

YARNING KITS

CULTURAL

GUIDANCE



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The University Library recognises and acknowledges the traditional lands and the people on which our sites are located including the Awabakal, Worimi, Darkinjung, Birpai, Worimi, Wonnorua and Eora nations.

We pay respects to the wisdom of the Elders past and present. We recognise that First Nations sovereignty was never ceded and that this always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

CONTRIBUTORS

This piece of work was led by David Newham – University Cultural Capability Facilitator, and UoN ‘Reconciliation and Development Consultant’ Institute for Regional Futures and Cultural Capability Facilitator/Indigenous Liaison Officer, and Sarah Groombridge, a proud descendant of the Weilwun people and Lead, Indigenous Engagement, University of Newcastle Library.



Scan this QR Code to
view a video about
the Yarning Mats.





‘Yarning Circles have been used by Indigenous peoples around the world for centuries to learn collectively, build respectful relationships, and preserve and pass on cultural knowledge through narrative’ (Geia, et al., 2013).

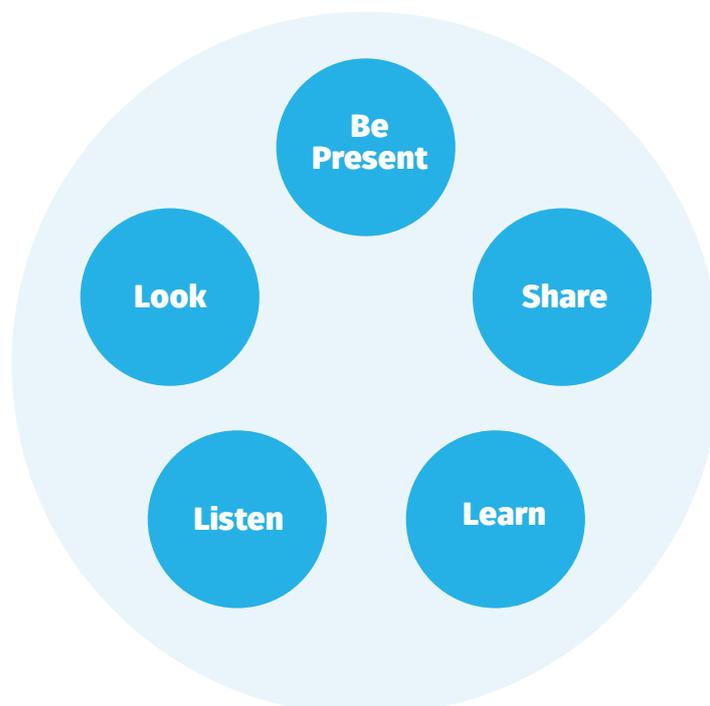
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have embedded cultural perspectives into conversation and storytelling for tens of thousands of years. Yarning Circles are a way to invite Indigenous styles of conversation and storytelling into our everyday way of learning and teaching and can be used across all disciplines to embed traditional ways of practice into day-to-day learning. Yarning Circles allow an opportunity for culture to be reclaimed through traditional ways of storytelling and by sharing knowledge.

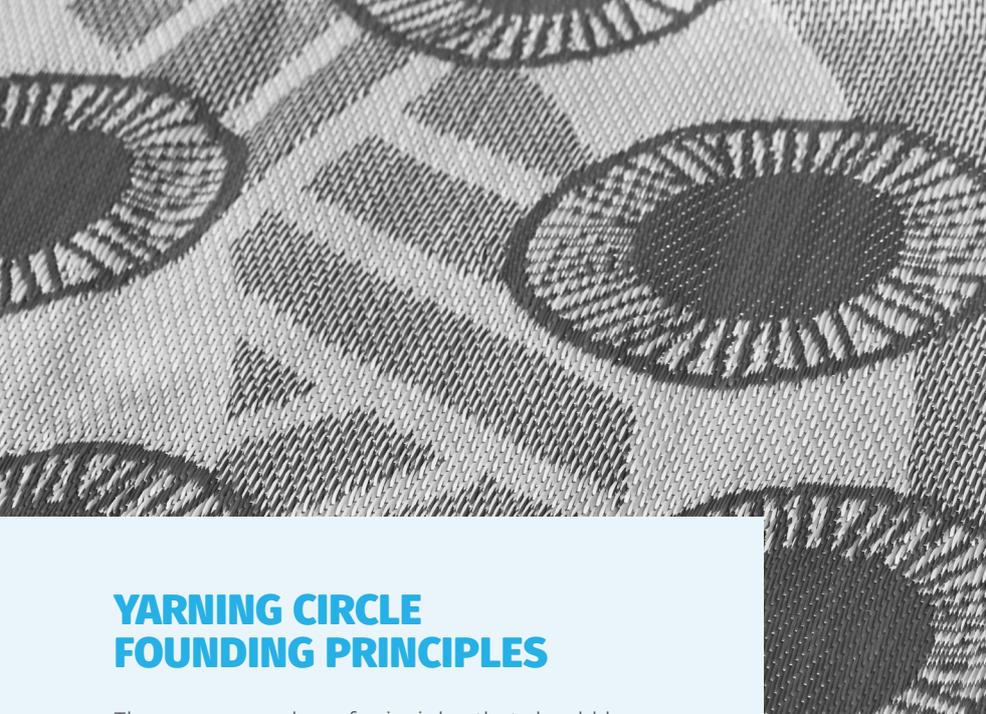
Across different nation groups, there are varying protocols for conducting Yarning Circles. This document provides a generic overview of a Yarning Circle, which when undertaken in a culturally appropriate manner is suitable for all people to utilise.

