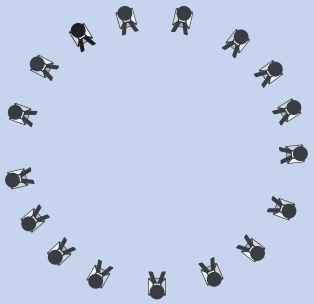
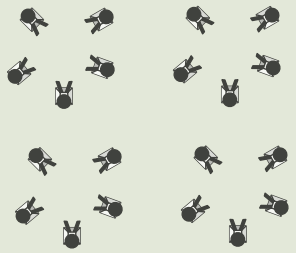
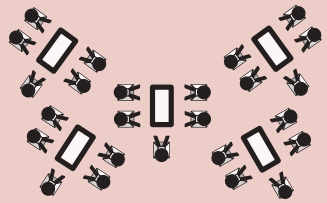
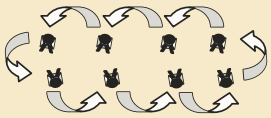
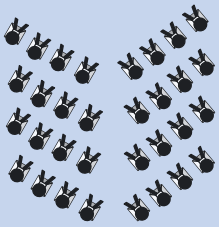
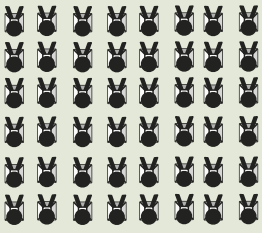
Setting Up a Training Room

The way a room is arranged influences the learning experience that occurs in the space. Setting up the room ahead of time is very important because it allows participants to find a seat and start feeling comfortable before the session begins. This also saves time.

There are a variety of ways to set up a room, and different set-ups are better for different environments and activities. For instance, small groups (or clusters) may be better equipped for group work than desks in rows (or classroom style). The use of desks, tables chairs and cushions is optional. Including desks or tables may help participants feel more comfortable and less exposed and is ideal when writing or drawing is involved. Not using desks and tables might be more appropriate or even necessary with cultural groups that are not accustomed to using them, when working with youth, or when facilitating games or role plays.

Making participants feel comfortable is very important to achieving a successful training or orientation session, so take time to plan ahead. Try different strategies to see what works best with your space, topic, and group.

Type of Arrangement	Ideal for	Other Considerations
Circle Style 	• Large group discussions	• Good for brainstorming and sharing ideas as equals or to create the feeling of equality among participants. • Can be used with or without tables. • Participants can sit around one large table or in a circle or square made up of smaller tables, leaving space in the center empty.
U-Shaped Style 	• Presentations • Watching videos • Large group discussion • Hearing from panelists or a speaker	• Can be used with or without desks or tables. • Allows participants to discuss with the presenter *and* other participants. • Can be shaped more like a semi-circle where the chairs on the edges make the circle more rounded so that participants can see one another better.
Cluster Style 	• Small-group work • Small-group discussions • Discussing problems, issues, critical incidents, case studies	• Can be used with or without chairs, desks, or tables. • Can be set up in circles, squares, ovals, rectangles, and so forth.

Type of Arrangement	Ideal for	Other Considerations
Herringbone Style 	• Small-group work *and* large-group discussions together • Informational presentations	• Participants can see the presenter and any visuals at the front of the room, yet can still work in small groups. • The group can move back and forth between large-group discussions and small-group work without having to rearrange furniture. • Works best with small tables for each group, as work can be done there.
Partner Style 	• Pair or partner work • Games • Introductions	• Remember to plan for groups of threes if there is an odd number of participants or if participants feel more comfortable in groups of threes. • Can be used in a "carousel" manner, with participants moving to different chairs to talk with others: 
V-Shaped Style 	• Medium-size group presentations	• Can be used with or without desks or tables. • Similar to classroom style, but does not allow for as many seats; however, angling the seats provides participants a better view of one another. • Enhances the opportunity for small-group discussion more than the Classroom Style described below.
Classroom Style 	• Watching videos • Presentations and briefings • Lecture	• Can be used with or without desks or tables (theatre style). • Fits many people into the room. • Good when group discussion is not as important. • Does not allow space for movement. • Can be used for question-and-answer with speakers. • An aisle or two can be created between seats for some mobility.

Classroom Arrangements Checklist:

- ☐ Reserve a space appropriate for the number of attendees.
- ☐ Accommodate for those with disabilities such as hearing, seeing, or mobility issues.
- ☐ Arrange for necessary technological items (acoustics, laptops, projectors, screens, speakers, microphones, etc.) and support.
- ☐ Find out whom to contact if there are technical (or other) problems.
- ☐ Determine which wall will be the "front" of the room, with the entrance at the rear to minimize distractions when people enter and exit.
- ☐ Select a seating arrangement that supports the goals of the session and the presenter.
- ☐ Build in time for room set-up changes.
- ☐ Use comfortable chairs (and adjustable chairs for longer sessions).
- ☐ Create aisles and easy access to seating, so that participants do not feel cramped. Keep in mind that various cultures have different views regarding the distance appropriate between people.
- ☐ Provide surface for writing, laptops, and beverages if needed.
- ☐ Have a space reserved for refreshments if necessary.
- ☐ Find space for the trainer's personal items that is out of the way and not distracting.
- ☐ Make sure all technology works ahead of time.
- ☐ Locate visual equipment (screens, flipcharts, etc.) so that participants can see the materials.
- ☐ Check for and maintain adequate air, temperature control, and lighting.
- ☐ Avoid challenging odors, enticing aromas, and exterior noise.
- ☐ Place "Welcome" signs on outside doors indicating the event and the time.
- ☐ Tape door latches to prevent them from making noise when people have to arrive late or leave early.
- ☐ Discuss housekeeping items, such as the location of restrooms, coatrooms, and exits, near the beginning of the session.

Reference

- Adapted with permission from Wallace, M. (2002). *Guide on the side—room setups for presentations & training—one size does NOT fit all*. Retrieved from http://www.llrx.com/columns/guide59.htm.

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For more information about resources available from the Cultural Orientation Resource Center, visit **culturalorientation.net**

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