

Own the Space: Tips for In-Person Room Set Up

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Consider these 3 goals for intentional room set up:

1. **Offer a sense of hospitality.** Learners feel a sense of safety and inclusion when it's clear that we've made an effort to ensure their comfort. We want them to enter the room and quickly feel at ease.
2. **Maximize dialogue.** Meaning is made in the dialogue between us. As such, I always consider how to set up and facilitate spaces that optimize this.
3. **Ensure a feeling of belonging.** Each learner needs to feel seen and heard, to know their ideas and stories are of value. A sense of belonging is a fundamental human need and contributes to the 'container' in which individuals can learn.

Tips to consider:

- **Prepare in advance.** It takes time and intention to plan how to use a space to maximize learning. Before you arrive, make notes on how you'll set up the space at key points.
- **Set up early.** It is important to be ready to greet people as they arrive and not be distracted by other things.
- **Clear the space of unnecessary clutter.** Ensure a tidy space as much as possible. Move extra furniture and debris out of the space, if necessary.
- **Decide where "the front" should be.** The goal is to ensure everyone can see each other and you. Feel free to rearrange the room if you think it will better serve the learning, You may even wish *not* to have a designated 'front' to encourage dialogue.
- **Arrange table groups.** Table groups are ideal for dialogue and focused work. However, even if the group is large and everyone needs to sit in rows, this should not discourage you from designing for dialogue between individuals or movement in the room.
- **Equip each table with supplies.** With dialogue usually comes the need to record thoughts, work or questions. Each table will need dark markers, Post-it notes, and other notetaking supplies and manipulatives to help some remain focused. Candy and chocolate can also help with energy levels.
- **Set up a circle of chairs.** Beginning and ending in a circle – especially in a multi-day event – can be especially powerful. It invites vulnerability and personal sharing that sitting at tables doesn't.
- **Ensure there is a clock.** Although you need to stay flexible for meaningful dialogue, you also need to ensure you offer the entire learning experience. If you're facilitating solo, it may be helpful to assign a timekeeper to help you stay on track.
- **Use multiple flip chart stands.** Having a stand at each table can be helpful for group work, especially if there is little free space on tables. They can offer group work around the room, in the hall or elsewhere. Moving flip chart stands side-by-side for the full group debrief can also be helpful when wall space is limited.