These kits have been developed to support Indigenous ways of learning and the Indigenisation of curriculum. They can be used for a range of purposes including teaching, learning, research, and in community.

WHY PRACTICE IN A YARNING CIRCLE?

Participating in a Yarning Circle offers the opportunity to revisit traditional Aboriginal cultural practices of coming together, sharing, growing knowledge and strengthening relationships. This opportunity of coming together, is especially poignant today where there is a growing trend across society of us becoming more divergent and polarised than ever before. Coming into a Yarning Circle is a privilege, and with this comes a series of responsibilities and obligations, particularly to the other members of the group. Sitting in Circle allows for the transfer of knowledge and storytelling.





YARNING CIRCLE FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

There are a number of principles that should be followed for a Yarning Circle to be conducted in a culturally appropriate manner.

WHY A CIRCLE?

One of the powerful aspects of the Yarning Circle is that the shape allows all members of the group to be seen clearly, facing each other and be placed equally around the Circle/mat.

AUTHENTICITY

All members of the Yarning Circle enter it being authentic, with a genuine desire to be involved.

FEELING – SPIRIT (OF STORY)

Every participant brings with them their own depth and breadth of story - their “past” or “history”. Traditional Aboriginal knowledge holders speak about the power and presence of “feeling” or “spirit” of story, and the need to always remember our own past (Neidjie, 1989) as well as the spirit of our land or Country. The two spirits are intertwined. We encourage group members to be present in the Circle and embrace the spirit of their own story, along with the spirits of the other participants and the land. A leader of the Circle (predetermined or chosen at the time) can also assist members by guiding conversations and helping the sharing of story to flourish.

HUMILITY

When you are humble, things become easy to share. Humility is strength and our ego drops away. It is important to always speak the truth within a Yarning Circle.

LEARN

The Yarning Circle allows participants to build and strengthen relationships by celebrating what we have in common, not what divides us. Participants suspend judgement and recognise the knowledge of other Circle participants together with the knowledge of those who came before us. We acknowledge and respect different perspectives and expertise.

LISTEN

Listening is more important than talking. It’s a respectful practice and allows knowledge and information to be attained respectfully. We encourage Circle members to listen when others are speaking and sharing their story or thoughts.

LOOK

By looking at or towards the speaker, if/where culturally appropriate, you take in non-verbal language cues and can learn in different ways.

OBLIGATION

Participants have an obligation to ensure that knowledge is shared in a culturally appropriate way, which can include asking permission to share. Be mindful that stories or knowledge shared in the Circle may not be used for further discussion or shared beyond that experience. It is important to seek permission or establish what is allowed to be reshared afterward or kept to the Circle - please do not assume.



RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are key to building the Circle. If someone doesn't contribute, it impacts the whole Circle. Everyone in the Yarning Circle has a relationship and a responsibility to participate. It's ok if someone sits back quietly and doesn't speak but be mindful of this and encourage them to contribute when they feel more comfortable.

RESPECT

The Yarning Circle is a culturally significant tool. It is important to recognise this and treat it, as well as the other Circle participants' stories and their life journey, with respect.

SAFE SPACE

The Yarning Circle is a safe space. Use the preceding paragraphs to create a charter of responsibilities before starting the Yarning Circle, to ensure everyone is aware of how to participate in an authentic, meaningful way which is also culturally appropriate. Make sure that any concerns about different power levels are resolved before entering the Circle. Be mindful of any pre-existing assumptions and biases, and try not to allow these to affect your participation.

