

The New Rules of Gathering

A GUIDE TO
PLANNING WITH
PURPOSE FOR
ANY OCCASION.



Priya Parker

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**A GUIDE TO
PLANNING WITH
PURPOSE FOR ANY
OCCASION.**

Gathering is a practice to nurture and refresh. Not every gathering is the same. Keep this guide as a reference to help you begin to move toward new and creative ways of spending time together.

Inspired by my Art of Gathering principles, this guide includes five rules to help you rethink what your casual parties and special occasions *should* look like to what they *could* look like.

You don't need to follow every suggestion. Some moments you may practice only one idea while others may pull you to practice all five. You're the best person to decide what will be helpful for you and what makes the most sense given the context of your gatherings.

With the right tools, everyone has the ability to gather well. Welcome to the new rules of gathering.

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“Gatherings crackle and flourish when real thought goes into them, when structure is baked into them, and when a host has the curiosity, willingness, and generosity of spirit to try.”

PRIYA PARKER
THE ART OF GATHERING



HI, I'M PRIYA PARKER!

Before we dive in, I should probably tell you a little something **about** myself.



HELPING PEOPLE
CREATE COLLECTIVE
MEANING IN MODERN
LIFE, ONE GATHERING
AT A TIME.

I am a facilitator, strategic advisor, and author of *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters*. For the last 20 years, I've been helping people create collective meaning in modern life, one gathering at a time.

I hold degrees in public policy, organizational design, and political theory. But I've also been deeply shaped by dance, community theater, improv, and the fields of dialogue and deliberation. I realized along the way that when coming together, we often spend more time planning logistics than thinking about the elements that make a gathering sing — the human ones.

And now, when we may not be able to be in the same physical space, it's more important than ever to have the tools to create human connection. My mission is to equip you with the inspiration, courage and know-how to create transformative gatherings for yourself and your communities.

You can find additional resources at priyaparker.com and find me on Instagram [@priyaparker](https://www.instagram.com/priyaparker).

RULE #1:

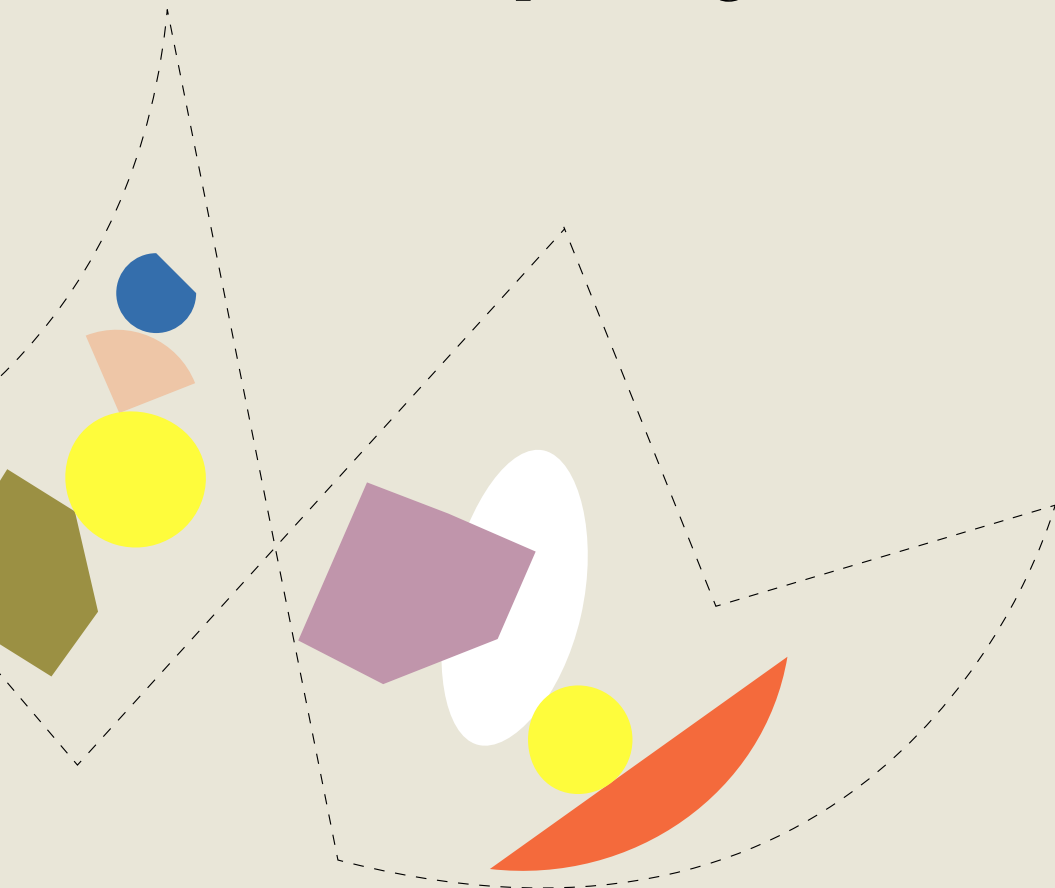
Identify Your Purpose



RULE #1:

