggested titles available to download on the [Reading Group](#) pages on the Library website.
- It is advisable to avoid choosing titles that are very new or have been heavily advertised and promoted in the media e.g. recent prize winners, as there may be long waiting lists for these titles.
- When making your choices, have some in reserve in case your first selections are not available.

How the West Sussex Library Service can help your group

For an annual subscription we provide:

- A Reading Group membership ticket

- A seven week loan period
- Free requests for multiple copies of titles
- Access to a hotline phone number or online request system
- Help and advice on which books to read

We also have a Reading Group e-newsletter, a booklist of recommended titles and a list of helpful websites.

If you would like to register your Reading Group with the Library Service, please visit your local library to pay your subscription and collect your borrower ticket.

Tips on leading the discussion

- To give structure to the discussion it is best for one person to do some initial preparation such as notes on significant passages, themes and characters. This may be the person who suggested the title.
- Try to give everyone an opportunity to contribute if they want to.
- Round the table questions are a handy way of getting quieter people to say something if they would like to.
- Don't put anyone on the spot, some people are content to be passive listeners and do not have the confidence to talk about a book
- Opinions differ and it often makes a more interesting and stimulating discussion if there is disagreement, but remember that everybody's opinion of the book is equally valid.

Ideas for discussion of a chosen title

- Did the cover of the book appeal to you?
- What did you find interesting or uninteresting?
- What did you enjoy most about the book?
- What irritated you?

- What were the main themes and issues?
- Did you feel sympathetic towards the characters, dislike them or feel indifferent towards them? Why?
- Could you relate your own experience to any described in the book?
- When did you feel you had become fully involved or did you decide to give up?
- How effective was the author's use of language?
- Was there anything unusual about the structure and pace of the book?
- If so, was it effective?
- Were the beginning and ending satisfactory?
- Where did you read the book?
- Did this have any influence on your enjoyment of reading the book or otherwise?

Ideas for further development of your Reading Group

- See the list of recommended titles on our Reading Group page
- Participate in Reading Group events offered by libraries e.g. book awards- reading the longlisted and shortlisted titles
- There are offers for Reading Groups in New Books magazine, available in all libraries in West Sussex
- Register your Reading Group on Reading Groups for Everyone for special offers, tips, news etc: <http://readinggroups.org/>
- Discuss resources for choosing titles e.g. radio extracts, press reviews etc.
- Choose a genre that you would not normally read e.g. Science Fiction/Fantasy, Poetry, Classics, Short Stories or Gay and Lesbian writing
- Choose a book set in a particular country or area that you have visited.
- Try translations of international prize winning titles.

- Read two books with similar themes and compare them.
- Keep a reading diary where you can write reviews or scores out of ten.
- Extend the discussion of a particular author to include his/her other work and biography.
- Write a review for the library website, Reading Group e-newsletter or an internet blog.
- List your ten favourite books to take to a desert island.
- Consider whether the book is male or female orientated.
- Compare the book to its film adaptation, why might they be different?
- Compare your reading experiences e.g. must you finish a book at all costs? Can you read with noise around you?

Further information

For further details of West Sussex Libraries' offer to Reading Groups see "Guidelines for Reading Groups" on our [webpage](#) or ask your local library for a copy.

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