

## Sparring

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Sparring is a structured way to get peer feedback from teammates and stakeholders. A fruitful sparring session can also help you reach specific decisions that will take the project forward.

### **USE THIS PLAY TO...**

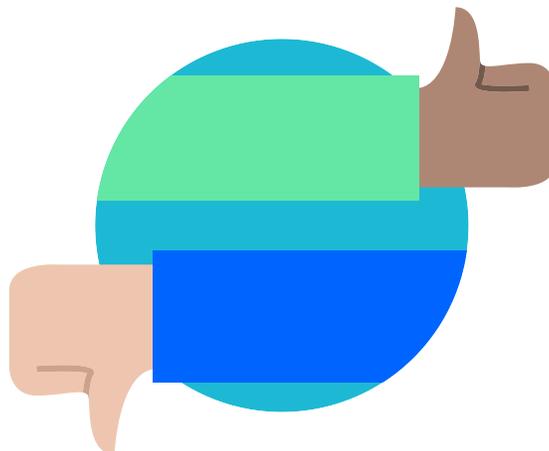
Let peers challenge your own ideas and inspire new ones.

Take advantage of others' knowledge and experience from outside your own discipline.

If you're struggling with [velocity](#) or [team cohesiveness](#) on your [Health Monitor](#), running this play might help.

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[Read more](#)



**PEOPLE**

2 - 6

**PREP TIME**

30 min

**TIME**

30 min

**DIFFICULTY**

Easy

## Running the play

Think carefully about what you want to get peer feedback on. Be sure to send links to any pre-reading when you invite your team to the session.

### Materials

Print-outs of your work

Sticky notes

Markers or pens

Timer

[Rubber chicken](#)

### PREP

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## Do your homework (30 min)

Don't waste your time (or others'). You've only got half an hour, so think carefully about what you want to spar. Page layouts? Copy for social posts? The user's journey through several screens? Be sure to put that in the invite you send out. Also include links to any pre-reading, but limit that to 15 minutes' worth.

Build a tight case for the approach you've taken – gather competitive analysis, user research, etc. – and be ready to defend it. But that's not the same as being defensive! Critiques of your work are not criticism of you as a person.

## **ARRIVE EARLY TO SPARRING**

Hang print-outs of your work on the wall, along with supporting materials like personas, lists of user stories, a list of guiding principles for your project, and so on. And don't forget the sticky notes, markers and whiteboard!

### **STEP 1**

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#### **Set the stage (5 min)**

Remind your team what they'll be critiquing, and explain the level of feedback you are looking for so you don't waste time on things that are likely to change later. For example, there's no point in talking about tiny little details if the workflow has not been decided.



#### **PRO TIP**

Invite peers from outside your immediate team so you can get a totally fresh perspective.

### **STEP 2**

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#### **Do a walk-through (5 min)**

Briefly present whatever you're sparring to set the context. Give just enough information to get oriented, but don't justify things (yet) or go nuts on the explanations. They walked in with open minds, and you want to keep it that way and avoid introducing bias that will lead the witness.

### STEP 3

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#### Bring on the peer feedback (10 min)

Let the group go over your work and mark it up directly, or use sticky notes to pose questions and leave feedback. Do this part in silence. Only answer questions for clarification.

Don't try to solve issues right now, as tempting as it may be. That only takes away time that could be spent raising questions.

### STEP 4

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#### Discuss, debate and challenge (5 min)

Go back over the work and discuss your team's questions and comments. Be prepared to answer challenges about why you are doing this, as well as details of what you are doing. Providing context is important along with backing the work up with any research you have done.

Peer feedback can be brutal and being vulnerable is hard, but encourage that. When you step outside your comfort zone, your idea can evolve into something you may never have envisioned.



#### **ANTI-PATTERN**

**Your sparring session morphs into a brainstorming session.**

Sparring isn't about generating ideas. If you feel like you need that, schedule it for a different time.

### STEP 5

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## Wrap it up (5 min)

Capture any outstanding questions or issues, and schedule a follow-up sparring session if necessary. Make it clear when your team will be able to see an iteration of your work based on the feedback they've given. And acknowledge any feedback that you likely won't incorporate into the next iteration.

## Nailed it?

Be sure to run a full Health Monitor session or checkpoint with your team to see if you're improving.

[Find your Health Monitor](#)

## Variations

If you're sparring something that doesn't lend itself well to sticky notes (e.g., long-form copy), have your team call out feedback verbally and ask for a scribe to take notes.

Sparring can either be a two-way discussion where you challenge the feedback you get from your team. Or, it can be a one-way delivery of feedback where you just soak it all in.

## Follow-ups

Ping your team with follow-up questions as you work on your next iteration. Don't just hope for the best or wait for the next sparring session.

### RELATED PLAYS

[Demo Trust](#)

[Experience Canvas](#)