



# How to Run Online Reading Groups

If you'd like to set up a Left Book Club, why not run it online? We want to be as inclusive, participative and accessible as possible – online reading groups can help us achieve that goal. Hosting your discussions online can allow those who might not have book clubs nearby to participate, allow people to contribute through text if they don't feel like speaking, and are flexible enough to include those who have limited time to attend events.

## 1) Choose what platform you'd like to use

In this guide, we will focus on zoom as we've found it to be the most user-friendly. A lot of what you would normally do during a meeting in person can also be replicated on zoom. Our friends over at The World Transformed have developed clear guidelines for setting up your meeting on zoom – you can find it [here](#). If you're not familiar with zoom, you can also use Google Hangouts or Skype.

## 2) Create your account

If you decide to use zoom, their free plan will allow you to invite up to 100 participants and host group meetings that last up to 40 minutes. When setting up your account, remember that whatever name you choose will show up as the host of your meetings.

## 3) Select your book

Ideally start with an LBC book as we can often send members additional resources and a list of discussion points for our titles to help run meetings initially. You can order books from previous months on the website if you are a member. If your online book groups becomes regular, make sure to include everyone when selecting your reading material!

## 4) Schedule your meeting

- Click schedule a meeting, and decide on a title. We recommend the following format 'LBC Online Meeting: [Name of book and author] for example, 'LBC Online Meeting: Authentocrats by Joe Kennedy.

- Write a quick and snappy description of your event. It can be as simple as 'Join Burley Fisher Left Book Club for our online meeting to discuss *The Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James!'

- Select the time and duration (only 40 minutes with a free plan) of your meeting.
- If you have a paid plan, you can tick the box that requires registration for the call. You don't need to tick the 'require password' box.
- You can choose to turn host and participant videos off initially in the meeting while you set up. It's also important to mute participants upon entry, and then unmute them during the call.
- If you already have email addresses for people you'd like to invite, you can send them invites as soon as you schedule your meeting.

### **5) Size of meetings**

Don't worry about having too few people! Reading group meetings should provide a space where all participants can get involved in the discussion, and meetings that are too big often mean that some people might not have the chance to speak. Meetings should ideally have fewer than 20 participants.

### **6) Ask us to help**

Once you have scheduled your call and you'd like a few more participants in your meeting, let us know and we can publicise it. Make sure you have an email address that you are happy for us to share so that people can contact you directly. We might also be able to send you extra resources and optional discussion points!

### **7) How to facilitate a meeting**

- Make sure you are sitting somewhere quiet, with nothing in the background that might distract participants!
- Begin the meeting by introducing yourself and making sure everyone can hear you clearly. Then explain that everyone will be muted for the first few minutes of the call.
- Take some time to familiarise everyone with the zoom display so that they don't get lost during the meeting.
- Briefly explain the format of the meeting. Our meetings usually begin with a short presentation of the book by the facilitator, last about 5-10 minutes. If people would like to contribute, they can click on the 'raise hand' icon (make sure they know how to do this!) and you can queue their points as in a normal meeting.
- It's always a good idea to have a few questions or discussion points prepared beforehand,

focusing on general themes of the book rather than specific parts of the text. We have optional discussion points for most of our books, get in touch if you'd like us to send them to you!

- Try your best to make sure everyone is encouraged to participate if they feel like it, and no one dominates the conversation. Our meetings should be as inclusive as possible. If a person starts using oppressive language, you can reach out to them privately by clicking their name on the chat to let them know their behaviour is not acceptable for this space. If it continues, you can 'eject' them from the discussion by clicking on their name in the manage participants view and choosing remove from the meeting. Although it may happen sometimes, we very rarely have troublemakers at our meetings!

### **8) Have fun!**

It may sound obvious, but try to keep the discussion as lively as possible. Use language and references that everyone can follow (if you use terms like 'accumulation' or 'social reproduction', make sure to explain what they mean). Keep your discussion between 40 minutes to an hour. Remember, most of us are just there to connect with like-minded people and build a sense of solidarity in these uncertain times.