



# **Designing Better Meetings**

Using Science to Enhance  
Debate, Discussions and  
Retention

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[RulesDoneRight.com](http://RulesDoneRight.com)

# DESIGN BETTER MEETINGS

Using Science to Enhance Debate, Discussions and Retention

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“Meeting science is the study of what happens before, during, and after meetings in the workplace. It is a look at the psychological, sociological, and anthropological underpinnings and consequences of meetings.”

-- The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science, 2015

## DESIGN:

According to Wikipedia, the term design means “A design is a plan or specification for the construction of an object or system or for the implementation of an activity or process, or the result of that plan or specification in the form of a prototype, product or process.” It is design that makes the difference between that which is useful and that which is junk. When you conceive something as being designed, you believe that something has been given appropriate and reasonable consideration with forethought and research being considered in its creation.

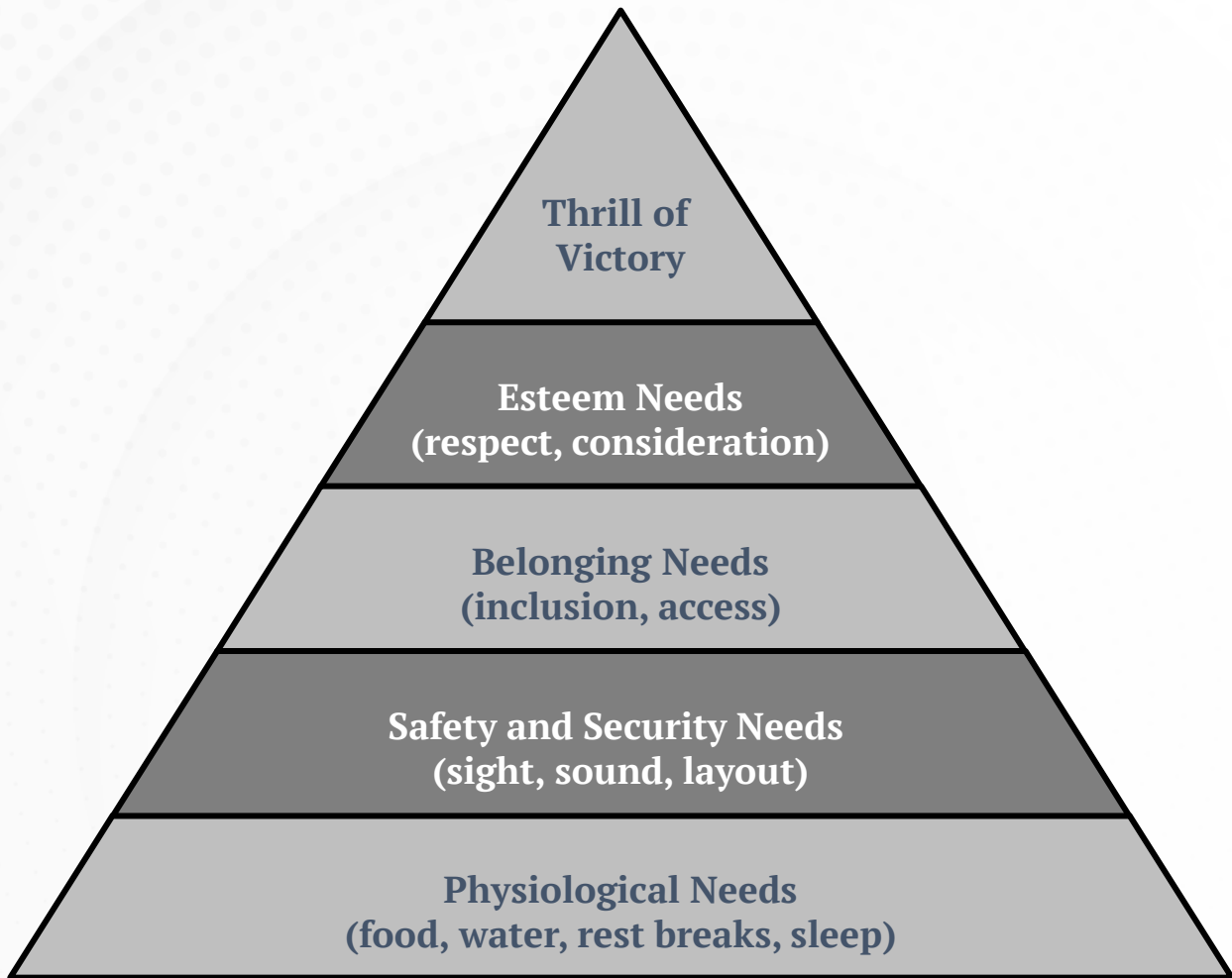
## MEETING DESIGN:

