

# A Quick Guide to Small Group Facilitation

Created for Residence Life by University Ministry

1. Choose a topic of conversation that's interesting and relevant (and something you yourself would voluntarily show up to talk about).
2. Decide how you will bring everybody up to speed on the topic. Will you see a movie or presentation beforehand? Or perhaps read a book passage while you're together in the group?
3. Prepare for the small group by gathering all materials (handouts, books, movies, etc.) and making a list of talking points or questions you can refer to if the conversation gets stuck.
4. Be thoughtful in the way you choose and arrange the meeting space. Darker lighting encourages deeper reflection, and seating everybody at the same eye level makes people feel at ease (i.e. everyone sits in a chair or everyone sits on the floor).
5. Find your own unique way to begin each small group, depending on the topic of conversation. Perhaps an opening prayer would be appropriate, or perhaps it would make sense to begin with a book passage. The most important thing is to establish a reflective tone for the session.
6. At the beginning of the small group, depending on the topic of conversation, reinforce the importance of confidentiality and trust. Create a safe and caring atmosphere that encourages people to share.
7. Silence can be one of the most profound experiences in a small group. Discern whether your small group's silences are productive (i.e. everyone is simply reflective) or distracted (i.e. they are not taking the group seriously). If they are productive, resist the urge to speak out. If they are distracted, ask a question to move the conversation in a new direction.
8. If one or two people are dominating a small group conversation, step in and gently remind them that every person needs a chance to speak during the session. If a person is unusually silent, ask him or her (courteously) if he or she would like to share.
9. Maintain boundaries in the conversation. If the dialogue becomes too personal or too off-topic, gently steer the conversation back onto your theme.
10. End each small group with a prayer or ritual (perhaps including member participation) that concludes the conversation.

**Do's and Don'ts:** Do encourage participation, do attentively listen, do ask open ended questions, do be genuine and warm-hearted, do seek to understand, and do acknowledge sharing (i.e. say thanks or nod). Don't reassure, minimize or pretend to know how another person feels. Don't advocate, give advice or problem solve. And, unless you have a verified vision, don't speak or give advice on behalf of God.