

# *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi

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# VIRTUAL BOOK CLUB TOOLKIT

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*Hosting a book club for your chapter and chapter members is a great way to spread awareness about Slow Food values as well as increase your chapter’s education about a sustainable food system. Plus, it is just plain fun! This toolkit is meant to serve as a best practices resource for chapters interested in starting a book discussion group.*

*>>>>>> Check out the* [*Slow Food USA Bookshop*](https://bookshop.org/shop/SlowFoodUSA) *page for book suggestions.*

## Introduction: Planning and Advertising

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### Start with why.

Why this book? Why now? Provide some context for why you want to have a discussion about this title/author as a way to welcome your invitees into the conversation

### Think about logistics and PLAN AHEAD!

**Hosting**

How will you be hosting this discussion? What resources do you need to pull it off?

**Outreach**

How will you market the conversation to garner an audience? Will “RSVP’s” or registration of audience members be necessary?

**Pre-meeting Prep**

What does your audience need from you to “plug in” to this conversation? What do you need from your audience to have an effective conversation? Will you require that everyone must read the book to participate or can individuals come into the conversation “blind?” Will there be some sort of hands on activity to further engage audience members (icebreaker, demonstration, etc)? How much time should you allot for people to both acquire the book and read it?

**Facilitation**

Will you invite an expert or someone with relations to the book and/or the discussion to help facilitate/moderate the conversation? Is the moderator you - if so, have you read the books and made note of key points you’d like to discuss? Will there be a keynote or expert in attendance to help moderate the discussion? This may be an added draw to the experience if you are able to secure it. If you do (secure a “speaker”), be sure you set their expectations as to what will be required of them for their “appearance.”

### Marketing the Event

Don’t forget to market the event so you have a healthy audience available for conversation.

Consider tactics like enforcing RSVP’s, pre-event promotion of giveaways or raffles or drawing (for which you have to be “present” at the discussion to receive), or other experiences that will lure audience members in.

*Example: For a virtual event, you could host a “live” drawing (where the winner will be announced at the event), but you must RSVP in advance of the event to serve as your “entry.”*

Consider partnering with other organizations in your community that might also be interested in joining the discussion. Those groups could also help get the word out.

## Technical Tips for Virtual Conferencing

### “Virtual” Discussion Platform Options

1. **Zoom:** Over the past month, Zoom has become a go-to for educators and workers, and a great place for your book club (even Saturday Night Live is on the platform). Zoom offers a free basic service with a 40-minute time limit, as well as paid services with more features including unlimited time. [An example: For a SF Albuquerque virtual book club last month, one of our board members had an account so she created the meeting, started it, and then was able to turn it over to me (Tammy) and didn’t need to stay in the meeting to keep it running. (So that we could have longer than 40 minutes)].
   1. FYI- SFUSA has a paid zoom account. They are offering their account, scheduling permitting. Please contact [chapters@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:chapters@slowfoodusa.org) if interested.
2. **Google**: Google Meets recently began offering free video conferencing for anyone with a Google email, seemingly in an attempt to compete more aggressively with Zoom.
3. **Skype:** An option, but does require a download and login. It certainly doesn’t seem like the top choice right now, but could be a backup.

### Rehearse the tech the day before with a small group

All this tech does make it easier to do a virtual book club. But some of the features require some familiarization so that you aren’t fumbling around during your event. Make sure that you rehearse how slideshows, videos, and screen shares work and are high enough quality. Do you know how to end a screenshare?

Also make sure you know how Gallery view/speaker view works and how to manage questions in the chat.

**To mute or not to mute**

Mute when there are distracting noises in your mic - like a dog barking or construction or meal prep noises But! if people can stay off mute - the conversation can flow more with umms and huh’s and laughter. More natural. But watch out for people talking over each other - and that distracting background noise! Usually as owners of the event, platforms allow you to mute any participant you want-- so when someone’s dog starts barking at the mailman you can mute them yourself.

Another option is to mute while the moderator is “presenting” and then open up “virtual” questions (via chat) and allow a specified amount of time for “live” questions (where participants could share their audio/video to ask a question or deliver a comment).

**Have a back up plan**

In case you run into technical issues, it’s nice to have options. Can you just record a moderated discussion with an expert for participants to watch later? Can you email participants documents they need and do a phone conference instead? Have some idea of what you might be able to offer as a “Plan B.”

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## How to facilitate discussion

**Don’t pass up an opportunity to promote your Slow Food Chapter!**

The moderator gives a brief explanation of Slow Food and the local chapter in case there are people new to Slow Food or who could benefit from knowing a little bit about what other things your local chapter is up to. Invite participants to any upcoming events, meetings, or initiatives.

