WLG 334

West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

How to Start a Book Club: If Oprah Can Do It So Can You!

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Educational Objectives

1. Learn steps in starting a successful book club.
2. Learn how to make your book club fun and stress-free.
3. Learn tips about using your Kindle, Nook, or electronic reader.

Starting a book club

What could be better than sharing a great book with a group of friends who have read it, too? Starting your own book club is a great way to share your love of reading in a fun way. Being in a book club enhances the reading experience. It allows you to see other people's perspectives, hear different opinions, and read a variety of books. It is important to have an open-mind about the books the group will read. The fun comes from reading things you would not normally read and getting out of your comfort zone.

Book clubs are supposed to be fun and stress-free; however, there are a few ground rules to establish in order to be successful. First, find people whom you enjoy talking to and have a shared love of reading. Once you have a small group of people, you can begin organizing your club.

Questions your group will need to answer

- **What do you want to get out of the book club?** It could serve as a night out or a social gathering, it could be a way to learn about new books, or it may be the discussion and hearing other's views.
- **What type of people will make up the club?** People who love to read! A neighborhood group, a group of current friends, a library group, or putting a flier at the store to find new friends. Talk about your book club to others and ask them to join. Diversity in your club is good!

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- **What types of books will your club read?** Does it matter or will each book be different? Will the group read one particular genre – all fiction or all non-fiction? Or will you rotate genres?
- **How many members will you have?** It is important to have enough members to have a good discussion but not too many causing side-conversations to occur. Be sure to consider how many people your selected meeting location will hold. Four to twelve members is recommended.

- **What are the logistics?** How often will the club meet – monthly or bi-monthly? What day and time? How long? If someone can't make it, will you reschedule? Where will the meetings be held – rotate between houses, the library, a local restaurant? With busy schedules, it's important to stick to the date your club set. Changing dates for one, means changing dates for all and will get your club off track. Your club should be large enough to handle one or two people not being able to make it. If you meet monthly, it keeps the book club on a tight schedule. Depending on how fast your members read, you may want to schedule every other month. This also allows time to read a book outside of the book club selection. Sometimes people don't finish the book or can't make a meeting, that's okay – life sometimes gets in the way. However, if it becomes a continual habit, you will want to have guidelines set to handle this.
- **Who will chair the group?** Will one person be in charge or will the responsibilities be shared among the group? Although a book club is about having fun, it is also a group that needs to stay on track.

With any club, leadership is important to keep people focused and moving forward; however, some responsibilities can be shared. Who will make the decisions if a date needs changed? Who will send reminders of meetings? Who will lead meetings when the group needs to change things? Have guidelines but remember it is okay to change the rules. Have a 5-minute discussion to check on how the group is doing and if something needs changed. This allows the group to move forward and keep attendance high.
- **Will your book club have a name?** Naming your book club can be fun. It is not necessary but can give your group a sense of belonging.

  Sample names for book clubs:

  – A Novel Bunch
  – As the Pages Turn
  – Book Worms
  – Babes with Books
  – Chapter Chatters
  – Chapter Chicks
  – Page Turners
  – G.R.E.A.T.: Girlfriends Reading, Educating, Achieving, Together
  – My Wine Club Has A Book Problem!
  – Reading Between the Lines

- **Who will lead the book discussions?** The leader of the group, the person who chose the book, or one of the members who wants that responsibility?

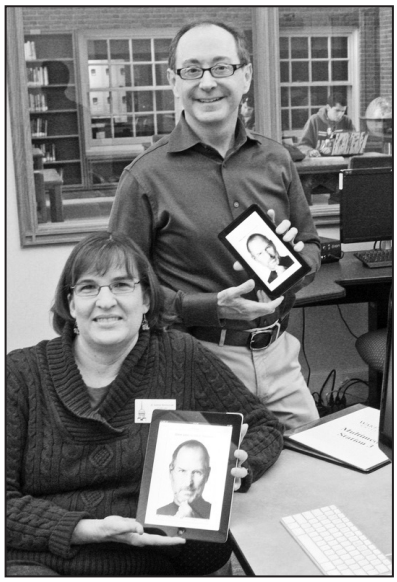
A sample schedule for a club meeting: Eat and socialize for 30 to 45 minutes. Then, call the book club to order and begin discussing the book for 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the book. Two hours should be plenty of time for the entire meeting.

- **Who chooses the books?** Each member reads the same book, then the group discusses it. Does someone each month choose for the next month? Does the group select six to twelve books for the year? Do you put book titles in a hat and draw for the next month?
- **Finding discussion questions?** If the book has them, use them. But what if it doesn't have questions? There are many websites that have discussion questions. Go to an Internet search engine (such as Google) and type in the title of the book and discussion questions. For example, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* discussion questions." Discussion questions help the group stay focused on the topic.
- **Cost of books?** Do you want to set a limit? Are you going to order the books online or go to a bookstore? You can also get books from the WV Library Commission. They have a list of books that are available to book clubs. You just pick the ones your club wants to read, and they will mail them to you. The club just has to pick up the cost of returning the books.
- **Will there be food?** If there are refreshments, who will prepare them – the host for the meeting or will it be potluck? If you choose to rotate houses and the hostess is responsible for the food and drink, it means each individual is only responsible a couple times a year. Sometimes, you can prepare food based on the theme of the book. Don't stress yourself. This should be fun.

If the book comes out as a movie, go as a group! Whether you are looking for like-minded lovers of the classics or just an excuse to chat with friends, getting a book club together should be fun and easy.

Using electronic readers (Kindle, Nook, iPad)

In today's world, electronic readers or e-readers are becoming more of a norm than the hard copy. Some people still love to hold the book in their hands and flip pages; however, others enjoy the convenience of a small device that's easy to hold, bookmarks automatically, and keeps all their books in one place. It is a personal choice and whatever you are most comfortable using.



When choosing an e-reader, be sure to explore the different brands' features in order to get the one that best fits your needs. Some of the most popular are the iPad mini, Kindle Fire, Nook, and Kobo. Each has a list of pros and cons, so do your research. Ask others what they like and dislike. E-readers also range in price, so take into consideration the price of the e-reader, features included, and where you can download books.

Advantages of an e-reader

- Underline or highlight passages you may want to keep. This is great for noting places you want to discuss.
- Good for those who have trouble holding a book open due to arthritis or carpel tunnel. E-readers are small lightweight devices that turn pages with a swipe or click of a button. They also have the option to enlarge the font size for easier reading.
- Free downloadable books. Some classic books are free, because their copyrights have expired. There are other free downloads as well.
- E-readers hold hundreds of books. When selecting an e-reader, be sure and check the size of the memory. You can store all your books in one place and always have your library with you!

Tips for leaders

- Have a list of books available for members (WVCEOS Suggested Reading List) or from the local library.
- If possible have a couple of e-readers so that members can see what they look like. Ask friends or family to borrow theirs to display.

References

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2013

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