

THE PLANNER'S GUIDE TO ENGAGING EVENT LAYOUTS

The Planner's Guide to Engaging Event Layouts

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Why the Right Layout Is Essential

It's understandable for someone unfamiliar with event planning—either a new event planner or a customer who has never hosted an event before—to think that the “right layout” for an event is any layout that can accommodate the expected number of attendees. However, that's definitely not the case!

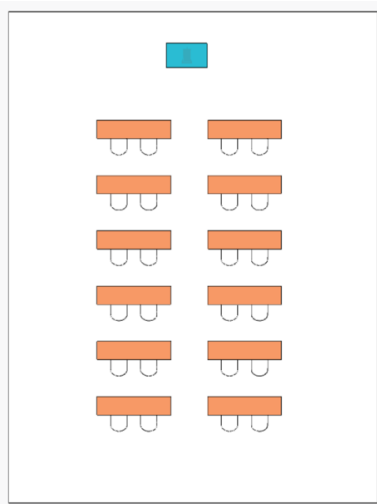
There is one main reason that people and organizations hold events: Engagement. They want attendees to be appropriately engaged—whether that means absorbing the information in a presentation, getting to know fellow attendees, or some other goal.

To achieve the necessary engagement, people must be positioned the right way relative to the presenters (if any), to any services being provided (catering, for example), and to one another. Simply putting tables and chairs in a room and hoping the event goes well is a recipe for disappointment.

Fortunately, experience has shown that one of 9 time-tested layouts tends to be the key to success for various types of events. Check out these layouts—including their pros and cons—below to find the perfect fit.

Classroom

Tables and chairs are arranged in parallel rows facing the front of the room.



Pros

- It facilitates interaction between the presenter and attendees.
- It's ideal for note-taking and the use of electronic devices.
- It's useful when the focus is a presentation and food will be available.

Cons

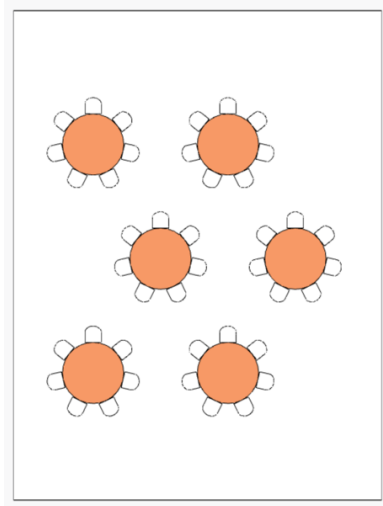
- It can be difficult to see the presenter for those in the back or at the far sides of the room.
- It's not ideal for attendee interaction.

Best For

Classroom style is best for activities that have a learning component like training and workshops. This style is also useful for longer events since attendees have space for meals or snacks.

Banquet

The banquet-style room setup includes a round table with chairs placed around the perimeter. The attendees face each other while seated at the table.



Pros

- It encourages attendee interaction.
- It's ideal for events with food since the attendees have a place to sit and enjoy their meals.
- It optimizes the use of space, particularly if the tables are used to maximum capacity.

Cons

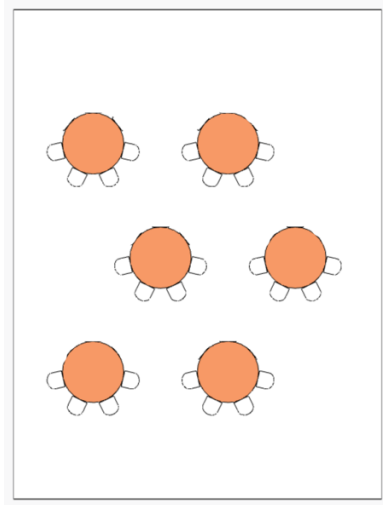
- While it enables interaction among attendees at the same table, it can isolate them from those at other tables.
- If there is a focal point for the event, such as a speaker or video presentation, some attendees will have to reposition their chairs to see it.

Best For

Banquet-style seating is best for networking sessions where the goal is for attendees to get to know each other. It also works well for weddings, evening events, and seated meals.