**GIVE YOUR GATHERING
A PURPOSE**

Gathering well begins with a specific, unique and disputable purpose. When should we gather? And why? We often confuse the category of a gathering (birthday, baby shower, wedding, dinner party, etc) with the reason we are coming together. When we don't examine the deeper assumptions behind why we gather, we end up replicating the same old party formats.



Going with the flow and catering to everyone makes for a fine event but narrowing your gathering to a specific and unique purpose creates an opportunity to thrill.

When you're planning your next gathering for someone, think beyond the category. Let the following questions guide you in identifying its purpose.

- What is the occasion?
- Who is this event for?
- What are their needs in this specific moment? Which need will this gathering address?
- What is the host's need? Why are you the one planning it?
- What is your unique gift or superpower that you're bringing around your knowledge of the guest of honor or group? And how might you tap into your guests' (or co-hosts) unique skills or knowledge as well?

Use the table below to help you begin planning with a specific purpose.

THE CATEGORY	
3 REASONS TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER IN THIS MOMENT. WHAT ARE THE NEEDS?	1.
	2.
	3.
WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT NEED? BE SPECIFIC.	

RULE #2:

Make Purpose Your Bouncer



RULE #2:

MAKE PURPOSE YOUR BOUNCER

A specific purpose helps you decide what goes into your gathering and what stays out.

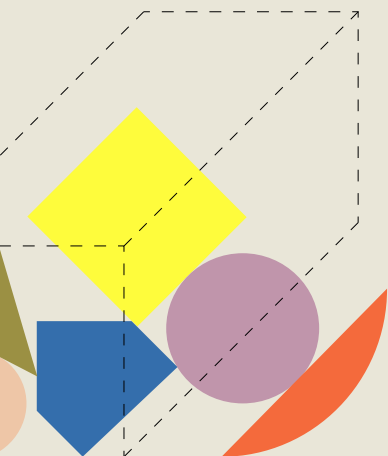
This starts with your guest list. I take no pleasure in exclusion (and often break my own rule), but the thoughtful gatherer understands that inclusion for the sake of being overly polite (or not making decisions) can distract from your carefully curated purpose.

THE GUEST LIST
SHOULD FULFILL
THE PURPOSE
OF THE
GATHERING.

Inattentive over-inclusion can keep connections shallow because of the increasing complexity and various needs of a group as it expands. When guests come for reasons other than the clear and specific purpose of the gathering, it can be harder to meaningfully activate your guests around a shared purpose. The guest list should fulfill the purpose of the gathering.

For example, if you're planning a reunion for a group of friends who are all now married, whether to include spouses or not should come back to what the purpose of the gathering is. Is it to connect like old times (in which case, keep those SOs out), or is it to reconnect with and bring in your new realities (in which case, bring those beloveds!).

Generous exclusion becomes a way of bounding a gathering that allows the diversity in it to be heightened and sharpened, rather than diluted into a hodgepodge of people. It is part of the important task of communicating to the guests what this gathering is. Generous exclusion is thoughtful and defining.



**ART OF GATHERING
REFLECTIONS**

Generous exclusion may feel a little uncomfortable, but the more is not always the merrier. Those who aren't fulfilling the purpose of your party are detracting from it.

As yourself these questions as you reflect on your past guest lists:

QUESTION #1

Has there ever been a time when you didn't want to invite someone to a gathering you were organizing — a meeting or a wedding — but felt that you had no choice?

QUESTION #1

How did having that person at the gathering affect it?

QUESTION #3

Have you ever successfully not invited someone? How did it go?

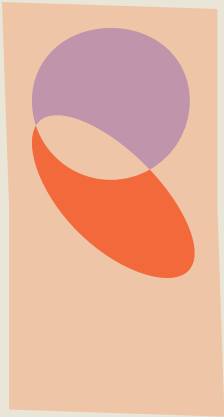
RULE #3:

Design Your Invitation To Persuade



RULE #3:

DESIGN YOUR INVITATION TO PERSUADE



Your gathering begins at the moment of discovery. For most guests, that moment of discovery begins with the invitation.

