

This recipe card covers important introductions that should happen during your first meeting. Take about 10 minutes to give an overview of the Learning Circle process.

INTRODUCTION (10 MIN)

Start by introducing Learning Circles and the course you are facilitating. Then take some time to answer logistical questions from participants. Talking points are below.

INTRODUCING LEARNING CIRCLES

- Many universities and institutions have begun developing free, online courses as a way to increase access to education.
- These courses have very low completion rates, because taking a course alone, online, requires a lot of self-discipline, motivation, and prior knowledge of how online learning works.
- Learning Circles, developed by Chicago Public Library and Peer 2 Peer University, are an attempt to create a more engaging learning experiences using this free, online content, but doing it in-person!
- Learning Circles are free peer learning courses; a combination of a book club, study hall, and support group. Together we will try and help each other accomplish our learning goals.
- There are many ways to contribute. Some people might be more advanced technically, but other people might have unique insights that other people would not have noticed.

COURSE OVERVIEW AND LOGISTICS

- Discuss some of the specific themes of your course, what the learning goals are, what kind of work participants can expect to be doing.
- There are few prerequisites for taking this course: basic digital literacy, a desire to learn, and willingness to work together with your peers.
- We will meet at this time, for 90 minutes, for the next 6 weeks. Each week I will send you a reminder about our next meeting and a summary of what we did the week before.
- There is no necessary work outside of the Learning Circle, but as a group we can decide if we want to work on the course material outside of the weekly session. (The more work we do, the more progress we will make!)
- You can get a certificate if you complete the online course and/or attend 5 Learning Circles.
- My role as a facilitator is to support you in your learning. I am not a teacher or content expert.
- This is the most I'll ever be speaking at once during the Learning Circle. I have these cards which suggest activities and discussion points, but this is our space and we can choose to use it however we want.

QUESTIONS (10 MIN)

Open the floor to questions from participants.

The rest of this week's activities are outlined on the following card.

The goal for the rest of the session is to strike a balance between giving learners a chance to jump right into the course and taking time to create a comfortable space for the fledgling community. Both are important to the success of the Learning Circle.

GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER (10 MIN)

As the facilitator, it is important for you to prompt personal introductions in a way that will encourage conversation amongst the whole group. Frame this activity as a way for all of the participants to get to know one another, as a starting point for the work they'll be doing together over the next 6 weeks – this activity is for them, not for you.

- **First:** Ask learners to share why they came to the Learning Circle and an example of a good learning experience they have had in their life.
- **Next:** Model an introduction by re-introducing yourself to start.
- **Finally:** Afterwards, summarize the learning experiences and share how you think this Learning Circle can develop into an inclusive learning community.

COURSEWORK (45 MIN)

- Direct participants to the course website and have them create an account on the platform. Use platform guides on P2PU website as needed.
- Encourage learners to poke around on the platform, together or on their own.
- To wrap up, ask participants to come back together as a group and share with the broader group some of the things they learned or are excited to start learning about.

ACTIVITY: GROUP EXPECTATIONS (10 MIN)

Talk about expectations for the group to draw in participation from all group members and help craft group identity. It's okay if not everybody agrees on everything!

- **First:** Ask learners how they want to work with their peers in the coming weeks. Prompt learners with these questions:
 - Do you want to work through activities on a projector or work on their own?
 - Do you want to commit to doing work outside of the Learning Circle?
 - Do you feel like you have enough time to complete the course?
- **Next:** Based on the discussion create a list of expectations for their group and discuss the list, leaving room for last minute additions and any disagreements.
- **Finally:** Once the list is final, read the final list to the group.

PLUS/DELTA (5 MIN)

Ask learners to share one thing that went well for them today, and one thing that they would like to change for next week. You should record these weekly, as each subsequent Learning Circle will begin by revisiting the prior weeks plus/deltas. This activity is a great way to reflect on the course and constantly strive to improve the experience for learners. Make clear that the changes the participants mention will be revisited in the following class and integrated into the flow of the course.

FEEDBACK (AFTERWARDS)

Send a wrap up email to learners each week. Include your impressions of how it went, plus/delta feedback, and anything the group agreed to for next week.

If you are using our software, you can submit this via the [facilitator dashboard](#).



As the group continues to evolve into a learning community, this week's activity is designed to support learners in defining and setting personal goals for the Learning Circle. These goals will become the focal point of the weekly check-in for subsequent weeks.

CHECK-IN (10 MIN)

- Recap last week's plus/delta
- Start **stand-ups** this week. Go around and ask learners to share "what I worked on last week, what I am working on this week, and what I'll need help on."