<b>PURPOSE</b>	Is the purpose of the meeting clear? What is the anticipated outcome?
<b>LOGISTICS</b>	Where will the meeting take place? Start and End times for the meeting Has advanced notice been sent and is it complete? Will meeting minutes be taken? What will the room seating arrangements be? Is lighting or sound systems required?
<b>AGENDA</b>	Is the agenda used to keep meetings on track? Does the agenda include adequate detail provided to set expectations and help members prepare? Has the agenda been shared with sufficient notice?
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	Is the number of invites reasonable? Are the right participants invited? Is the reason for each participant's attendance clear (e.g., a point of view, a need to know, the authority to make a decision, or useful information that will shape the topic and drive closure)? Is debate and discussion to be part of the meeting? Are all opinions valued?
<b>GROUND RULES</b>	What are the meeting rules? Is this clear to all attendees? Do you refrain from recapping what the team has covered if someone comes late to the meeting? How will members handle computer and phones? (e.g., agree to turn devices to mute? Step outside the room for calls that must be answered immediately)?
<b>FACILITATION</b>	Are introductions required? Is the purpose of the meeting reviewed? Are roles and responsibilities reviewed (e.g., timekeeper, recorder, and facilitator)? Is the meeting agenda reviewed? Are group norms and ground rules established? Are all agenda items discussed?

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## Hierarchy of Meetings Needs



Needs	
Esteem	Respect of the Participants Meeting Purposes and Agendas
Belonging	Accommodation Maintaining Focus
Safety and Security	Room Layout Lighting and Sounds
Physiological	Food and Drinks Appropriate Breaks Meeting Times

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## BIGGEST MEETING ISSUES:

1 **No Agenda**

Avoid missing or recycled agendas. All agendas should express a specific purpose and desired outcome of the meeting.

2 **No Clear Meeting Organizer**

Meetings called by staff personnel or calendar programs. Who called the meeting and who is setting the purpose of the meeting?

3 **No Minutes are taken at the meeting**

The lack of meeting usually results in conflicts about the past and failing outcomes in the future. Specify someone to take minutes.

4 **Meetings don't start or end on time**

Start and End meetings at odd times, like 11:07am for a 42 minute meeting. This indicates that start times are exact, not suggestions.

5 **One-Way Communication**

Information Sharing meetings can often be done using methods other than meetings such as email, texts and common rooms. Ties up lots of time for simple information transfer.

6 **Non-participation by the Attendees**

Unprepared attendees due to poor agendas, or unmotivated to participate. Review hierarchy of needs.

7 **No clear outcome from the meeting**

Publish an agenda with clear SMART outcomes then follow-up from the meeting minutes

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## AVOID SUGAR AND FATS

Excessive sugar and fats can lead to the dreaded “carb coma”. An effect which leaves the attendee with low blood sugar and facing an afternoon slump.

## ALTERNATIVE CHOICES

- Avoid any all-you-can-eat options
- Make Menu Changes:

Replace	With
Soft Drinks, Coffee	Juice, Water
Cookies, Cakes	Fruit with Yogurt
Crackers and Bread	Whole Grain Equivalents
Chips and Dip / Salsa	Vegetables with Hummus Popcorn
Candy	Whole Grain Granola Bars
Pizzas, Sub Sandwiches	Low Fat Wraps



## THE EFFECT

Use foods that are “brain-friendly”

- Better concentration
- Less restlessness or sleepiness
- Better moods

Resulting in better, more efficient meetings!