Many of us fall into the same invitation template habits:

- Digital invite design template
- Party category
- Who's hosting
- Time/Date/Location
- RSVP details

But, an invitation is not simply a pretty carrier of logistics. It's the carrier of a story. Storytelling helps to guide your guests and explain why you're asking them to meet in this way. Done well, it's an opening argument to persuade, even to entice.

An invitation should prepare your guests for why you're bringing people together, what you're asking of them (which part of themselves to bring), what to expect and what role they might play in the occasion (should they choose to accept).

**AN INVITATION
IS NOT SIMPLY
A PRETTY
CARRIER OF
LOGISTICS. IT'S
THE CARRIER
OF A STORY.**

The invitation is a proposed temporary, voluntary social contract:
Here's what I'm thinking and hoping to offer. Here's what I'm asking of you. Sound good? You in?

Stop making the logistics of your event the central point of your invitation.

Instead, tell a specific story of how and why this gathering needs to happen, in this specific future way, and why they're a crucial part of the experience. This (short) story should set the tone for the group experience and generate interest and excitement, while also weeding out those who may not fit your purpose. Great invitations help guests more honestly and easily say a considered "yes" or "no."

Give it a try and practice the art of (brief) storytelling. Create two invitations:

Invitation 1: The traditional logistics-focused template described in Rule #3.

Invitation 2: Use your notes from your purpose brainstorm to tell the story of why you're bringing people together in *this* moment.

Which one is more compelling?

INVITATION 1: LOGISTICS	INVITATION 2: STORYTELLING

RULE #4:

Create an Alternative World

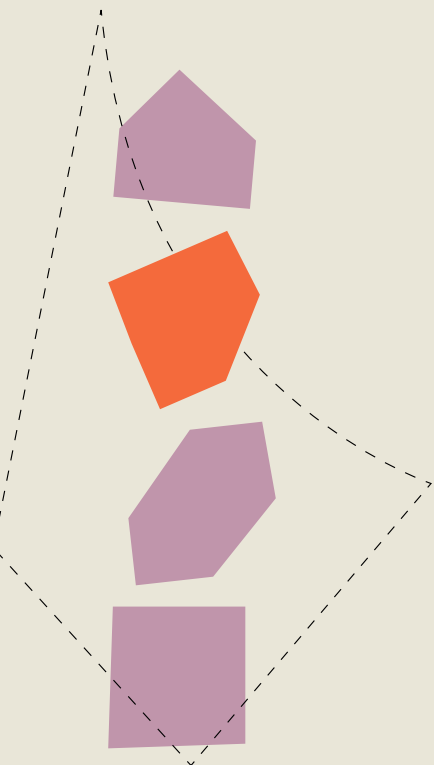


RULE #4:

DITCH ETIQUETTE FOR RULES

Looking to spice up your party? You can season your gatherings more deeply by creating a more playful world through temporary pop-up rules. Pop-up rules are not controlling or boring, but rather a rebellion against etiquette.

Whereas etiquette allows for people to gather because they have been raised with the same silent codes and norms, pop-up rules allow people to gather because they are different — yet open to having the same experience. They allow us to make meaning together without having to be the same.



The proper use of pop-up rules can help you get so much more out of a gathering because it can temporarily change and harmonize your guests' behavior for a specific bonded moment.

You create the possibility of more experimental, humble and satisfying gatherings. In a world of infinite choices, choosing one thing is the revolutionary act. And imposing that restriction can be quite liberating.

- What would your next networking event look like if you couldn't disclose what you do for a living?
- How would the energy change in the next "mom's night" if parents were playfully penalized for talking about their kids?
- Where might the dinner party conversation go if everyone had an incentive to keep their phone out of site for the night?

Brainstorm a few pop-up rules of your own to experiment with for your next gathering to help others be more present. Be playful and have fun with it.