ACTIVITY: GOAL SETTING (10 MIN)

Goal setting and sharing is a powerful tool to help learners craft group identity, increase motivation, and build confidence. By setting goals early, learners will be able to refer to these on a weekly basis to track their progress over time.

- **First:** Ask the learners to spend 5 minutes writing down one or two major learning goals for themselves for the Learning Circle. Encourage them to look through the course syllabus online to help identify course goals that resonate with them, or identify other personal goals they might have. Prompt learners with this question:
 - "What do you want to know or be able to do by the end of this course? Some examples are "I want to do all of the readings, or I want to complete the final project, or I want to help everybody in the Learning Circle at least once." These are all good goals because they are specific, difficult yet achievable in 6 weeks, and have clear checkpoints that you can make progress towards each week."
- **Next:** Have learners break into small groups of 3-4 or come together as a larger group (if there are less than 6 people) to share their goals. As each learner presents, the group should help them improve their goals by making them more specific, at a reasonable level of difficulty, and with clear checkpoints. Examples of questions they might ask include:
 - What specific actions can you take to reach your goals? How can we help?
 - Can you break down your goals to checkpoints so that you can see progress each week?
 - Do you think this goal is reasonable in 6 weeks?
- **Finally:** Have each individual write down their individual goals and checkpoints somewhere, and keep a master list yourself that you can refer back to over time. Let everybody know that starting next week, learners will share their goal at the beginning of each Learning Circle.

COURSEWORK (65 MIN)

Check in with learners who didn't seem confident about their goals to see how they are progressing.

PLUS/DELTA (5 MIN)

Ask learners to share one thing that went well for them today, and one thing that they would like to change for next week.

FEEDBACK (AFTERWARDS)

Send a wrap up email to all the learners including a quick summary of the session, the plus/delta feedback, a summary of the goal setting activity, and anything else you want the learners to remember for next week.

Week 3 | Critique and feedback

Giving and receiving feedback are a very important parts of Learning Circles. This week focuses on building the learners' confidence in turning to the group for help and support, and talking together about what the benefits of critique are and what are good ways to give and receive it.

CHECK-IN (10 MIN)

- Recap last week's plus/delta
- **Stand-up:** what I worked on last week, what I am working on this week, and what I'll need help on.

COURSEWORK (45 MIN)

- While working, ask learners to think of one thing from the course that they would like feedback on (such as a draft of a paper, a mockup of a website, or an updated resume). Tell them that, if they are comfortable, they will share these during the activity today.
- Does everyone seem settled into a routine? If not, spend a little extra time with them.
- If digital skills are still holding any participants back, consider recommending a different course for them.

ACTIVITY: CRITIQUE AND FEEDBACK (30 MIN)

Modeling good feedback and constructive criticism can help make learners more comfortable sharing with one another. If this is something that the learners like, you can incorporate it into future sessions as well. Use a projector if that will help everyone look on together.

- **First:** Introduce the sessions with the following prompt:
 - We all learn from other people, which means that giving and receiving constructive criticism is essential for us to reach our potential. Critical feedback may be awkward sometimes, so there are a few good rules of thumb to follow. First, when you are giving feedback, try to include something positive about your colleague's work, and make your recommendations specific and actionable, so that they know how to address the feedback that you raise. When you are receiving feedback, try to listen with open ears, and remember that we all have each other's best interests at heart. If you feel yourself feeling defensive, try asking a clarifying question rather than assuming the person is attacking your work.
- **Next:** One by one, have learners share their work (either by presenting it verbally or showing it on the projector or a laptop). If learners are looking for feedback on a specific component, they can mention that beforehand.
- **Finally:** If any learners feel particularly distraught about their feedback, help them make a plan for getting back on track during the next Learning Circle.

PLUS/DELTA (5 MIN)

Ask learners to share one thing that went well for them today, and one thing that they would like to change for next week.

FEEDBACK (AFTERWARDS)

Send wrap up email to all the learners including a quick summary of the session, the plus/delta feedback, and anything else you want the learners to remember for next week. Remind learners to bring something to share next week (see Week 4 activity).

Week 4 | Sharing

In the past, learners have enjoyed getting a chance to hear and share stories about past experiences related to the course material. It is a nice way for the learners to bring more of their personality in the group, especially for those learners who tend to be more quiet or reserved.

CHECK-IN (10 MIN)

- Recap last week's plus/delta
- **Stand-up:** what I worked on last week, what I am working on this week, and what I'll need help on.

ACTIVITY: SHARING (15 MIN)

Try to strike a balance between learners sharing something personal that also directly relates to the course material. In the past, public speaking learners have shared speeches they love from YouTube, HTML/CSS learners have shared their favorite website, and Registered Nursing exam prep learners have shared embarrassing stories from nursing school.