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# Sample Menus

## Beverages

- Pitchers of water
- 100% fruit or vegetable juice or 100% juice diluted with water or seltzer, with modest-sized cups or containers (less than 8 ounces)
- Beverages with 40 calories or less per container: water, seltzers, flavored waters, diet fruit juices, diet sodas, diet iced tea
- Coffee—regular and decaf with low-fat milk instead of half and half
- Tea—unsweetened, iced or hot, with lemon and low-fat milk instead of half and half
- Low-fat (1%) or non-fat milk and/or unsweetened calcium and vitamin D-fortified soymilk
- **Superior Healthy Meeting:** no sugar-sweetened beverages (includes soft drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks, energy drinks, and all other beverages sweetened with high fructose corn syrup, sugar, honey, or agave syrup)

## Breakfast

- Always serve fruit. Cut fresh fruit into slices or chop it into a fruit salad (bananas, apples, oranges, grapefruit, melon, etc.) to make easier to eat
- Oatmeal with cinnamon, nuts, and dried or fresh fruit
- Low-fat or non-fat plain yogurt with fresh berries, bananas, or other cut fruit
- Whole grain cereal low in sugar (lower than 6g/serving) and high in fiber
- Fiber-rich, whole grain breads – small whole grain bagel (3 ½ inch diameter) or full size cut in quarters, whole wheat English muffins, whole wheat toast
- Spreads: peanut butter, other nut butters, low-fat cream cheese, hummus
- Scrambled eggs, egg whites, or egg substitute with vegetables (bell peppers, spinach, onions, mushrooms, tomatoes)
- Breakfast burrito: scrambled eggs, egg whites, or egg substitute, onions, peppers, black beans, salsa, whole grain tortilla

## What is a Whole Grain?

**Examples of whole grains:** whole wheat, whole corn, oats, barley, quinoa, sorghum, spelt, and brown rice

**How to identify whole grains:** Check if “whole grain” is the only grain ingredient; grains with whole grain as the first ingredient on the ingredients list are also good choices.



# Sample Menus: Lunch and Dinner

## Boxed Lunches

When ordering a boxed lunch, choose a salad or sandwich made with lots of veggies and whole grain bread or wrap. Ask the restaurant to substitute fruit for the cookie and chips, and provide water or seltzer instead of soda. Have dressings or other condiments on the side.

## Sandwich Suggestions

- Use whole grain bread or whole grain wraps
- Lean meats, poultry, seafood, and non-meat proteins: sliced turkey, chicken, fish (tuna, shrimp, salmon), egg, tofu, hummus, or bean spread
- Any vegetable: lettuce, raw spinach, tomatoes, bell peppers (fresh or roasted), cucumbers, avocados, artichoke hearts, onions, mushrooms, radish, shredded carrots, or cabbage

## Main Dishes

- Broiled, baked, grilled, poached, sautéed, or roasted lean meats, poultry, seafood, or tofu in appropriate portion sizes (see portion sizes section on page 17)
- Bell peppers or tomatoes stuffed with brown rice and vegetables
- Whole grain pasta with tomato-based sauce and vegetables
- Main dish salads (for lunch events)

## Limit Cheese

Most cheese is high in saturated fat and sodium and is calorically dense. Substitute extra veggies on your sandwich instead of a slice of cheese, leave it out of pasta dishes, and don't offer cheese platter appetizers. If you are concerned about calcium, offer low-fat and non-fat milk.

## Healthier Condiments and Dressings

Condiments and dressings often have lots of sodium, sugar, or fat. Serve them on the side. Try mustard, hummus, or chutney for spreads on sandwiches. For salad dressings, offer oil and vinegar or lower-fat versions.

## Snacks

- Sliced fruit: melon, kiwis, oranges, apples, pineapple, peaches
- Easy to eat (and peel) fruit: bananas, grapes, berries, clementines, plums
- Vegetable tray with hummus
- Pepper strips and cucumber slices with salsa
- Dried fruit (no sugar added)
- Unsalted peanuts, almonds, walnuts, pistachios, cashews with fruit, sunflower seeds, or pumpkin seeds
- Plain yogurt with berries

## Side Dishes

- Mixed greens and assorted vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers, shredded carrots, peppers)
- Spinach salad with mandarin oranges and toasted almonds
- Roasted vegetables (carrots, broccoli, brussels sprouts, squash, beets)
- Fruit salad
- Brown rice, whole grain pasta/ couscous, or quinoa with dried fruit and/or vegetables
- Black beans
- Curried lentils
- Vegetable platter: carrot sticks, celery, broccoli, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, snap peas with hummus