A FEW POP-UP RULES

RULE #5:

Close with Intention

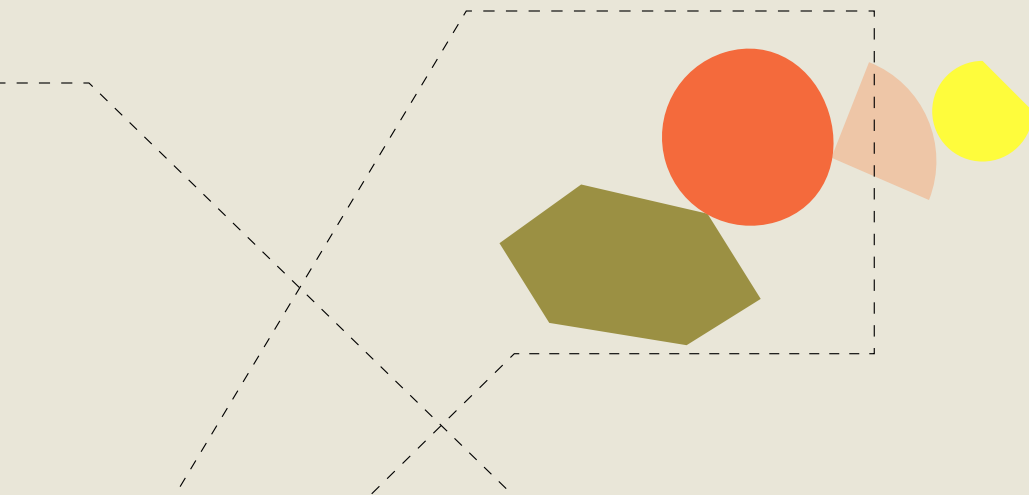


RULE #5:

CLOSE WITH INTENTION

Ending your time together well is a crucial way to shape the feelings, ideas and memories you want your guests to take with them. Endings are a reminder of **why** you gathered in the first place, and give guests a chance to make sense of the time they spent together.

Just as you don't start your invitations or gatherings with logistics, you don't want to end on them either. Closings are a moment of power. How you end your time together shapes your guests' experience, sense of meaning and memory of the event.



**ART OF GATHERING
REFLECTIONS**

On the one hand, you don't want to kill the vibe and seem like a party pooper by kicking everyone out the door.

On the other hand, you shouldn't wait until the life has been sucked out of everyone to end it. Your gathering doesn't need to end with a grand closing speech, you could simply:

- Put an end time on the invitation.
- Issue a last call: A song, an announcement, a signal to indicate that your time together is coming to an end.
- Provide a simple chocolate or other small token on the way out that symbolizes the theme of the night (or just a thoughtful, unexpected treat).
- Take a group photo. "Before everyone disappears, let's capture tonight!"
- Walk your guests to the door rather than having them see themselves out.

Brainstorm ideas for the closing below.

<p>YOUR GATHERING'S PURPOSE: REMIND PEOPLE OF THE "WHY."</p>	
<p>3 IDEAS TO CLOSE YOUR PARTY</p> <p>HOW CAN YOU IMPLEMENT A SMALL BUT POWERFUL WAY TO METAPHORICALLY WRAP A GATHERING AND DISTINGUISH IT FROM YOUR LAST ONE?</p>	<p>1.</p> <hr/> <p>2.</p> <hr/> <p>3.</p>

CHECKLIST

The New Rules of Gathering

Remember, gathering is an art to *practice*. You can and should nurture and refresh often as you begin to move toward new and creative ways of spending time together.

Use this chart to help you brainstorm your next party, meeting, or event.

THE NEW RULES OF GATHERING	PLANNING NOTES
<p>Identify Your Purpose</p> <p>EXPLORE YOUR REASON FOR BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER. IDENTIFY A SPECIFIC, UNIQUE, DISPUTABLE WHY RATHER THAN JUST THE PARTY'S CATEGORY.</p>	
<p>Make Purpose Your Bouncer</p> <p>LET YOUR PURPOSE GUIDE YOUR APPROACH TO YOUR GUEST LIST. WILL YOUR PARTY THRIVE FROM GENEROUS EXCLUSION OR OVER-INCLUSION?</p>	
<p>Design Your Invitation To Persuade</p> <p>HOW CAN YOU USE STORYTELLING TO DRAW YOUR GUESTS INTO YOUR GATHERING?</p>	
<p>Creating an Alternative World</p> <p>IDENTIFY A POP-UP RULE TO HELP YOUR GUESTS BE MORE PRESENT OR AVOID UNHELPFUL GROUP TENDENCIES THAT CAN DISTRACT FROM YOUR PURPOSE.</p>	
<p>Close with Intention</p> <p>WHAT'S ONE THING YOU CAN DO TO CLOSE THIS PARTY AND MAKE IT MEMORABLE?</p>	

“Connection doesn’t happen on it’s own.
You have to design your gatherings for the
kinds of connections you want to create.”

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THE ART OF GATHERING



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APRIL 2022

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