Crescent or Cabaret

This layout is similar to banquet style, but attendees are not seated in the half of the table closest to where information is being presented so that no one has their back to the presenter.



Pros

- It enables attendees to interact with others at their table.
- It works well for events at which food and drink will be served.
- It puts the focus on the presentation/presenter.

Cons

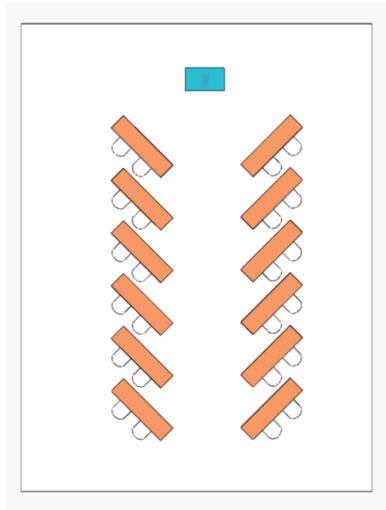
- People at different tables can't interact effectively.
- It doesn't maximize seating capacity since half of each table is empty.

Best For

Cabaret seating is best for meetings and events that combine attendee interaction with a presentation.

Chevron / V Shape

Also called herringbone style, this layout has tables and chairs set similar to classroom style but angled to facilitate better line of sight with the front of the room.



Pros

- It allows for easier discussion among attendees.
- It facilitates interaction between the presenter and attendees and works well for note-taking and the use of electronic devices.
- It works well when the focus of the event is a presentation but there will also be food available.

Cons

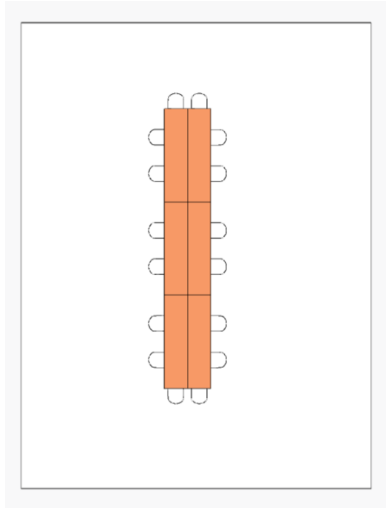
- The ability to interact with other attendees is slightly better than with a classroom layout, but it still isn't ideal.
- The line of sight for some attendees may still be blocked.

Best For

Chevron style is similar to a classroom layout, which makes it great for training sessions, workshops, and other activities requiring note-taking

Conference / Boardroom

This style utilizes a single rectangular or oval table with chairs placed around it.



Pros

- It allows for direct interaction among attendees.
- It ensures a direct line of sight to other attendees.
- It works well for using laptops and other electronic devices, taking notes, and having snacks or meals.

Cons

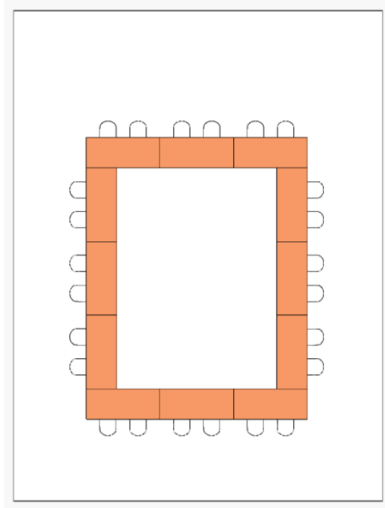
- Some attendees may not have a clear view of slides or other visual materials.
- Having too many people seated too tightly around the table can decrease interaction.

Best For

Conference style is best for agenda-focused meetings, conference breakout sessions, brainstorming, and open discussions. It's also a good layout for conference calls.

Hollow Square

Rectangular tables are placed in a square with open space in the middle and chairs positioned around the perimeter.



Pros

- If a small gap is left for access, the hollow space allows a group leader or moderator to interact with any attendee easily.
- It facilitates eye contact, communication, and interaction among attendees.