# Swappable Items

Adapted from University of Minnesota Guidelines

BEVERAGES	
CHOOSE...	INSTEAD OF...
Water (plain or flavored, carbonated or not, with no sugar), coffee or tea, 100% fruit or vegetable juices	Soda or fruit-flavored drinks
Low-fat or non-fat milk	Whole, 2% milk, or half and half

## BREAKFAST

CHOOSE...	INSTEAD OF...
100% juice	Juice drinks
Fruit, fresh or canned in water, juice, or light syrup	Fruits in heavy syrup
Low-fat yogurt with less than 30 g sugar/8 oz	Regular high-sugar yogurt
Small whole grain bagels – 3-1/2" or smaller	Regular-sized, refined grain bagels
Small or mini muffins – 2-1/2" or smaller	Regular or large muffins
Small whole grain bagels or muffins, low-fat granola bars	Croissants, doughnuts, sweet rolls, pastries
Toppings of peanut butter, almond butter, low-fat cream cheese, hummus, tub margarine	Butter, full-fat cream cheese, stick margarine
Unsweetened whole grain cereals	Sweetened cereals and refined grain cereals
Whole grain waffles or French toast	Waffles or French toast made from white bread



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## LUNCHES AND DINNERS



CHOOSE...	INSTEAD OF...
Salads with lower-fat dressings on the side	Salads with added dressing
Lower-fat, lower sodium salad dressing	Regular salad dressings
Soups made with vegetable puree or non-fat milk or vegetable based soups	Soups made with cream or half and half
Whole grain pasta salads with light vinaigrette	Pasta salads made with mayonnaise
Sandwiches on whole grain breads	Sandwiches on croissants or white bread
Lean meats, poultry, fish, tofu (3g fat/oz)	High-fat and fried meats, processed meats, poultry with skin, oil-packed or fried fish
Roasted or baked potatoes topped with Greek yogurt/low-fat sour cream or vegetables	Baked potatoes with butter, sour cream, and bacon bits or French fries
Roasted, sautéed, or grilled veggies with herbs	Cooked vegetables in cream sauce or butter
Vegetable plate with hummus	Bread basket with butter
Whole grain bread or rolls with olive oil	Croissants or white rolls with butter
Desserts with lower calories: fresh fruit, low-fat ice cream and frozen yogurt, sherbet, sorbet, angel food cake with fruit	Desserts with higher saturated fat and calories: ice cream, cheesecake, pies, cream puffs, cake, pastries

# Swappable Items

Adapted from University of Minnesota Guidelines

## RECEPTIONS



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CHOOSE...	INSTEAD OF...
Fresh vegetables, cut up and served with low-fat dressing, salsa, or hummus	Tempura or deep fat-fried vegetables or cheese platters
Cut up fresh fruit	Fruit tarts, pie, cobbler, pastries
Grilled or broiled chicken skewers without skin	Fried chicken tenders
Miniature meatballs made with poultry	Large meatballs made of red meat, meatballs served in gravy or high-fat sauces
Broiled or poached seafood: shrimp, salmon, scallops, oysters, clams	Deep fat-fried seafood, seafood in high-fat sauces
Miniature pizzas made with whole wheat crust, tomato sauce, part-skim mozzarella cheese (with less cheese), and vegetables	Pizza with pepperoni, Italian sausage, or other high-fat meats and a thick layer of cheese
Vietnamese summer rolls, fresh, not fried	Egg rolls
Whole grain crackers (5g fat or less/serving)	Crackers made with refined flour
"Lite" popcorn (5g fat or less/serving)	Potato chips or tortilla chips
Lower calorie vegetable-based dips (e.g. salsa, hummus, or bean-based dips)	Dips made from regular mayonnaise, sour cream, cream cheese, or cheese sauce

## SNACKS



CHOOSE...	INSTEAD OF...
Cut up fruit	Cookies
Cut up vegetables	Chips
Whole grain crackers (5g fat or less/serving)	Crackers made with refined grains
"Lite" popcorn (5g fat or less/serving)	Potato chips
Plain yogurt with berries	Ice cream bars
Whole grain granola bars (with less than 10g sugar/bar)	Candy
Fruit with yogurt dip	Cupcakes, snack cakes
Vegetables with hummus, low-fat dressing, or salsa	Chips and dip
Fruit cups in water, juice, or light syrup	Pudding cups

## Choosing a Meeting Location

- Make sure that the meeting location has proper lighting, safe sidewalks, and visible pedestrian signs.
- Select hotels that have fitness facilities, and negotiate the cost into the contract with the hotel so that attendees have free access.

