

## How to make your meetings sizzle not stink

### 7 different meeting room layouts that work

Guest article by professional meeting planners at De Vere hotels, resorts and venues

How can something as simple as a meeting room layout influence the success of a meeting? Here are 7 different tried and trusted meeting room layouts used by professional meeting planners at De Vere hotels, resorts and venues, with clear advice on when and when not to use a different meeting room layouts...

The heart of successful business is the art of discussion and planning – without the bringing together of teams businesses would face roadblocks. Face to face meetings are especially effective with meaning and feelings being carried by facial expressions, much more than the actual words.

But “meetings” are often met with slight apprehension – a bad meeting can be far worse than having none at all, especially if the goal of the meeting was not achieved. So is there an art to organising a meeting? Absolutely – and where many professional meeting planners may argue the exact formula for the perfect meeting, what they will all agree on is the requirement for planning.

Planning a meeting is not simply organising the sandwiches and finding a free room. It is about understanding the needs and requirements of the attendees - this can shape every aspect of the meeting from choice of room and location to seating arrangements. Without proper planning and consideration delegates will feel less motivated to involve themselves and the meeting goals will not be attained. We will be looking at one of the most important aspects of a meeting – the layout of seating arrangements.

Whilst seating arrangements might not seem like the most exciting aspect of organising [meeting rooms](#), a good floor plan can really help in directing your audience's attention and even facilitate discussion and interaction. For example, if the main purpose of your meeting is to get your team brain storming the last thing you will want to do is have team members sitting in rows with backs facing one another. Similarly if you are presenting an idea to a group of people what you do not want is restrict people's natural view. So let's get thinking about some seating layouts: here are the most common and their application to meeting goals.



- Type:** Auditorium Style (also known as theatre style)

**Meeting style:** performance presentations, conference speaker, MD/CEO Company Performance Overviews

**Why:** The auditorium style is best suited to situations where the main purpose of the meeting is to convey a message and thus ensuring you have the attention of the audience at all time is really important. The layout is structured such that the main speak will be facing the audience either behind a central support structure (a pedestal) or without any support structure. Seats are then arranged in rows facing this staging area – either straight angled or circular.

The main benefit of the auditorium/theatre style is that it can the speaker can address a rather large audience. However the seating arrangements mean that the speaker cannot allow for much audience interaction. Similarly this arrangement does not allow for writing areas such as desks or tables – if the audience wants to take note then they are forced to writing on their laps.

**Not particularly good for...:** brainstorming, product testing/troubleshooting, any type of gestalt creative processes..! morale boosting sessions...

**Bonus! Interesting fact:** The Greeks were the masters of the modern day theatre arrangements with many of their “theatrons” (i.e. seeing place) consisting of circular rows of seats in front of a central “orchestra” (dancing area) and a central alter dedicated to Dionysus.



- Type:** Banquet Style (also known as Cabaret style)

**Meeting style:** Even though we suggested that meetings aren't really for taking people out for lunch in this case the whole point is to convey messages through a central presentation whilst the audience eats.

**Why:** This method is particularly useful for conference style meetings and popular amongst charity fundraisers. Due to the nature of the event often the message is less formal and is intended to boost the morale of the audience or boost the emotional

attachment between audience and speaker. Similarly this method is especially useful when a business wishes to exemplify positive news.

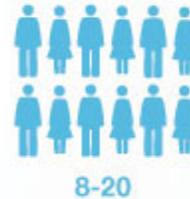
**Not particularly good for...:** one to one messages, negative performance reviews, appraisals

**Bonus! Interesting fact:** The wedding of Marie de Medici with Henry IV (the king of France) in Florence (1600s) had over 50 courses and lasted several days...

**Type: Hallow Square**



**Number of Delegates:**



- **Type:** Hallow Square Style

**Meeting style:** Tables are arranged in a square with all delegates seated on the outside of the square. All delegates will be able to see one another and have space for writing and note taking. The meeting leader will be seated at the head of the main table.