Cons

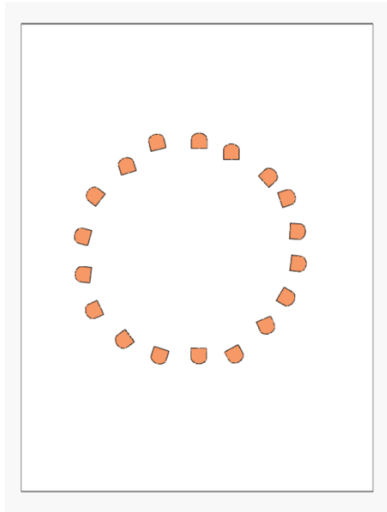
- Attendees can be easily distracted when using their electronic devices.
- Some attendees may not have a clear line of sight for viewing presentations.

Best For

This seating style provides attendee dynamics that are similar to the conference style layout. But unlike conference style, it minimizes status differences since there is no “head” of the table. Hollow square works well for agenda-focused meetings, discussions, and brainstorming sessions.

Circle of Chairs

Chairs are placed in a circle in the middle of the room with no tables and attendees facing the center.



Pros

- It uses minimal furniture since tables aren't required.
- It maximizes engagement and encourages everyone to get involved.
- It eliminates attendee status differences that can be inferred from the seating position in other layouts.

Cons

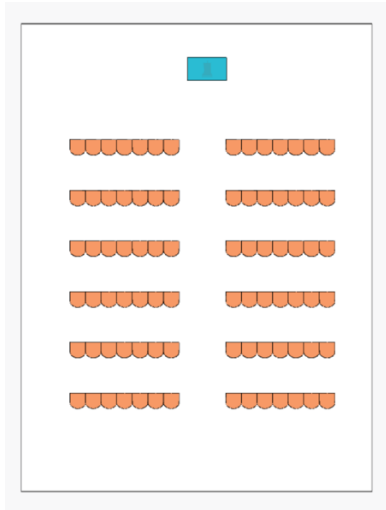
- It's not an ideal layout for presentations.
- It may require a strong facilitator to keep things moving effectively.

Best For

Circular setups are best for networking events, team building, and workshops.

Theater / Auditorium

Chairs are set in rows facing the front of the room with no tables. There typically is an aisle down the middle to allow easy access to center seats.



Pros

- It maximizes the number of attendees that can fit in a space.
- It's ideal for passive learning and entertainment.

Cons

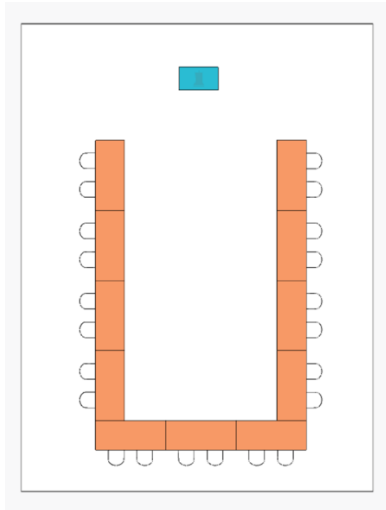
- It doesn't work well for note-taking.
- It may not be as comfortable for attendees so it's not good for longer events.
- It minimizes interaction with the presenter and other attendees.

Best For

Theater style is best for large groups where interaction between attendees is minimal. Presentations, performances, lectures, and annual meetings typically are best arranged in theater style.

U Shape

Tables are positioned in a “u” shape with one end open. Chairs are placed along the outer edge of the tables.



Pros

- The presenter can more closely engage with attendees than they can in other layouts.
- It's a good layout for attendee interaction.
- Having tables facilitates note-taking, using electronic devices, and having snacks or meals.

Cons

- The seating capacity of the room isn't maximized.
- The majority of the attendees are viewing the presenter from the side, which may not be ideal.

Best For

This layout is best for interactive workshops, training sessions, and meetings.

Set the Room and Survey the Scene

The 11 room layouts help support different activities at an event. However, they can't *guarantee* that those activities will take place. Ideally, an event will have a leader or coordinator who can guide attendees through the agenda and any transitions required.

For example, if food will be available, the moderator can encourage people to partake and then let them know when the presentation will resume. Or, if networking is a goal, the moderator can encourage people to mingle and have shorter but more numerous interactions.

Ultimately, the combination of the right room layout and a little guidance as needed helps ensure that an event will be a success!