## Pre-Meeting Materials Should Include:

- Information about places to walk in the meeting area.
- Maps of nearby attractions and walking trails.
- Information about hotel (or nearby) fitness facilities.
- Details about meeting activities and activity breaks and appropriate attire.

## Setting the Agenda

- Include physical activity on the agenda so participants can plan accordingly.
  - Choose a motivating individual to lead activity sessions.
  - Schedule 15-minute breaks in the morning and afternoon.
- Provide time in the agenda for attendees to do morning or evening workouts.
- Leave time at lunch for physical activity.

## Exercise During Meetings

- Have a dynamic person facilitate physical activity at the beginning of each break or use a video (like Instant Recess).
- Let people know it is acceptable to stand if they want to during the meeting/conference.
- Incorporate exercise equipment into meeting room space (see page 22 for suggestions).
- Place equipment in your organization's conference room, encourage hotels to purchase, or ship it to your conference.

## Ideas for Activities

- Active applause: urge guests to stand up and clap whenever applause is given
- Walk around the room
- "Walk and talk" sessions—encouraging participants to do walking meeting and networking
- Meeting musical chairs: every 20 minutes everyone should get up and switch chairs with someone

## Tips for leading activity breaks

- Make activities fun and safe
- Allow each person to move at his or her own speed
- Make sure there is enough space for the activities
- The activities should not be overly strenuous or cause people to perspire

- "Sit down if..." with health messages (e.g. "Sit down if you didn't eat fruit yet today")
- Simon Says

## Simple Chair Exercises

- Chair twist (grab one side of the chair while turning in the opposite direction)
- Toe raises
- Knee lifts
- Arms reaching over head
- Arm circles



# Physical Activity

Adapted from the Alabama Department of Health Guidelines

## Exercise During Meetings (continued)

Ideas for Activities (continued):

### Stretches

- Calf stretch
- Upper body
- Back
- Calf raises
- Neck/head circles
- Quads
- Deep breathing

### Small Movements

- Arm circles
- Marching in place
- Side steps
- Side-to-side arm swings
- Arm reaches

## Fun giveaways

- Flash drives with meeting materials loaded onto it
- BPA-free water bottles
- Pedometers
- Potted plant kit/vegetable seeds
- Reusable grocery tote bags
- Tupperware containers
- Assorted tea
- Gym bag
- Fanny pack
- Flashlight
- Lunch container
- Small backpack
- Pot holder
- Frisbee
- Baseball cap
- Visor
- Thermos
- Measuring cups or spoons
- Cutting board

## Healthy Prizes (for raffles)

- Fitness club membership
- Gift certificates for sporting goods store or grocery store
- Athletic shoes
- Workout clothing
- Dance lessons
- Jump rope
- Hand weights
- Fitness book
- Cooking utensils
- Cutlery sets
- T-shirt

*Put the logo for the sponsoring organization or a health message on giveaways and prizes*

## Participants with Disabilities

- Give participants the opportunity to inform you of any special physical access needs ahead of the meeting or when registering for the meeting.
- Listen to individual's needs and do not prejudice their requirements.
- Adapt activities to the situations—minor modifications such as slowing down the pace can be all that is needed or stretching while seated vs. standing.

## Exercise Outside of Meetings/Sessions

- Encourage people to take the stairs instead of the elevator—point out stair locations at beginning of meetings and breaks.
  - Post signs directing people to stairwells outside of meeting rooms and near the elevators.
- Organize a walking group during breaks/ encourage people to go walking.

- Arrange for early morning or evening fitness classes—aerobics, yoga, tai chi.
- Provide time in the agenda for people to get in a morning or evening workout.
- For an overnight conference/meeting, encourage people to walk to dinner/other events.
- Offer dancing during dinners or evening receptions.
- Organize outings to local attractions like zoos, museums, farmers' markets, parks, etc.
- Provide incentives for being active:
  - Hand out forms for participants to track their minutes of physical activity—give prizes to those who are active at least 30 minutes each day.
  - Give participants a step counter and encourage everyone to walk at least 10,000 steps every day—give people who meet the goal prizes.