SHARING IS CARING

Sharing is the best way to build strong relationships. A Yarning Circle is the place to sit together, talk, and share.

STORYTELLING

Storytelling is a natural way to share knowledge. When you tell your story, be mindful that it will become part of the other participants' experience, so it needs to be based in fact and truth. Make sure that your story serves the wellbeing of the whole Circle, not a smaller group or agenda.

YARNING CIRCLE CULTURAL TOOLS

It is the responsibility of each Yarning Circle custodian to ensure these cultural tools are maintained. Please keep food and drink off the mat and shoes off is preferred.

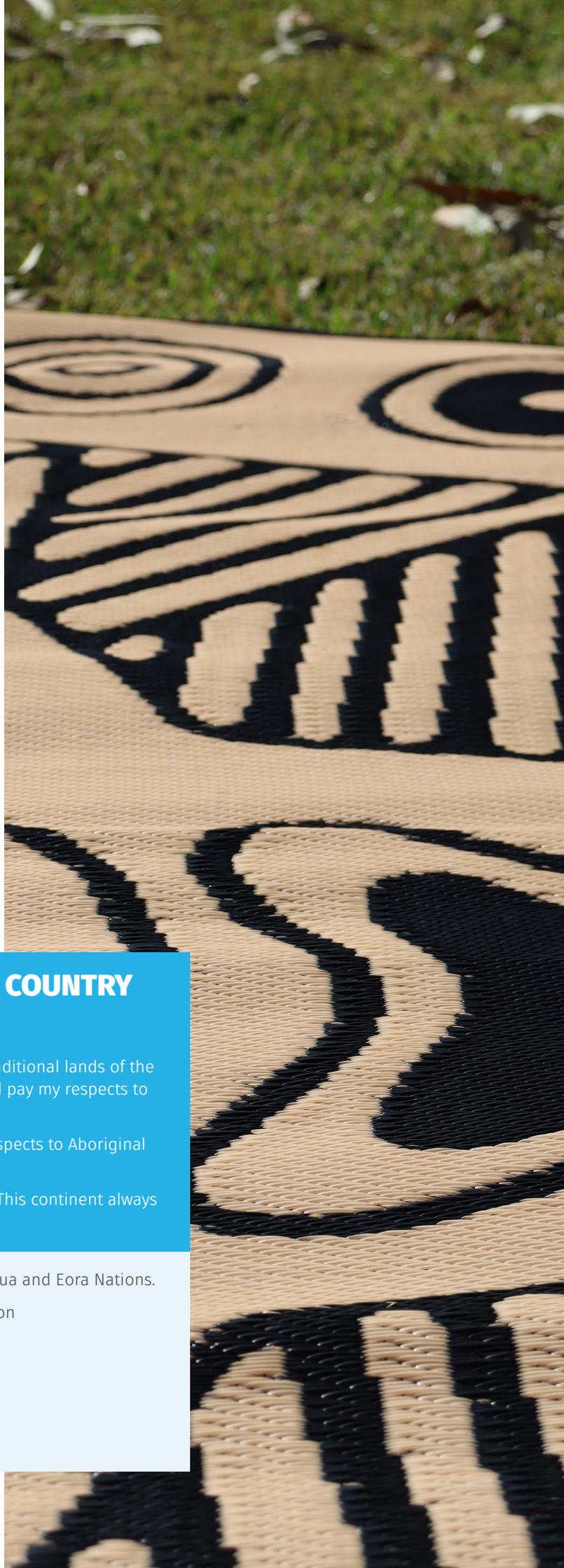
WAYS OF RECORDING

The Yarning Circle is an ancient tool and participants must be present and engaged. Laptops, and other devices can be used to record the discussion if necessary.

HOW TO USE THIS KIT

If used in a culturally appropriate way, people from all cultural backgrounds are invited to use the Yarning Mat kits.

- The Yarning Mats can be used indoors or outdoors.
- The Yarning Mat will include three (3) coloured “Yarning Stones”. These are learning tools to assist the Circle leader to pass to other members as a symbol of their turn to speak next. One stone is held by the current speaker, while the other two stones are held by members who will be next to speak. Once the person speaking finishes their sharing, they pass the “yarning stone” to another Circle member that has indicated they wish to share. The Circle leader will play an integral role in steering the Yarning Stones throughout the Yarning Circle session.
- Participants should be invited to sit on the mat, however, chairs and mobility aids can be used around the yarning Circle for those requiring assistance or modification.
- As a sign of respect, Yarning Mats are best used without shoes.
- Ensure that participants understand the importance of the cultural protocols of participating in a yarning circle prior to the commencement of the circle.
- The Circle should always commence with an Acknowledgement of Country (which can be done by anyone) or a Welcome to Country if a local Aboriginal Elder is present and willing to deliver one.
- At the commencement of the Circle, each participant should be asked to share three things: their name, where they are from, and one thing about themselves that they feel comfortable sharing that no one knows.
- The person that is guiding the Circle is responsible for ensuring all members can share equally (for example, by inviting individuals to share or speak up if they haven't had the opportunity to do so).



