

How to Set Up Learning Stations

Classroom set-up 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.

Arranging the Whole-Group Area

Set aside an area for whole-class portions of the lesson. These portions may include, for example, warm-up and wrap-up, informal discussion, direct instruction, and student presentations.

- Make sure that all students can see the board or relevant visual displays.
- Consider the whole-group activities that will take place to determine how to arrange student desks or floor seating. Keep in mind that arranging desks in a circle promotes discussions and small clusters of desks can be used to support group work and for small-group meeting areas.
- Your desk should be out of the way, but in an area where you can view the entire classroom.

Learning Stations: Tips for Getting Started

Take the physical features of your classroom into account when planning learning stations. You may wish to start with one station in a corner. As you and the students become more comfortable with learning stations, you can create additional stations and change the tasks at the locations.

- Use bookshelves, easels, or other vertically oriented objects to separate different areas.
- Provide comfortable seating, if possible.
- Save floor space by using areas along walls for posters, display shelves, books, and supplies.
- Separate learning centers of high activity and noise (e.g., Content-based Learning Station) from areas where students need to be quiet (e.g., Reading Station).
- Set aside an area to meet with small groups. Allow enough seating for four to eight students.
- If the classroom has computers, face them away from windows to keep glare off the screens.
- Ask students where they think the different learning stations should go and what types of station activities they would enjoy.
- Let students help to define appropriate behavior for each station.
- Post activity guidelines and behavior rules (text or signs with pictures) at each learning station.
- Help students learn how to behave appropriately by role-playing and practicing with them.

Examples of learning stations:

Reading Station: Students read independently or quietly with a partner; features comfortable seating, a variety of books, and a quiet atmosphere.

Writing Center: Students work independently or collaboratively in a comfortable space with a variety of supplies and resources (charts, posters, picture dictionaries, models of letters) to support writing.

Content-based Learning Station: Students complete activities that explore content drawn from across the curriculum (e.g., science, social studies, art, and math); usually an active station.

Computer Station: Students use computers for language practice, keyboard and technology skills development, projects, and learning games. Students can work alone or with partners.

Creative Arts Station: Students can get involved in visual art and dramatic play. It should have a variety of art supplies, costumes, and props; this is an active station.

Hands-on Learning Station: Students can work with modeling clay, realia, building blocks, and other kinesthetic materials; this is an active station.

Listening Station: Students can listen to recordings of books, stories, songs, and poems either using headsets or with speakers set at a low volume.

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