

# Room Design

## [ HOW TO SET UP YOUR EVENT SPACE ]

There are so many components of planning an event and so many decisions! In this article you will learn about some factors that will help you choose the best space for your business meeting event and the ideal way to set it up.

The consideration for your room layout and design will vary according to the space you choose. Are you having your event at a typical site such as a hotel ballroom or meeting center? Or are you trying to substantially change a space into an event site? Examples of this would be changing a building lobby into a banquet room, a warehouse into a theater, or a tent into a meeting and luncheon space.

You'd be amazed at how spaces can be transformed – and with some vision and help from people who have done it before – you can make the drabest space into a visual wonder. But we'd like to remind you that the more standard the event site, the less you have to think about.

For starters, you need to know how large a space you'll need to accommodate all your attendees. You certainly don't want your guests to feel that they're uncomfortably packed in, but you also don't want the room so large that it appears the crowd is too small. As a general rule of thumb, plan on 10 to 20 square feet per person.

Once you've chosen your space, you will need to think about what arrangement of tables and chairs would best serve your event goals. This may seem unimportant, but the way people are seated (or not seated!) makes a huge difference in their ability to interact with each other and to direct their attention to a focal point.

As if there aren't enough logistics to think about, you also must know something about the state fire code. Yes, the arrangement of tables and chairs will determine your guests' comfort and ability to interact, but it is also key to their safety should there be an emergency.



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## WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO ARRANGE YOUR CHAIRS AND TABLES?

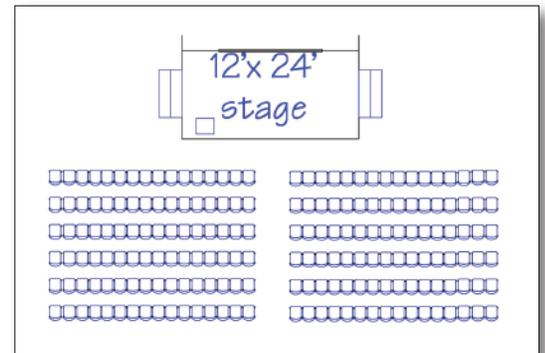
The answer to this question depends upon many variables, including your event goals, the size of your crowd, whether there's a presenter or an audio-visual component, etc. Take a look at these 5 styles to see which one most closely fits your objectives.

### Theater Style

Theater style floor plans chairs are typically set up in rows. The spacing of rows and aisles depends upon the width of the room and the total seating needed. The seats face a stage area, head table, or speaker.

#### HELPFUL HINTS

- ✓ This is a very flexible room set-up. Rows can be semi-circular, straight, or angled toward a focal point.
- ✓ According to state fire codes (read more on page 7), you must have a minimum of 12" between rows, but we recommend 18" to 24" to allow attendees easy movement in and out of the row. Typically each row is limited to 15 seats maximum, however, more is possible by increasing the distance between the rows.
- ✓ If your chairs have a narrow width, space them several inches apart to ensure your guests' comfort.



#### PROS

- Most efficient set-up for large groups in a presentation format

#### CONS

- Elevation changes are needed for large groups
- No writing surface or food service option
- Minimal opportunity for group interaction

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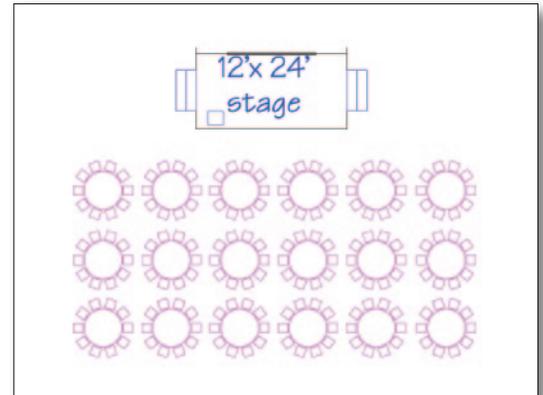
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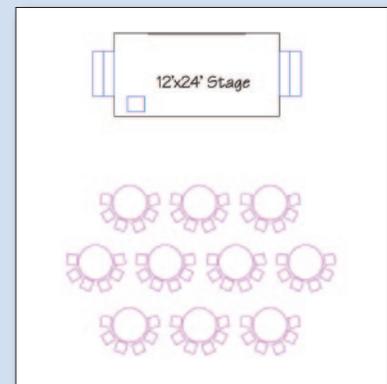
## Banquet Style

Banquet seating typically refers to guests seated at round tables. Generally the best number of people to put at a table depends on chair sizes and what you're placing on the table.



