

Here's our protocol:

1. One acts as chairman for the meetings, but otherwise is no more important at the meeting than anyone else. All are equal in their contributions. If he is out of town, he appoints someone else to chair the meeting.
2. We value diversity among our members—Christians, atheists, etc. Sometimes the conversation is bawdy. If you want diversity, you will have to allow such freedoms. We also have members who always strive to keep the conversation on a noble plane (without telling others what to do).
3. We meet on the 2nd Saturday of the month at the same venue. Good venues are hard to find. It needs to be relatively quiet. We require good draft beer and food. We also require a space that allows smoking, which limits us quite a bit because of the smoking ban in Austin. To provide for cigars, pipes, and cigarettes, we meet outside year round. At present, our venue has no rain covering, so when it rains we have to meet at a member's warehouse where we BYOB and order in pizza.
4. We meet even if it is Valentine's day. We do not delay or change the meeting schedule just because the leader is out of town. (We did do this when the group was small. With a large group it is not possible.) Many of us come early to eat and drink before the meeting. Both eating and beer drinking continue throughout the meeting.
5. We are a men-only group. This is because some literature is simply impossible to discuss in mixed company (eg, *One Hundred Days of Solitude*). Also, the guys cherish the opportunity to be with other guys. If there are any in the group who would have it that women were allowed, they are a minority. Years ago we had to settle this by vote.
6. We have steadily grown from the founding 4 to where we now have 15 in attendance every month. We have begun discussions about whether to limit attendance, but so far have not. With 15, it is hard for everyone to hear and guys are constantly tempted to get into multiple discussions at once at different parts of the table.
7. We begin promptly at 7 pm with an essay read by the person who nominated the book. So as not to be intimidating, we say that preparing an essay is optional, but everyone does it. We aim for 750 words, and ideally the essay is a critical study. However, in practice many members rely heavily on author biography and plot summary.
8. It is common for members to read and refer to secondary literature, biography, other works by the same author, etc, to enrich the discussion. Our discussions are deep, and it helps to have people involved who know how to engage in literary criticism. We discuss, themes, symbolism, authorial intent, structure, historical context, etc. For very difficult works (e.g. Joyce's *Ulysses*), we prepare by reading other works in advance, identifying appropriate annotated guides to recommend to each other, etc. We have an unwritten rule that referring to movies during the discussion is frowned upon. We always identify particularly valuable passages to read aloud.
9. Sometimes one cannot finish the book before the meeting. Nearly all our members show up anyway for the great discussion, although they will undoubtedly hear how the book ends.
10. We take a 10-min break at 8:15. At 9:20 we go round the table and give everyone a 60 sec parting comment. After these comments, we move directly to nominations.
11. On meeting day, we already know what the selection is for next month. So our nominations and voting are for the month after next. This gives everyone 1 month to get the book and 1 month to read it.
12. For nominations, we go round the table again. If 8 or fewer are present, we allow 2 nominations per person. If 9 or more are present, one nomination is allowed. Sometimes guys nominate a 2-fer (two-for-one): two short books, short stories or plays read and discussed together. Once we did a 3-fer of essays by Camus. If a person wants to pass on nominating, he passes. With the nomination is usually a short persuasive speech to sell the nomination to the group. If a particular translation is better than others, this should be part of the nomination, or perhaps discussed after the voting if the selection wins the vote. Any book from any genre can be nominated. If it wins the vote, it wins. Most of us incline toward classics or otherwise significant works, so new or highly specialized works are unlikely to win.
13. If you are present, you can nominate. There are no other qualifications to nominate.
14. During the nominations, the moderator lists them down the left side of a page in the club journal. He writes the names of those present across the top of the page. This makes a grid to record the voting.
15. After the nominations, the moderator reads through them twice so everyone can decide on their choices. He then calls out the titles one by one, marking each vote under the person's name.

- Everyone gets to vote twice, but not for the same book. We always remind everyone to get their hands up in a prompt, manly fashion, rather than first trying to see what others will vote for.
16. In the event of a tie, we have a runoff. In the event of a tied runoff, we decide by coin toss.
 17. We are usually done at 10 pm. Sometimes people hang around afterward and talk over another beer. Running a tight schedule is very important. People need to know the schedule will be adhered to strictly, because discussions like this can go on forever. If meetings run late, some people will stop coming. And everyone in our group knows that I start the meeting at the stroke of 7, so we don't have much problem with late comers.
 18. A day or two after the meeting the moderator sends an email reminding the group of the selection for next month, and informing all of the new selection for two months hence. That keeps the no-shows informed of the book voted on in their absence and gives everyone a written record of the selections.
 19. We maintain a reading history, which you can see on our website.
 20. During the discussion, Jeffrey usually makes some notes so he can create a blog entry about the meeting on the website. These are really good and are fun to look back on. Having a blogger to document the meetings is valuable, but we have not always had a person willing to do it.
 21. We do not send out meeting reminders. We are men, and expect men to be responsible.