

Resources for Conducting an Online Book Group Discussion

Before you start:

Think about your expectations and the experience you want this book group to provide. Are you trying to replicate the experience of an in-person group discussion, or do you want to capitalize on this "strange new world" to try out something new?

For instance, is it very important to you that everyone is "present" simultaneously, or would you like to offer the freedom to comment and reply to each other within a certain number of days? Do you have an existing book group whose preferences you are catering to, or are you trying to reach out to new members who have not been part of your user base before?

Moderating

Think about how you will moderate a discussion if you are not able to use visual cues (even raising a hand!) and body language. How large of a group do you feel comfortable moderating by phone? By video chat? By text? Some platforms have features to let everyone know when someone has something to say, if you need it, but not all of them do. Or you may want to break out your creative phrasing with something like "Remember, one diva, one mic!" You can have everyone mute themselves while someone is speaking, or even create a queue where you keep a list of who wants to speak next.

Tech Skills

You will also want to consider the technology skills you possess as well as those of your book group members, if you are going to be meeting with people you already know. Some of the platforms listed below are easier to use than others. Is it important to you to offer a method of participating that doesn't require internet access? If you don't, will you be excluding group members who would otherwise like to participate? The same goes for platforms that only work on specific devices, such as Apple or Windows. You will also want to be sure to choose a platform that keeps your members' privacy in mind by not requiring them to share their personal contact information. Please know that the platforms listed below should work on most devices and should keep everyone's information private.

There are no right answers, but thinking about your own intentions will help you select options that best suit your needs.

What will you read next?

There are a few options, if your book group members don't have the physical books already in their hands: 1.) Have the group discuss other books they are currently reading so you cover more than one book in your discussion. 2.) You can find accessible eBooks with enough copies for a book group through one of the sources listed below.

How to choose accessible books:

[Hoopla](#) - The library has access to "pay per use" eBooks (the library pays, not the patrons!) through Hoopla, which means simultaneous use is possible. We advise that you browse this collection and choose a short list of titles since the number of options would likely be overwhelming for members of your book group. If you're having trouble picking, [this list](#) suggests a handful of "book club friendly" offerings. Hoopla items can be viewed in a web browser or in their app.

[Overdrive](#) - The library has access to a limited number of "simultaneous use" eAudiobooks. Several of these items would be excellent book club picks. These eAudiobooks can be listened to in a web browser or using either of the Libby or Overdrive apps.

[Project Gutenberg](#) - There are many classic books that are now out of copyright and are available at websites like [Project Gutenberg](#)! Again, there is an overwhelming number of books to choose from, so you may prefer to prepare a shortlist in advance. Or go through their list of [top 100 downloaded books](#), where you'll find many recognizable classics. Project Gutenberg books can be downloaded in a variety of formats and should be compatible with eReader apps such as Books (for iOS devices) and Kindle (platform agnostic).

How to contact your existing group:

- Do you have an email list?
- Phone numbers?
- Branch Facebook page
- Branch newsletter

How to recruit people for a new "online only" group:

- Reach out to regular patrons by email or phone
- Branch Facebook page
- Ask Communications to put information on city-wide Twitter and the library homepage, or in the monthly newsletter

Platforms:

These are free or have a free basic level. You will need to determine which will work best for you and your book group members, and it's recommended that you try them out first before you go live with a book group. Contact your coworkers and see if they would like to help you out! There may be other options out there that have not been included on this list. These are good options that we know of right now.

[Survey Monkey](#) - This is a great way to poll group members about where they want to meet or what books they want to read next.

[Goodreads](#) - Create a Goodreads group, where you can poll your members and have a forum/text discussion, with you as the moderator. This has no phone or video aspect.

[Zoom](#) - A video/chat conferencing service where you can host up to 100 people, but your meetings can only last up to 40 minutes with a free account. There is an app for this. The library has now purchased several Zoom accounts, so speak to a supervisor or with IT to see about using Zoom for your book group.

[Google Meet](#) - Free video/chat conferencing via your computer or as an app.

[Jitsi Meet](#) - Video/chat conferencing without an account. Put in the name of your group meeting and it opens up a conference call right then and there. Works on their website and as an app.

[Free Conference Call](#) - It sets up a phone number and a passcode members would use to connect in. This is over the phone, with no video aspect.

[Facebook](#) - if you have a following on your branch Facebook page, utilize it! You can hold a text-based group discussion in the comments of a post.

[Uberconference](#) - Host a video/chat conference with up to 50 people for up to 5 hours. (The free account is usually up to 10 people and up to 45 minutes, but because of the virus, they've done a temporary upgrade.) It can support both video chat from a computer and audio calls from any telephone, making it even easier to use for groups who may not have access to a computer with a microphone or the internet. *Jay Hamilton recommends Uberconference.