### HELPFUL HINTS

- ✓ A general rule of thumb for table size: 4' for 6 people; 5' for 8-10 people; 6' for 10-12 people.
- ✓ For an instructional type event, use larger tables or less people per table to allow event attendees to have extra space to place their notebooks and other materials.
- ✓ For an event that is a combination of food service and presentation, consider crescent round tables so no one has to turn around. Here's an example to the right ▶
- ✓ 5' round tables are the best size table for encouraging conversation and interaction.
- ✓ Plan on between 4 to 5 feet between tables to allow enough room for comfortable seating and wait staff movement.
- ✓ Be aware that when you are ordering table linen, although linen that goes to the floor looks elegant, it is more challenging for the person to sit at the table. Your guests will be more comfortable if the linen is a few inches off the floor.



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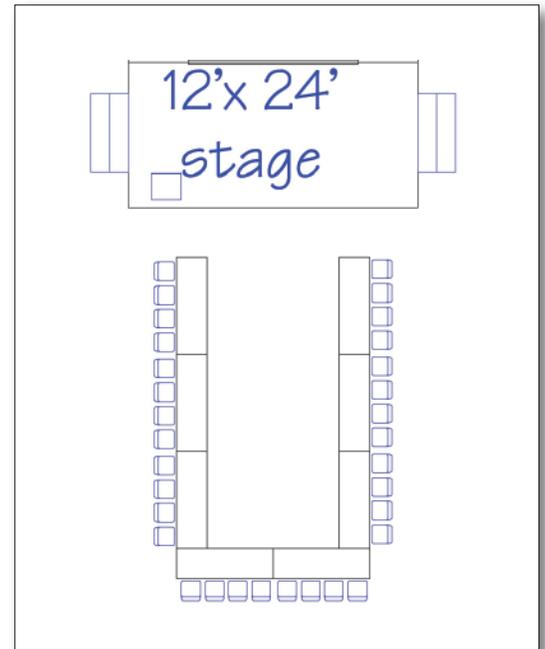
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## U-Shape Style

U-shaped floor plans lay out conference tables and seating to form a “U” toward the front of the room where a presenter will lead a discussion. This layout is often used for meetings or discussion groups where there is a speaker, audio-visual presentation or other focal point.

### HELPFUL HINTS

- ✓ A minimum of 24” of table space is required per attendee, with 30” providing the most comfort.
- ✓ Skirt the inside of the “U” if attendees are being seated only on the outside.
- ✓ Avoid this setup for groups greater than 25, as the sides of the “U” become too long and may not promote participation from all attendees.



### PROS

- Good workspace
- Encourages interaction between participants
- Ideal when audio-visual or speakers are involved

### CONS

- Not ideal for larger groups
- Not space efficient – space in the center may be wasted

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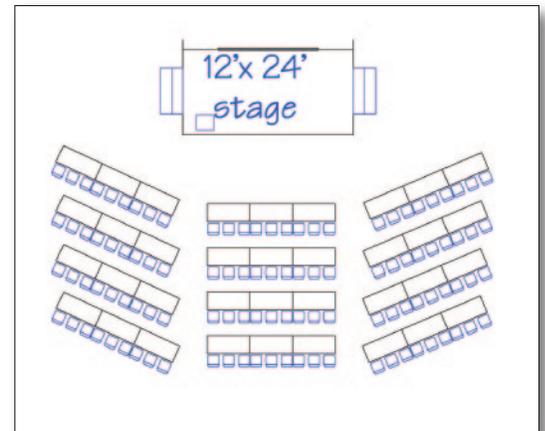
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## Classroom Style

Classroom style includes rows of conference tables and chairs facing the front of a room with writing space for each person. This set-up is ideal for note taking, meetings requiring multiple handouts or reference materials, or other tools such as laptop computers. This is the most comfortable set-up for long sessions and allows refreshments to be placed within reach of each attendee.