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## Principles for Better Communication:

1

### Coherence Principle

People learn better when extraneous words, pictures and sounds are excluded rather than included. Keep to the point and minimize distractions.

2

### Signaling Principle

People learn better when cues that highlight the organization of the essential material are added. Use colors, pointers and highlights to help indicate the most important material.

3

### Redundancy Principle

People learn better from graphics and narration than from graphics, narration and on-screen text. Either narration or text but not both, only one source of language.

4

### Spatial Contiguity Principle

People learn better when corresponding words and pictures are presented near rather than far from each other on the page or screen. Keep notes and labels near to the item being referred to.

5

### Temporal Contiguity Principle

People learn better when corresponding words and pictures are presented simultaneously rather than successively. Language and Visuals can be processed at the same time.

6

### Segmenting Principle

People learn better from a multimedia lesson presented in learner-controlled segments rather than a continuous unit. Break into small segments and allow the user to step to the next segments.

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7

## Pre-Training Principle

People learn better from a multimedia lesson when students know names and behaviors of system components. Explain any jargon before using the jargon.

8

## Modality Principle

People learn better when words are presented as narration rather than as on-screen text. Verbal Language is used directly, while printed text takes additional steps.

9

## Multimedia Principle

People learn better from words and pictures than from words alone. Use pictures and don't feel the slides with text.

10

## Personalization Principle

People learn better from multimedia lessons when words are in conversational style rather than a formal style. Be friendly and talk as talking to a friend.

11

## Voice Principle

People learn better when the narration in multimedia lessons is spoken in a friendly human voice rather than a machine voice. No automated voices!

12

## Embodiment

People learn better when the instructor expresses facial expression and normal hand gestures. A static picture of the speaker hurts the learning, use a live person.

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## Possible Arrangements

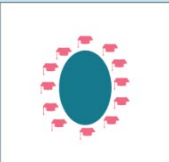
Consider:

- Comfort
  - Seating Density
  - Visibility
  - Human Factors
- Information Flow:
  - One-Way from a Presenter
  - Two-Way between Presenter and Audience
  - Multi-way among Audience Members
  - Multi-way among Audience Subgroups
- Technology


### Classroom Seating Arrangements




Traditional



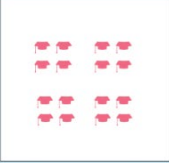
Roundtable



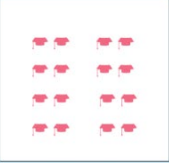
Horseshoe or Semicircle



Double Horseshoe



Group Pods



Pair Pods

Yale Poorvu Center

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## Squares

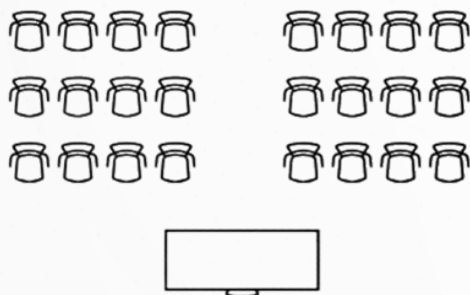
### Used Primarily When:

Presentations, Lectures and Performances

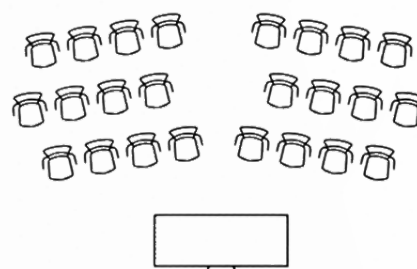
Large groups with one-way communication

Advantages	Disadvantages
Holds the most people in the least space	Discourages Audience Interaction
Puts the Focus on the presenter / chair	Poor Visibility in the Back
Minimizes inter-audience conflict	Favored Positions (Front and Main Aisle)