EXAMPLE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Callaghan Specific (**modify for other sites as needed**)

I would like to start by acknowledging that we are on the traditional lands of the **Pambalong Clan of the Awabakal Nation**. I acknowledge and pay my respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging.

I would like to extend this acknowledgement and pay my respects to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

I recognise that First Nations sovereignty was never ceded. This continent always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

All campuses: Awabakal, Darkinjung, Biripai, Worimi, Wonnarua and Eora Nations.

Newcastle Callaghan: Pambalong Clan of the Awabakal Nation

Newcastle CBD: Awabakal and Worimi Nations

Central Coast Ourimbah: Darkinjung Nation

Port Macquarie: Biripai Nation

Sydney CBD: Eora Nation

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There is a plethora of scholarly works that focus on the power, appropriateness, and place of Yarning or Yarning Circles in education, research, and many other fields or sectors. Please see our recommended reading list below:

- Barlo, S., Boyd, W. E., Pelizzon, A., & Wilson, S. (2020). Yarning as protected space: Principles and protocols. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 16(2), 90-98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180120917480>
- Bessarab, D., & Ng'andu, B. (2010). Yarning about yarning as a legitimate method in Indigenous research. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 3(1), 37-50. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcis.v3i1.57>
- Carlson, B., & Frazer, R. (2018). Yarning Circles and social media activism. *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture & Policy* 169(1), 43-53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X18803762>
- Chapman, N. (2019). Yarning Circles – their value in midwifery education in Western Australia. *Women and Birth: Journal of the Australian College of Midwives*, 32, S45-S45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2019.07.287>
- Eady, M. J., & Keen, J. (2021). Employability readiness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: Yarning Circles as a methodological approach to illuminate student voice. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 12(2), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.21153/JTLGE2021VOL12NO2ART962>
- Evans, N., & Acton, R. (2022). Narratives of teaching in outdoor and environmental education: What can we learn from a case study of outdoor education pedagogy? *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 22(3), 214-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2021.1902828>
- Fleming, T., Creedy, D. K., & West, R. (2020). The influence of yarning Circles: A cultural safety professional development program for midwives. *Women and Birth: Journal of the Australian College of Midwives*, 33(2), 175-185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2019.03.016>
- Geia, L. K., Hayes, B., & Usher, K. (2013). Yarning/Aboriginal storytelling: Towards an understanding of an Indigenous perspective and its implications for research practice. *Contemporary Nurse: A Journal for the Australian Nursing Profession*, 46(1), 13-17. <https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.2013.46.1.13>
- Kennedy, M., Maddox, R., Booth, K., Maidment, S., Chamberlain, C., & Bessarab, D. (2022). Decolonising qualitative research with respectful, reciprocal, and responsible research practice: A narrative review of the application of Yarning method in qualitative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research. *International Journal for Equity in Health* 21(1), 1-134. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-022-01738-w>
- McLaughlin, T., Chester, A., Kennedy, B., & Young, S. (2020). Tertiary Education in a Time of Change. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5883-2_11
- Mills, K. A., Sunderland, N., & Davis-Warra, J. (2013). Yarning Circles in the literacy classroom. *The Reading Teacher* 67(4), 285-289. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1195>
- Purdie, N., Milgate, G., & Bell, H. R. (2011). *Two way teaching and learning: Toward culturally reflective and relevant education*. ACER Press.
- Radke, A. (2018). Women's yarning Circles: A gender-specific bail program in one Southeast Queensland Indigenous sentencing court, Australia. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 29(1), 53-69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/taja.12263>
- Shay, M. (2021). Extending the yarning yarn: Collaborative yarning methodology for ethical Indigenous education research. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 50(1), 62-70. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2018.25>
- Uink, B., Bennett, R., & van den Berg, C. (2021). Factors that enable Australian Aboriginal women's persistence at university: A strengths-based approach. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 40(1), 178-193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1852185>
- Walker, M., Fredericks, B., Mills, K., & Anderson, D. (2014). "Yarning" as a method for community-based health research with Indigenous women: The Indigenous women's wellness research program. *Health Care for Women International* 35(10), 1216-1226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2013.815754>

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