Salons by House 42
Host Playbook

Salons are designed to support friendship and meaning-making by creating a space to collaboratively explore ideas—ranging from philosophy to art to science—with other people.

This **playbook is intended to support new hosts** in organizing a fun, inclusive and fulfilling event with as little effort as possible. Hosting can be draining, but the hope is that by simplifying the process with the following guidelines (think of them like the rules provided for playing a board game), we can simplify the art of organizing so that people anywhere in the world can have a similarly fulfilling experience.

The suggested structure of the event is based on a mix of science, leadership training and adult learning design, as well as our experience running over 100 salons. **We recommend you follow this format to start** but feel free to experiment with what works best based on your experience.

This community concept was created by House 42. Email phil@house42.org for q's.

BEFORE THE SALON

There are 3 main activities before the salon happens:

1. Choosing a venue, date and time
2. Choosing a salon topic
3. Posting the sign-up list and sharing the pre-read

CHOOSING A VENUE, DATE AND TIME

For the venue, we have primarily hosted in people's homes and accommodate anywhere from 8-25 people, depending on the size of the space and the host's experience. This is the most intimate and is best when possible. But, coffee shops or

bars can also work well if you choose a day and time with limited clientele. For day and time, we have chosen to host all of our salons on Sunday afternoons (hence the name) as this creates consistency, is often a time that people have free, and allows for people to easily continue hanging out afterwards. You can of course host on a different day and time, though we recommend you consider both the experience for guests (Will they be free? Will people be too busy or tired to connect afterwards?) but also for yourself and pick a time that doesn't feel too stressful for your own schedule.

CHOOSING A SALON TOPIC

Generally, we recommend picking topics that you personally are curious to discuss with other people. What have you been reading, listening, or thinking about recently? Almost anything can make a great salon topic and if you don't know where to start, you can take a look at this salon topic calendar from our CDMX salon group.

Sharing a pre-read for the topic

For every salon, we prepare and share an optional pre-read document at least 24 hours in advance (ideally 2-3 days). Here's a sample pre-read, and a blank template you can copy. Why make a pre-read if it's only optional? Even though no preparation should be necessary or expected to attend a salon, having a pre-read is a big help for people who feel more comfortable gathering thoughts in advance so that they can show up fully and engage in the discussion. It helps to make the space more inclusive. You should include a few sample resources that give context or an interesting perspective on the topic, as well as suggested discussion questions.

You are also more than welcome to just pick one of our past salons as a starting place (topics and pre-reads are linked in the topic calendar above)

POSTING RSVPs.

In CDMX, we use a Whatsapp community to post about upcoming topics and to share RSVP lists. It's first-come, first-served for RSVPs, though if you'd like you can also post the sign-up list at a regular time so people know when to look for it. Eventbrite or other platforms can also work well, but we've found that a simple chat group is easiest for hosts and for organizing. Once you have your topic and venue, you are ready to share the sign-up list, which looks like this:

Our next salon is this week. Copy & paste this message + add your name to RSVP.

📅 Sun, April 21 | 3-5pm
[Address]

🗣️ Topic: Labels & how we classify ourselves

Pre-Read coming soon

1. Trisha
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

WAITLIST
1.
2.

It's best to post the sign-up list at least by Wed for a salon happening on Sunday, and perfectly fine to share the pre-read later if you don't have it ready by then.

DURING THE SALON

AGENDA

The default event is 2 hours, broken down roughly as follows:

- [0-0:30] Arrival buffer; unstructured socializing
- [0:30-0:33 min] Group breathing activity
- [0:33-0:35] Voice over of group norms
- [0:35-0:45] Icebreaker — "What feels alive for you right now?"
- [0:45-0:50] Intro on theme (host voices over context)

- [0:50-1:45] Salon Discussion - Moderating
- [1:45-2:00] Reflections
- [2:00+] Unstructured socializing

More details on each section in the following pages.

ARRIVAL BUFFER / UNSTRUCTURED SOCIALIZING

The first 30 minutes is casual and allows for late arrivals, but also some small talk to get folks warmed up rather than just jumping right into the discussion. This part is important — don't skip it.

BREATHING / MEDITATION ACTIVITY

The goal of this component is to get everyone in the same headspace before jumping into discussion, which helps encourage more listening and greater comfort with sharing.