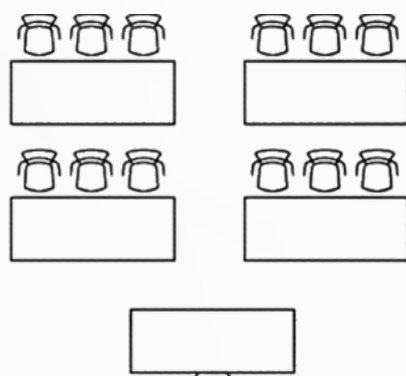
### Theater Seating



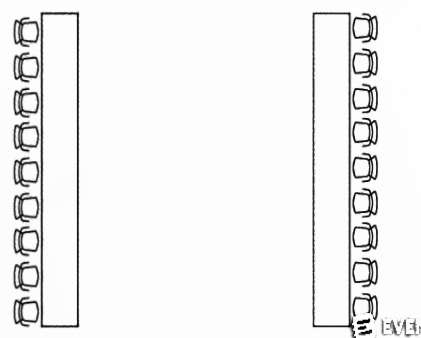
### Herringbone Seating



### Classroom Seating



### Runway Seating





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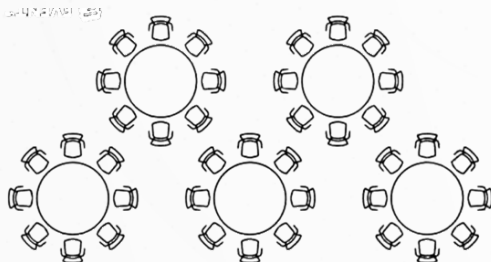
## Pods

### Used Primarily When:

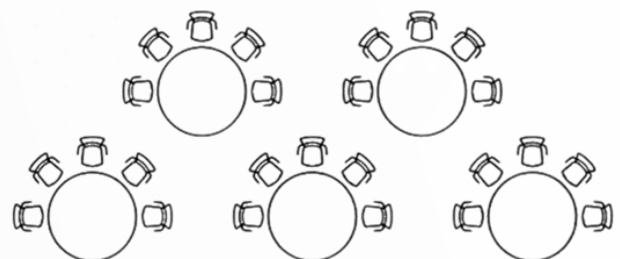
Training Groups Using Breakouts  
Serving Meals

Advantages	Disadvantages
Holds the most people in the least space	Some can end up with their back to the presenter
Puts the Focus on the presenter / chair	Distractions abound, Focus on subgroup
Allows for Audience Interaction	Favored Positions

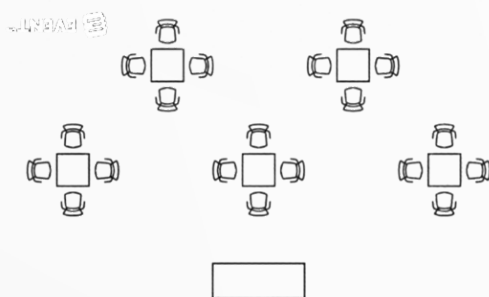
### Banquet Seating



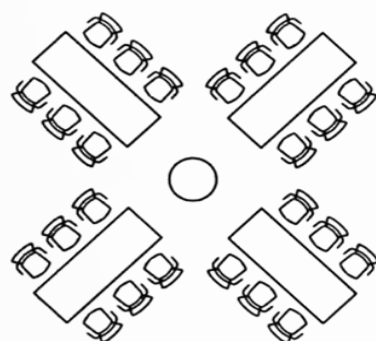
### Cabaret Seating



### Study Pods



### X-Formation



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## Circles

### Used Primarily When:

Wanting to Encourage Member Interaction

Committees and Boards

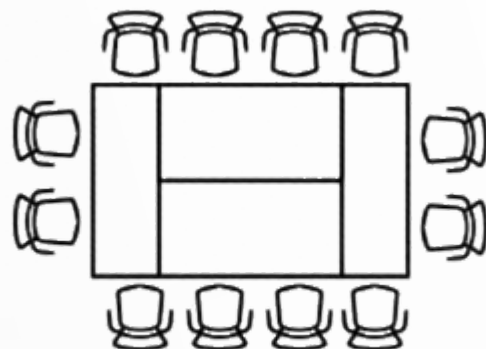
Among Equal Members

Advantages	Disadvantages
Equality of Positions Everyone can equal interact with others	No Power Seat for Presiding Officer  Lacks positional indicators used for social constraints (i.e. who goes when and next)

