

Summary

This is a suggested format for a study circle, lasting approximately fifty minutes, with explanatory notes.

Study Circle Format

Section	Time
Introduction	3 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Recite Surah Al Fatihah (followed by the English translation). Make du'a to God to bless the Prophet. • Recap of previous session. • Introduce topics to be covered. 	
Part One (choose two of the following)	10 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on a contemporary issue in the news based on a newspaper/online article or a topic related to Islamic beliefs/teachings. • Dhikr • Reminder • Book Synopsis 	
Part Two	
Main topic	20-30 mins
Q & A and general discussion	12 mins
Conclusion	3 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap of the session. • Concluding du'a. • Recite Surah Al Asr (followed by the English translation). 	

Notes

1. It is good practise to commence a study circle with the **recitation of Surah Al Fatihah**, as this surah is a du'a for guidance. Also, it is a means of remembering God which should be a basic component of a gathering to learn about Islam. It is also good to ask God to grant blessings on the Prophet (pbuh).
2. **Timings.** To facilitate concentration, it is good to have several types of activities within a session. This is considered good practise in teaching (for example, TED presentations are 18 minutes long to facilitate concentration). Although there are charismatic speakers whom one could listen to for an hour or more, they are rare.
3. **To facilitate concentration**, the order of activities in a study circle is important to keep the minds of the audience alert. If you decide to have a reminder in the first part, then it is better to have it first followed by another activity such as a discussion on a current issue in the news or a social issue or dhikr before the main presentation, so that there are not two similar types of learning next to each other.

4. **The recap** involves asking the audience what the main topic was that we covered in the previous session. This is a good way of engaging the audience. Similarly, it is good practise at the end of the session to perform a recap, which helps the presenter(s) to assess how effective their presentations were. Alternatively, the main presenter may wish to give a summary of what has been covered in the study circle at the end of the session, as a recap, to reinforce the main points.
5. **The reminder** can be given by someone different to the main speaker so that there is some variety. This can be a means of easing someone into public speaking.
6. **Small group discussions** of 4/5 people discuss a particular issue related to current affairs, a social topic (e.g. racism, sexism) or could include specific Islamic topics. This could be commenced by showing the group a video clip or a newspaper article. It enables participants to develop public speaking skills and can be a good way of developing group bonding. Then the presenter can ask for feedback from one nominated member of each group.
7. **Group dhikr** is a topic on which there is difference of opinion on whether it is allowed or not even though there are clear hadith which show that it is permissible. For example, the Prophet (pbuh) said:

“When you pass by meadows of Paradise spend time there.” When the Companions asked what they were he replied, “Circles of remembrance.”

(Tirmidhi)

However, it is preferred if the dhikr is performed silently:

‘And do remember your Lord in your soul with humility and in reverence, without loudness in words, in the mornings and evening and be not of those who are unheedful.’

(Quran, Surah Al Araf, 7:205)

For practical purposes, it may be good to have one person to lead the dhikr out loud, and the others to say it out loud, quietly or silently. The benefit of group dhikr, before the main presentation, is that it can soften the heart making it more receptive to the message of the main talk.

8. Within the **main topic** you should allocate approximately two minutes for each discussion point whereby members of the audience can discuss in small groups (breakout groups if online) or talking partners (pairs) if face to face. Then the presenter can ask for feedback from one nominated member of each group. Discussion points within the presentation help to engage the listeners.
9. The **concluding du’a** should cover asking God to accept this gathering amongst our virtuous deeds and to forgive us for any shortcomings. It is also recommended to recite Surah Al Asr, as it is reported that before the Companions left each other they would recite this surah.

References

Maududi, S. A. A. (1986) *Meaning of the Qur’an, Volumes I-III*, Translated by M. Akbar, Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications (Pvt).

Sabiq, S. (1989) *Fiqh us-Sunnah: Volume II Superogatory Prayer*, Translated by J.M. Zarabozo, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications.