

NASET's HOW TO Series

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How To Design Your Classroom

Introduction

Step I - Classroom Design-(Resource Room and Self Contained classroom only - Inclusion Class teachers proceed to Step II)

Setting up the physical structure of your classroom is a personal choice. However, some logical reasoning should be utilized when determining the layout of the room. In a resource room and self-contained special education classroom, there are several designs that you can consider:

Station oriented model

In this model, the room arrangement is divided into stations that contain specific content area materials. For example, there might be a reading center, math center, computer center, writing center etc. in which specific children go to work on their specific IEP goals. Houghton Mifflin (2006) lists several different types of 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.

When setting up your room with a station or learning center approach, take the physical features of your classroom into account when planning. As the school year progresses, you can change or add learning centers to fit your class's evolving needs. Keep the following things in mind if you use this type of design:

- a) Different learning areas should be partitioned off through the use of bookshelves.
- b) Provide comfortable seating by having the children bring in seat cushions.
- c) Save space by using walls for posters, display shelves, books, and supplies.
- d) Keep computers facing away from windows to keep glare from sunlight off the screens.
- e) Separate learning centers of high activity, such as the cross-curricular center, from areas like the Reading/Language Arts Center, where students need quiet.
- f) Set aside an area to meet with small groups. Allow enough seating for about eight students.

Child oriented model

In this type of setting, the room is arranged so that the children are separated to avoid distraction and increase concentration. Here, the teacher moves from student to student. Since most of the work is individualized, the teacher and the assistant can work on specific limitations for each child with special needs.

Teacher center model

In this type of design, the teacher's work table or area is the center of the room. In this way, the teacher can work with several children at a time and monitor their progress. If the teacher feels a child needs less distraction, he/she can be moved to another part of the room with or without the assistant teacher.

Step II - A-Designing Your Classroom (Inclusion class)

In this instance there may be very little to do depending on the relationship between you and the regular education teacher. If you are hired for an elementary inclusion class, the general education teacher may set up the room. However, your input would be helpful and you may want to ask if he/she has any concerns about the room design in light of the children with special needs. In this case, assist the teacher, making suggestions if you feel they will better serve the population of children with disabilities, e.g., quiet corner or study carrel to avoid distractions. If you are hired as an inclusion teacher at the high school, then there may be less to do with setting up the room, since many different teachers will be using that same room. However, try to assist the teacher and suggest anything that you feel might help.

The following comments concerning setting up your classroom come from teachers who posted their thoughts at the University of North Carolina, School of Education (2005) comment board:

I was fortunate enough to have my own classroom during my first year of teaching. My school building was too small to provide every faculty member that luxury. Some colleagues taught in a different room every period, using carts to transport their materials. Others, at neighboring schools, settled into trailers that had been rented to handle an unexpected increase in the number of students enrolled.

I was grateful, but had no time to dwell on my good fortune. Students were coming in less than a week and I needed to focus on developing my course materials and management systems. I had a minimal amount of time to set up a physical classroom. Still, I knew my students would benefit from a positive environment. The previous history teacher had been kind enough to leave pictures to decorate the wall space, but those images did not create the atmosphere we needed. Every portrait displayed the head of a

white male who had been a "Creator of Your Country!!!" There were no pictures of women, ethnic minorities or anyone under the age of fifty. Would my students feel a sense of belonging and engagement in a classroom like this?

I quickly replaced the pictures with a more diverse array of images and began moving desks, adding plants and organizing the board space. I created folders for students, a filing system for my materials and hung a "welcome" sign on the door. I thought I had covered the basics. I didn't discover the infamous "guillotine window" until a few weeks later when it slid shut forcefully and unexpectedly, nearly removing the arm of a student. I didn't learn that the carpet would be soaked after every rainstorm until I had ruined the teacher's edition of our textbook by leaving it on the floor near my desk.

My point? If you're a new teacher, one of your first jobs will be to set up your classroom. You'll want to do it quickly so you can focus on other aspects of teaching, but you want to do it well so that it becomes an environment in which your students can learn. There will be some hurdles that you cannot anticipate — guillotine windows for example. But the purpose of this post is to encourage you to talk to teachers in your building about classroom issues that might affect you and your students — and to provide a few practical tips that could save you some time, frustration and money as you begin a new year.

Other issues to consider for setting up your classroom should include:

1. Check school policies

Before designing your classroom, ask if there are any school policies that affect classroom displays. Some principals require you to post daily objectives. Many schools have fire policies that prohibit hanging paper signs on the door.

2. Plan for inspiration

Use a portion of your space to inspire students. This could mean hanging engaging posters about content or attitude. Or if you are planning to display student work, post a sign above the area that says *"ALL of my students are capable of excellence. These really showed it on a recent assignment!"* (Make sure you print letters large enough for students to read!)