We highly recommend doing 7 physiological sighs (video how-to here) which are scientifically proven to reduce anxiety.

GROUP NORMS

It's important to voice over these norms in the beginning of each salon.

1. ***The goal is to understand, not to win.*** *"This space is intended to be a place where we collaboratively explore ideas as a way to learn about each other as well as deepen our own understanding. The goal is not to convince others or "win" the debate over what is true." This is different from most spaces in school or at work, where we have learned or been taught that our goal is to win or make the best point. But the goal here is instead to understand others.*
2. ***Be more curious to learn than to share****. "Naturally, most of us will be focused on what we want to say and how to sound smart or interesting. That's normal. But, this is your invitation to be more curious to learn about others than to share about yourself. Please try to have a healthy dose of self-doubt, and to be mindful of how much space you are taking up. Keep your sharing to 90 seconds."*
3. ***Avoid repeated arguments and thinking out loud.*** *"To try and keep the conversation interesting and inclusive, try to avoid thinking out loud. For example, raising a point, and then branching into tangents. Or making the same point multiple times. Try to clarify the thought in your head and consider if it moves the conversation forward, before you share."*
4. ***Prioritize group relevance and inclusion.****"If you notice anyone is being left out, you can invite them into the conversation by saying 'I'm noticing [NAME] hasn't had a chance to share and I'm curious what they think'. Everyone is encouraged to do this at any time. But also know that if you don't want to speak, you don't need to.*

5. ***Heads up on gentle moderation by you, the host.*** *"Since it's really easy to get into the convo, I'll help keep the conversation on track and provide a gentle reminder if you might be speaking too long or too much. If you notice me place both my hands on my head while looking at you, that's your sign to quickly finish your thought and shift to being curious about others and letting them share."*

ICEBREAKER

For this part, encourage people *only to listen* and not to verbally respond to what others share. If they want, they can signal non-verbal support. The goal here is for everyone to share a bit about themselves and to both get comfortable speaking as well as listening without the need to respond. If you're not sure what question to use, the following is a great default one which can be used for every session: *what feels alive for you right now?*

INTRO ON THEME

As the host, it can be valuable for you to share a brief verbal overview of the topic to set the stage for the discussion. You could define the topic and a few subthemes, share a personal story of why you're interested in the topic, or play a short video/audio (e.g. from the pre-read) that sets some context. Then, read aloud the first discussion question and let the conversation flow naturally from there.

SALON DISCUSSION — MODERATING

As a host, your goal should be to let an interesting and collaborative conversation unfold naturally. However, **you will often find the most success by being an active guide for the discussion**. To do this, try to be aware of how *relevant* the conversation seems to be for the group. Do people seem engaged? Are a few people starting to dominate the conversation and leaving others out? Does it feel interesting to you — are *you* engaged?

If you're noticing things are not flowing quite right, here are a few simple "moves" you can try:

1. Raise your hand gently if you want to interject and the convo is moving too fast to do this naturally.
2. Pull other people into the conversation by inviting them to share their POV.
3. Gently suggest that you'd like to shift to another area and then read a different discussion question to open a new conversational thread.

If you're noticing a few people dominating the conversation:

1. You can say (or raise your hand to interject, then say), "I'd love to hear a few perspectives from people who haven't had a chance to share if anyone would like." Then, let up to 7 seconds of silence pass before moving on to another question or restarting the group convo.

REFLECTIONS

Towards the end of the salon, create space for people to reflect on the conversation you've been having. Ask them to think about (1) something they learned and want to carry forward (2) someone they want to appreciate for their thoughts (3) or a final thing they want to contribute to the group conversation before we close.

Then, go around and let everyone share. *NOTE: it should not be required for people to share if they don't want. Don't force anyone*.

UNSTRUCTURED SOCIALIZING

Once the official salon discussion ends, thank everyone for coming but then you are **highly encouraged** to create space for people to keep hanging out and chatting informally. You can choose to host people for a while, or bounce to a new location (restaurant, bar, park etc.) but it's recommended you have at least 30-60 min of social space after the salon. This space is really important for people to be able to connect with each other afterwards, and start forming friendships.