**Why:** The hallow square is useful for meetings that have multiple speakers and likely to instigate questions. Departmental reports and project updates which require small teams or main managers will likely benefit from this arrangement due to the ability for easy communication between groups. However large groups will struggle with this arrangement as the bigger the group of people the wider the distance between opposite delegates and those sat perpendicular to the line of sight.

The Hallow Square Style is also a much more formal arrangement with the heads of tables clearly defined.

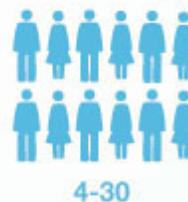
**Not particularly good for...:** large company meetings, brainstorming

**Bonus! Interesting fact:** Possibly influenced by Napoleon's "Infantry Square", a famous battle formation that consisted of a hollow square with each side of the square comprising of two or more ranks of soldiers..!

**Type: Classroom**



**Number of Delegates:**



- **Type:** Class Room

**Meeting style:** Rows of tables with chairs grouped in sections with tables facing the front of the room.

**Why:** An effective method for lectures and meetings that require a lot of note taking. This method is even popular for law enforcement agencies that require project

briefings. The “class room” style is useful for project briefs that require a lot of note taking and potential audience participation. However due to the school connotations they may have some negative associations..!

**Not particularly good for...:** large company meetings, informal meetings, morale boosting events, appraisals...



- **Type:** U shape

**Meeting style:** Tables are arranged in a U shape with delegates seated on the outside of the U. A focal point is arranged at the join point of the U – either audio visual equipment or other visual document.

**Why:** The U shape is extremely complimentary for presentation style meetings whereby the focus is visual communication. Board of Directors meeting, committee meetings and discussion groups are particularly applicable due to the requirement to not only convey information to a group of delegates but also to facilitate discussion between groups with a main reference point (i.e. the visual). This method is also useful in visual pitch presentations that require focus to be set on the presentation or product.

**Not particularly good for...:** large groups of delegates, conveying body language of speaker



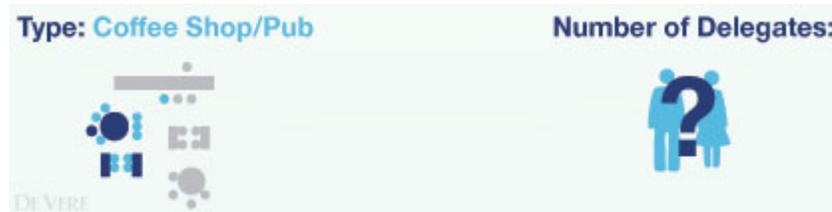
- **Type:** Conference (Boardroom)

**Meeting style:** A rectangular (or oval) table is set up with chairs around all sides. Both ends of the table are reserved either for visual communication technology or for most important figureheads.

**Why:** The most widely used meeting room arrangement which unsurprisingly is also the most easy to set up. The formality is dependent upon the requirements of the delegates – it is as easily applicable to creative brainstorming as to board meetings. Whilst the arrangement can be scaled up to 2-3 tables, generally delegate numbers

are small. Useful for regular small meetings that requires note taking, discussion and short presentations.

**Not particularly good for...:** large meetings, company reviews



- **Type:** Coffee Shop/Pub meeting  
**Meeting style:** Entirely dependent on the establishment – often sofas and coffee tables or pub benches arrange in any manner.  
**Why:** Whilst these are quite difficult to plan the coffee shop/pub meeting is often seen by many freelancers and managers as a useful morale boosting/client relations tool. The informal nature is useful for strengthening relations and more emotional goals rather than conveying business goals. Not so good if you want to ensure your audience pays attention or if you need to convey any information via presentations.  
**Not particularly good for...:** board meetings, formal functions, not getting tipsy/drunk

Whilst it can be easy to opt for the conference room style arrangement you might find that your meeting goals will be obtained much easier and more efficiently if you just consider where to seat your audience. If you have a large audience go for theatre or banquet style arrangements with a central focal point. If you are organising a pitch then ensure your audience are directed toward your chosen focal point (either the projector presentation or yourself). Or if you simply want to give an informal update about the performance/promotion of some of your colleagues then head to the local pub.

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