Story circle ground rules

SIL 503 Week 8 circle sheet, 28 October 2026

This sheet lies in the middle of the circle. Before the first seed, a facilitator reads the set-up block aloud and the circle agrees a length for the response round.

Set-up

- Everyone participates. There are no spectators.
- Both facilitators participate as members of the circle, not as observers.
- Phones off and out of sight.
- Nothing is recorded.
- The right to pass always stands.

Source: Arts Midwest, how and why to facilitate a story circle; the Week 10 lab description on the course site.

During the circle

- One speaker at a time, with no interruptions.
- The facilitation guide sets each story at roughly three to five minutes. Today the seed is two minutes, because the lab asks for a seed and not a finished piece.
- No added commentary after a story.
- Each speaker responds to what complements, complicates or contradicts the story before theirs.
- Reflective feedback only: the real subject, and the useful moment. Never advice.

Source: Arts Midwest; Lambert and Hessler (2018), chapter 7, on reflective feedback.

The facilitator's part

- The facilitator is a co-listener who hears a teller's vulnerabilities without pushing past what they can withstand.
- Three moves are available when a disclosure arrives that the circle cannot hold: the right to pass, a break, and a conversation outside the circle afterwards.
- The facilitator's own power to shape a story toward a predetermined message is one of six named ethical tensions in this method, and it is the one students underestimate.

Source: Lambert and Hessler (2018), chapter 7; Gubrium, Hill and Flicker (2014), American Journal of Public Health.

Not in the packet

Neither the facilitation guide nor the course site sets a length for the response after each seed. Agree one in the circle before the first seed and hold every seed to it, or ask the instructor for a number before the circle starts.