- **First:** Ask a learner to introduce a relevant resource/story and, if applicable, explain why they like it.
- **Next:** Go around the room and hear from each of the other learners.
- **Finally:** Have a brief discussion about what all the resources had in common, where people's opinions diverged, and how learning about these might impact the work learners do in the Learning Circle going forward.

COURSEWORK (60 MIN)

Try to engage a bit less during the coursework this week - do you think the Learning Circle could continue next week if you weren't here?

PLUS/DELTA (5 MIN)

Ask learners to share one thing that went well for them today, and one thing that they would like to change for next week.

FEEDBACK (AFTERWARDS)

Send wrap up email to all the learners including a quick summary of the session, the plus/delta feedback, any good links shared during the activity, and anything else you want the learners to remember for next week.

Week 5

Failing is Learning

This week focuses on helping learners to see failure and mistakes as helpful and necessary components of learning, instead of something to be avoided. This activity also gets learners to reflect a bit on the progress they've made in anticipation of the final Circle next week.

CHECK-IN (10 MIN)

- Recap last week's plus/delta
- **Stand-up:** what I worked on last week, what I am working on this week, and what I'll need help on.

ACTIVITY (15 MIN)

Sharing some of the mistakes and struggles with the coursework from the past weeks should help learners feel less pressure about always "knowing" the right answer and allow them to feel more comfortable asking peers for help.

- **First:** Prompt learners for a discussion about failure by reading the following:
 - This week we are going to talk about some failures we've had so far. In Learning Circles, failure is not bad; in fact, it is a guaranteed and inevitable part of learning. Just like toddlers fall when learning to walk, we will all experience failure as we grow as learners throughout our lives. If we really try to understand what we get wrong and overcome our failure, we can learn even more from our mistakes than from our successes.
- **Next:** Ask learners to take a couple of minutes to think about an example of a struggle or failure that they've come up against in the Learning Circle, what lesson they learned from that experience, and how they can imagine using that lesson going forward.
- **Finally:** Go around the room, sharing challenges and lessons learned. Try to focus less on the failure itself, and more on what was learned in overcoming it.

COURSEWORK (60 MIN)

- If some learners seemed like they hadn't resolved the failures they mentioned in the activity, see if another learner who knows the material is willing to help them out.
- Encourage learners to take some time reflecting on how much work they have left in the course and if they anticipate questions or challenges that they might want to bring up before the final Learning Circle.

PLUS/DELTA (5 MIN)

Ask learners to share one thing that went well for them today, and one thing that they would like to change for next week.

FEEDBACK (AFTERWARDS)

Send wrap up email to all the learners including a quick summary of the session, the plus/delta feedback, and anything else you want the learners to remember for next week.

Week 6 | Wrapping up

The final week focuses on making a final push towards learners' goals and discussing ways in which they can continue with the course materials. If your Learning Circle is longer than 6 weeks, you can keep using the same format as prior weeks (repeating or creating new activities) and save this card for the final week.

CHECK-IN (10 MIN)

- Recap last week's plus/delta
- **Stand-up:** what I worked on last week, what I am working on this week, and what I'll need help on.

COURSEWORK (50 MIN)

- Support learners in finding a good stopping point if it seems they won't finish the course.

ACTIVITY (10 MIN)

When you reach a good stopping point, convene in a circle to share your work and debrief about the experience.

- **First:** Go around the room and share a victory they've achieved. This could be by showing an example of their work or sharing an anecdote.
- **Next:** Ask learners if there is anything they'd like to keep learning now that the Learning Circle is over. It could be to continue with coursework they didn't finish, sign up for a new course in a different subject, or a personal goal like explore new job opportunities in the field.
- **Finally:** Brainstorm ways to help learners find ways to reach their goals, by continuing to meet with each other, finding new resources, etc.

SURVEY (10 MIN)

If you find it beneficial, distribute the learner survey included in the appendix of the facilitator handbook. This will give you some good feedback on the learner's experiences and prime them for an engaging plus/delta.

PLUS/DELTA (5 MIN)

This week is meta - ask learners to share one thing that went well for them over the past 6 weeks, and one thing that they would like to change for the next iteration of Learning Circles.

CERTIFICATES (5 MIN)

Hand out certificates to participants who finished the online course and/or attended 5 of the 6 sessions.

FEEDBACK (AFTERWARDS)

Send wrap up email to all the learners including a quick summary of the session summarizing the experience and encouraging them to keep learning together. We'd really appreciate you forwarding this, and any additional feedback you have, over to us by emailing thepeople@p2pu.org. This will greatly help us improve Learning Circles going forward.

Thank you for all the work you put into this Learning Circle, we hope you'll do it