Circle Seating



Boardroom Seating



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## Semi-Circles

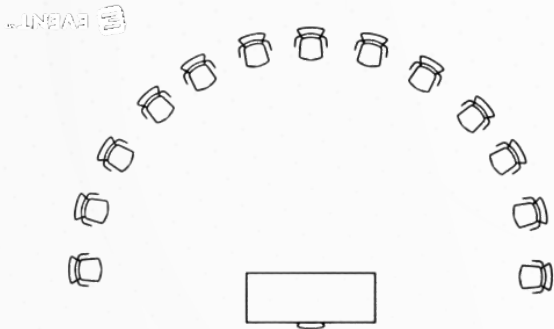
Used Primarily When:

Facilitated Discussions

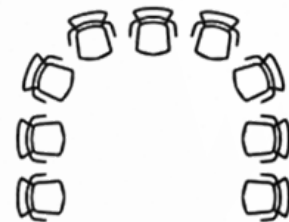
Small Group Discussions

Advantages	Disadvantages
Puts the Focus on the presenter / chair	Can be distracting
Equality of Members outside of presenter.	Presenter can lose control of meeting due to audience interactions
No Backs to Presenter	

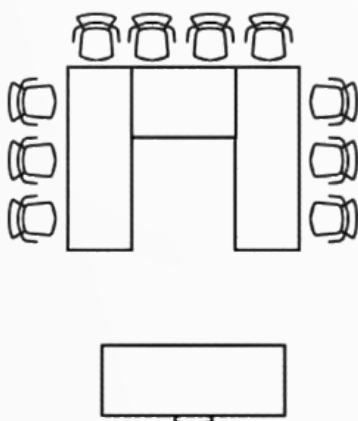
Semi-Circle



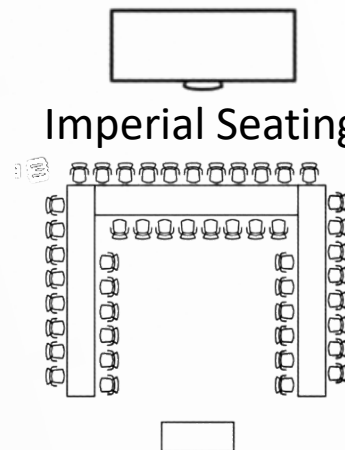
Horseshoe



U-Shaped Seating



Imperial Seating

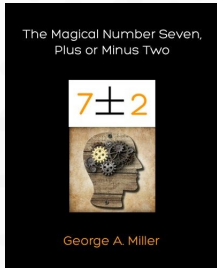


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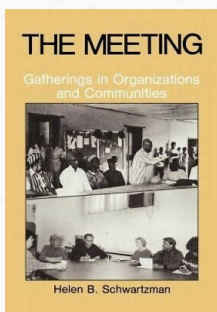
## References:



The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two:

<https://www.all-about-psychology.com/george-a-miller.html>

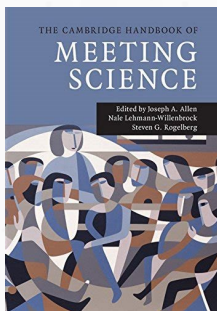
George A. Miller, 1955



The Meeting: Gatherings in Organizations and Community

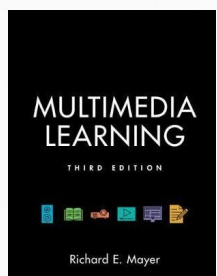
Helen Swartzmann, Professor Northwestern University, 1989

[Her study on a non-profit mental health organization and their meetings]



The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science, 2015

[ textbook style: 800 pages of studies and results from research in meeting science]



Multimedia Learning, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (be sure to read this edition, or later)

Richard E. Mayer, 2020

[A must on hybrid and online teaching methods]

National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity: Healthy Meeting Toolkit

<https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/healthy-business/resources/national-alliance-for-nutrition-and-activity-healthy-meeting-toolkit>

# DESIGN BETTER MEETINGS

Using Science to Enhance Debate, Discussions and Retention

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## Pursue Better Meetings

According to a 2015 study by the University of North Carolina, meeting organizers rate 75% of their meetings in a positive sense as being effective. Meanwhile, those attend those same meetings give only a 33% positive rate. There is obviously a large discrepancy between how those who run meetings see meetings and those who attend meetings see them. It is clear that meeting organizers everywhere should consider how their meetings are designed. Are they considering the needs and desires of the attendees or just the organizers. By considering the room layout, the facilities and services, the needs of the attendees may be met at a higher level which will result in improved values in the meetings across the board.

A well planned meeting can result in improved outcomes for everyone.