

Setting Up Your Classroom

Classroom setup can dramatically affect students' attitudes toward and habits of learning. Students need an environment that is organized, stimulating, and comfortable in order to learn effectively. Creating such an environment entails arranging a practical physical layout, supplying diverse materials and supplies, and encouraging students to have a sense of belonging and ownership.

Tips for Getting Started

- Ask students where they think the different learning centers should go.
- Let students help to define what behavior is appropriate for each learning center.
- Help students learn how to behave appropriately by role=playing and practicing with them.
- Post procedures for learning centers where students can refer to them.

Arranging the Learning Centers

Take the physical features of your classroom into account when planning. As the year progresses, you can add different kinds of learning centers to fit your class's evolving needs.

- Keep computers facing away from windows to keep glare from sunlight off the screens.
- Use bookshelves to isolate different areas.
- Provide comfortable seating.
- Save space by using walls for posters, display shelves, books, and supplies.
- Build a loft to save space while creating a private spot for independent reading.
- Separate learning centers of high activity, such as the cross-curricular center, from areas like the Reading/Language Arts Center, where students need quiet.
- Set aside an area to meet with small groups. Allow enough seating for about eight students.

Arranging the Whole-Group Area

- Make sure that all students will have an unrestricted view of the chalkboard.
- Consider using a rug to mark off the area if you have a primary-grade classroom.
- Consider what whole -- group activities will take place to determine how to arrange students desks. Keep in mind that arranging desks in a circle promotes discussions and small clusters of desks can double as small-group meeting areas.
- Your desk should be out of the way, but in an area where you can view the entire classroom. Set aside an off-limits zone for your records and supplies.

Learning Areas

Whole-Group Area

For whole-class lessons -- this includes informal discussion, direct instruction, and student presentations. This is a good place for an Author's Chair from which students can read their writing to the class.

Small-Group Area

Here you can give small-group instruction or allow groups of students to gather for peer-led discussions.

Reading Area

This is a place for students to read independently or quietly with a partner. It should provide comfortable seating, a variety of books, and a quiet, secluded atmosphere.

Writing Center

Here students write independently and collaboratively. The area should contain comfortable space for writing and a variety of supplies.

Cross-Curricular Center

This is an active center where students explore relationships across different curricula, including literature, science, social studies, art, and math.

Computer Station

This area is for computer use in writing, math, reading, keyboard practice, research, telecommunications, and creative games.

Creative Arts Center

This area is where students can get involved in visual art and dramatic play. It should have a variety of art supplies, costumes, and props.

Communication Area/Post Office

This area has mail slots for students and teacher to exchange written messages and suggestions.

Listening Station

Here students listen to tapes of books, stories, songs, and poems.