

# Online Book Clubs

Maxwell Memorial Library's Technology Class  
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## 0 Introduction

Often after you've read a book that you really enjoyed, you want to discuss it with other people who've also read it. That impulse has long been one of the motives people have had in forming or joining book discussion groups.

Maxwell has two fine groups that meet here monthly, but what if your niche reading isn't part of the focus of either group? Well, just like Facebook and other social media apps let you keep in touch with far-flung friends, there are sites on the Internet that host book discussion groups on all sorts of topics, eras, genres, authors, and so on.

We'll approach online book clubs from 2 angles:

1. Finding online discussion groups or forums that already exist and
2. Setting a club up from scratch.

## 1 Existing online discussion groups

### 1.1 Finding groups

There are many types of book clubs, both online and **IN REAL LIFE (IRL)**.

- Some focus on a particular genre:
  - For instance, Maxwell's **UNRAVELING YARNS BOOK CLUB** reads mysteries and books in related genres.
- Some are more general in what they read. They also might be more centered on the group than any particular sort of work that the members might choose to read together:
  - Maxwell's **BETWEEN THE LINES BOOK CLUB** reads from all genres.
  - C.P. Hoffman<sup>1</sup> mentions a group formed by people who went to college together but wanted to have a way of continuing to read some of the same things together.

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<sup>1</sup> Resources that I mention are listed (together with links to them) in the **RESOURCES** section (starting on page 4).

- Going the other direction, some groups are very specialized, something like an academic seminar:
  - One of the clubs hosted at Goodreads, [The Inklings](#), discusses only the works of **THE INKLINGS**, a group of Oxford-related authors from the 1930s to the 1960s that included J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams.
  - Some groups are devoted to an academic subject (history is popular with groups devoted to various sub-areas).

Here are some links to sites that offer already-established book discussion groups:

- [Goodreads](https://www.goodreads.com/group) at <https://www.goodreads.com/group>
- [Library Thing](https://www.librarything.com/groups) at <https://www.librarything.com/groups>
- [Online Book Club](https://onlinebookclub.org/) at <https://onlinebookclub.org/>

## 1.2 How do I join a group?

If you just want to **LURK**<sup>2</sup> in a group at any of the 3 sites above, you can click on the links for any discussion topics that look interesting. To join in the discussion, though, you'll first need to register with the website. Signing up is free at all 3 sites.<sup>3</sup>

For active participation, only Goodreads requires that you actually join the specific discussion group by clicking the **JOIN GROUP** button. In Library Thing, you only are required to click on **JOIN THIS GROUP** to join private groups. On the other hand, if you are going to participate in a group, it's good etiquette to join. Different groups will vary on whether or not a post introducing yourself to the group is expected, appreciated, or undesired (reading through old threads in the discussion will help you here).

Online Book Club is much less structured than the other 2, so once you find a forum (or, more likely, sub-forum) on a genre you're interested in, you can join in the discussion without any registration beyond the initial sign up with the site as a whole. Again, though, lurking first before posting can save you from embarrassment.

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2 **LURKING** is reading comments posted in the group without actively participating in the discussion.

It is generally considered a good idea to lurk for a while before posting to any forum or group on the internet so that you get a feel for the sense of the discussion before contributing your \$0.02. Even if you officially join the group immediately upon learning of it, lurking for a while before joining in will probably serve you well.

3 If you decide you want to use Library Thing to catalog your library and you catalog over 200 books, you'll need a paid membership.

## 2 Setting a book club up from scratch

C.P. Hoffman has a rather thorough article about setting a book club up. This section will summarize some of their suggestions.

### 2.1 Structuring the club

Some of what goes into organizing an online book club will be the same as what goes into organizing one IRL:

- Deciding on group foci (if any)
- Determining how the books to read will be chosen
- Other ground rules

Mx. Hoffman's opinion is that an online book club will probably have to have a more authoritarian structure than an IRL club would have unless the club's members already know each other pretty well from extensive face-to-face cooperation (here they give the example of the college classmates who wanted to keep in touch and maintain some level of commonality in their intellectual lives).

That authoritarian nature need not be capital-A Authoritarian, though. The core of the group that winds up making decisions should still take the various desires of the group's members into account when making decisions about what to read or what general direction the group takes. It's just that the kind of egalitarian anarchy that an IRL club might have might not work as well online.

### 2.2 Structuring meetings (or not)

One of the advantages of an online club is that it need not have a fixed time for discussion. Just like in an asynchronous online class or on a social media platform, discussion of the current book can take place at any and all times over the course of the month (or whatever period the group uses) rather than just for a fixed hour-and-a-half, in-person meeting.

This textual, asynchronous end of the spectrum also can serve to include people who are uncomfortable in IRL group settings but who enjoy interacting with people online.

Here are some links for platforms where groups of this sort can be set up:

- [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/groups/) at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/>
- [Google Groups](https://groups.google.com/forum/) at <https://groups.google.com/forum/>

Additionally, both Goodreads and Library thing let you start groups.

At the other end of the spectrum, a club could have the IRL-traditional fixed time to meet but in an online chat session instead of around a spatial table.

- [Google Hangouts](https://hangouts.google.com/) (see <https://hangouts.google.com/>)
- [Skype](https://www.skype.com/) (see <https://www.skype.com/>)

## 3 Resources

### 3.1 Articles

Hoffman, C.P. (2017-09-06). [A Book riot guide to setting up your own online book club](https://bookriot.com/2017/09/06/setting-up-your-own-online-book-club/), *Book riot*. Retrieved from <https://bookriot.com/2017/09/06/setting-up-your-own-online-book-club/>

Ahlin, Charlotte. (2018-02-02). [14 Online book clubs you can join right now](https://www.bustle.com/p/14-online-book-clubs-you-can-join-right-now-8088085), *Bustle*. Retrieved from <https://www.bustle.com/p/14-online-book-clubs-you-can-join-right-now-8088085>

### 3.2 Sites to find groups/forums at

- [Goodreads](https://www.goodreads.com/group) at <https://www.goodreads.com/group>
- [Library Thing](https://www.librarything.com/groups) at <https://www.librarything.com/groups>
- [Online Book Club](https://onlinebookclub.org/) at <https://onlinebookclub.org/>

### 3.3 Sites you can set groups up at

- [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/groups/) at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/>
- [Google Groups](https://groups.google.com/forum/) at <https://groups.google.com/forum/>

### 3.4 Tools you can use for live online meetings

- [Google Hangouts](https://hangouts.google.com/) (see <https://hangouts.google.com/>)
- [Skype](https://www.skype.com/) (see <https://www.skype.com/>)