### HELPFUL HINTS

- ✓ Tables that extend beyond the stage or podium should be angled toward the speaker.
- ✓ Allow for approximately 24" to 30" of space per person at each table.
- ✓ Minimum space between tables is 3 feet. Provide more if space allows, for ease of movement in and out of the rows.

### PROS

- Presenter can see all participants
- Accommodates large groups in less space
- Note taking is easier

### CONS

- Not conducive to attendee interaction
- Participants only see each other's backs
- Not efficient use of space compared to theater style

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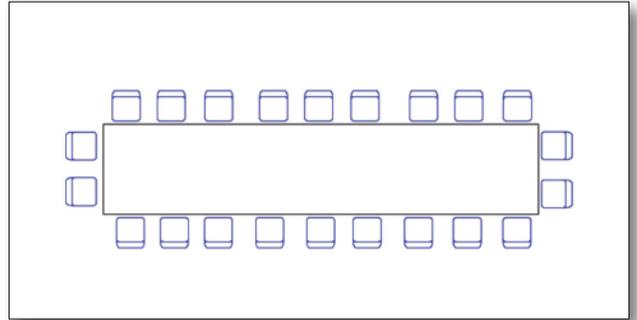
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## Conference or Boardroom Style

This floor plan has all the attendees sitting around a closed table environment. Most appropriate for groups of less than 25, it is intended for attendees to have close interaction. It's most often used for Board meetings, committee meetings, or discussion groups.



### HELPFUL HINTS

- ✓ Remember, the larger the set-up, the harder it is for attendees to see people at the other end of the table.

### PROS

- Good workspace
- Good working atmosphere
- Encourages interaction between participants

### CONS

- Not ideal for audio-visual presentations
- Not ideal for speakers
- Not conducive for large groups

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## ARE YOU IN COMPLIANCE WITH FIRE LAWS?

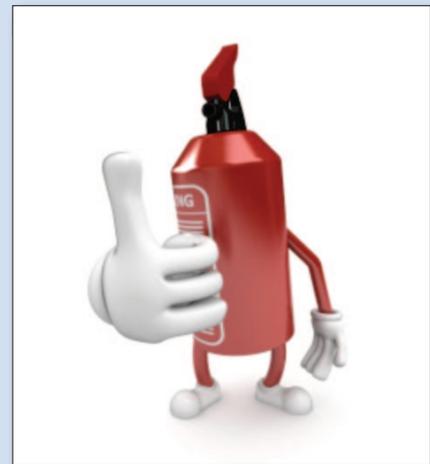
**The safety concerns associated with special events are as unique as the events themselves.** The concentration of people at large gatherings may produce problems in

physical movement and behavior of the occupants, the capacity of the exits, the maintenance of proper aisles or the proper width, and the method of alerting occupants in case of an emergency.

Events are usually attended by people who do not use the building frequently and are unfamiliar with exit locations, exit paths and other safeguards that may be present.

### Take a look at just some of the areas that fall under the provisions of fire code:

- ✓ Occupant loads (know your room capacity; the fire code has a per person occupant requirement)
- ✓ Table, chair and aisle spacing
- ✓ Egress: capacity, means of, width, impediments to (i.e. draperies over exit doors)
- ✓ Sources of illumination, emergency lighting
- ✓ Signage
- ✓ Stairs, ramps, handrail, riser heights
- ✓ Stage and platform construction
- ✓ Ventilation
- ✓ Fire protection



The fire codes are lengthy and include many caveats based on the venue type and location. Your event planner or fire marshal can help make sure your event space is in compliance.

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## WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT STAGES?

### How High?

You may not have thought about it, but if you're planning on having a riser or a stage at your event, its height is very important for the audience's visibility. It is also dependent upon many variables: Are your attendees sitting or standing? Do you have presenters? How many people will be on stage? What do you want your attendees to see?

If your audience is seated, you can use a lower stage than if they are standing. Here is a standard guideline you can follow:

# of Attendees	Stage Height
Up to 100	8" to 16"
100 to 300	16" to 24"
300 to 500	24" to 32"
500+	36" to 48"



### How Big?

The overall size of the stage you'll need is primarily determined by two factors:

- 1) the number of people that will be on it, and
- 2) the size of the venue. You want the stage to feel right for the size of the room. For example, if you don't have many people that will be on the stage, but your venue is very large, you will want a big stage. Just imagine a tiny stage at the XL Center!

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