**Have the participants briefly introduce themselves.**

Besides their names you could ask them to add how they heard about the discussion and/or Slow Food, how long they have lived in the area and/or where they are from, etc. You might want to keep this part really short depending on how many people are attending.

**Start with getting general reactions from the book or relevant chapters from your audience.**

This will act as an icebreaker for idea flow and conversation flow.

* Did you like this book/or not? Why?
* What were main takeaways/what did you see as the main message?
* Are there any other main themes you’d like to bring up?
* Gauge if your audience is familiar with this title/author/topic or was this their first introduction?

Open with some broad strokes/overview questions (building on the above), then narrow down to specific topics, chapters or notable quotes from the text.

Decide if you are going to solicit questions from your “audience” in advance (to be submitted on social channels or some other format) to help lead the discussion - particularly for individuals who may not be able to attend the event “live” or in person.

Have a general outline of questions/notes/quotes to reference, but also be ok with letting the discussion take on a life of its own rather organically.

**Facilitation Troubleshooting**

**Code of Conduct**. You could be reading material that brings up sensitive topics. Consider having formal or informal group agreements that keep conversation respectful and safe. [Slow Food USA’s Code of Conduct](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ODl5HSVpPe3HPSaYThk7U6TCuBpCTIqu/view?usp=sharing) is a great place to start. Better to have some agreements than not and have to face an awkward, tense situation without ground rules of general respect. Here are some specific examples for discussion groups:

<https://devempathybook.club/code-of-conduct/>

<http://www.thereadingclub.co.uk/book-club-rules-and-standards.html>

<https://dianegottsman.com/2012/07/13/book-club-etiquette-2/>

**Overspeaking.** We don’t want to pick on the shy people in our groups, but be mindful of people who are dominating the conversation. Take long pauses for more responses. Ask if everyone has shared before moving on. Make space for the people that need a beat in order to speak up. We definitely want to curb people from talking over anyone too much!

**Tangents and keeping your eye on the clock.** We all enjoy good discussions, but as facilitators we want to respect people’s time. Your participants have made time to join a rich discussion of a book-- so we want to make sure that time isn’t taken up too much by off topic things. The balance of keeping casual conversation and focused conversation is up to the facilitator. People do respect and are appreciative of a facilitator who keeps the group on track.

This is one of the reasons groups cede coordination power to one facilitator-- so that participants can just enjoy and not be worried about awkward social dynamics to call anyone out, redirect conversation, or end tangents. That’s why they have you!

## Resources for discussion questions

**Supporting articles and reviews of the book/author/topic.**

Common review sites : Kirkus, Booklist, School Library Journal, Horn Book Review, The Bulletin - Center for Children’s Books, The New York Times Book Review, other local + national news/media outlets, etc.

**How will you formulate questions for discussion?**

Naturally, you may formulate some of your own while reading the text. You may also want to solicit questions from your audience (especially to engage audience members who may not be able to participate in the “live” event in person) in advance on social media platforms to help lead the discussion as well. Ask for input from others (particularly if you aren’t from the population the book is discussing).

**Timing/Run of Show**

Typically, you want this to run its course rather organically as the discussion builds momentum, but if you do decide to set a time frame on the conversation, be mindful of your commitment to that time block so you aren’t disrespectful of your audience’s time. Perhaps this means adding a certain block of minutes of open discussion time at the end of the meeting to encourage organic conversation without any structured questions.

**Tips for keeping the discussion going after the discussion ends**

**Readers Advisory/Suggestions for Future Reading** Whenever possible, include or provide a reading list in case your audience has additional interest (or questions) on this topic.

**Virtual Recaps/Blogs** Do you have the resources to do a virtual recap on your blog or website? Did you share an activity or recipe that would be helpful to share with your network? This provides a way for a wider audience to participate and engage with your book event.

If the event is being recorded or live streamed - can you share it after the fact with your audience? (Again increasing accessibility.)

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## Resources for the book discussion planner

* [“So you want to host a webinar.”](https://fullcirc.com/2015/12/09/so-you-want-to-host-a-webmeeting-resource/)
* [Tips for hosting a “web” meeting](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-with-technology-articles/ten-tips-for-hosting-a-web-meeting/)
* [Book Riot - HT host a book club](https://bookriot.com/how-to-start-a-book-club/)
* [Tips for a Virtual Book Club](https://www.bookbub.com/blog/how-to-host-virtual-book-club)
* [Book Club Tips from PRH](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/book-clubs/tips/)
* [I Love Libraries - Facilitating Discussion](http://www.ilovelibraries.org/booklovers/bookclub/facilitate-discussion#:~:text=Choose%20a%20primary%20character%20and,off%20to%20an%20enthusiastic%20start.)
* [Making the Most of Zoom!](https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=how-to-make-the-most-of-zoom-for-every-kind-of-event&utm_source=Marketing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=top5)