3. Save plenty of space for information

If you need students to access certain types of information daily, create a consistent space for them to find it. For example, you could post permanent signs at the front of the room that say "Objectives", "Warm Up Activity" and "Homework" and use the area near these signs to provide details about each. Also have a space where the date is consistently posted, and make sure your name is posted at the beginning of the year.

I also recommend having a section of the room devoted to students who have been absent. If you decide to do this:

Label the space clearly. I have a sign that simply asks "Were you absent?"

Hang a calendar nearby to help students identify the day of school they missed.

Use a small filing cabinet to house an activity log (listing the work completed each day) and blank copies of all assignments (labeled with titles matching those in the activity log)

After you introduce students to the space, they become responsible for identifying days they miss, checking the log for work completed on those days, gathering the blank assignments, completing the work and submitting it to you.

4. Protect what you post

If you're going to display any poster in your classroom for more than a month — or want to use a temporary poster again next year — laminate it before you hang it on your wall. Otherwise, you'll need to recreate it after it is tattered and torn. Many of your schools will have laminating machines. If they don't, other teachers will be able to tell you where the service is provided in your area. Make sure you check the school limits on use or prices at stores before making final decisions about what to laminate!

5. Make it stick

Ask other teachers in your building what adhesives work on the school walls. I once spent hours creating a

display only to find it on the floor of my room the next day. Tape works on some walls. Others require puddy. I have heard that hot glue guns work on the concrete walls in many schools. Finally, you can nail things into the walls. The nails are especially good for holding clipboards (if you want to clip a sign in sheet near your door) and bathroom passes (if you use anything larger than a paper pass).

6. Leave space for colleagues

Leave space for other teachers who use the room. If you have your own classroom, but other teachers use it during your planning period or after school, leave them a drawer in your filing cabinet and sections of the board and wall. Have a conversation about what else they might need. This is important to preserve both your materials and your relationship with colleagues.

If you are a traveling teacher, initiate a conversation about space sharing with teachers you encounter in those travels. Get a copy of keys for each room in which you'll be teaching and ask the administration if there is a quiet corner where you can have a desk and filing cabinet that is all your own.

7. Arrange desks thoughtfully

Consider your teaching style, management style and the needs of other teachers using the room when arranging the desks. You may decide to use rows, clusters, a circle or some other configuration. Design with a purpose in mind!

8. Lock it up

Have at least one small closet or drawer in your classroom that can be locked, even if you have to add a small lock yourself. You'll need this area for confidential files and personal items. (This lesson cost me one camera and some priceless pictures on the roll of film inside it. It cost another teacher her gradebook the week before our grades were due.)

9. Be cheap

Save money on supplies! Ask a colleague what supplies are provided, how you can get them and if teachers are given a certain amount to spend on their classroom each year. If there are things you need to buy on your own, ask retailers if they have discounts for teachers. Office Max, Staples and Barnes and Nobles all offer price reduction on classroom supplies, and other stores in your area might too. For most, you will need evidence of your educator status — a school ID badge, union card or pay stub works well. Finally, save all of your receipts. If your school offers money later, you could be reimbursed for purchases if you still have the paperwork. Those receipts also help during tax season since purchases for work are tax-deductible.

10. Keep track of textbooks

Number your textbooks and create a system for loaning books out to students who forget theirs. Students have to pay up to \$60 for lost books, so you don't want any confusion about which book they had or whether it was returned to you. Track which books are assigned to each student by noting each student's book number next to his or her name in your gradebook. Create labels with your name and room number to place on every textbook so that lost books can be returned to you.

Also, decide if you are willing to lend books to students who do not bring their own copy to class. If you do loan books, track them with a sign-out sheet — I've created a sample textbook sign-out sheet in MS Word format that you can use as a template. Finally, if you can, wait a few days to distribute the books. Students transfer in and out of classes at the beginning of the year, and when a student leaves, textbooks can disappear.

11. Prepare for emergencies (but don't create them)

Locate the emergency call button in your room and learn how to use the intercom system. You don't want to accidentally signify an emergency when you're trying to answer a page from the office on your first day!

12. Be ready to file

Create your own filing system. You will need places to record and store your lesson plans and resources file administrative materials such as: student IEP's, notes from faculty meetings, a parent contact log, discipline log, a faculty handbook, student handbook, hall passes, sub plans, passcodes (for the computers and phones) and important contact numbers. Although this may all feel a bit overwhelming, hopefully organizing your classroom now will save you time

later. Doing it quickly will allow more time for developing your curriculum and management systems. Doing it effectively will create a space in which your students can thrive.

Helpful Sites for Information on Setting up a Classroom

<http://inspiredclassrooms.wordpress.com/setting-up-a-classroom/> Teacher comments and direction for setting up a classroom

<http://forums.atozteacherstuff.com/showthread.php?t=6501> : Teacher comments about setting up a classroom

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty/Strategies/Universal/>: Universal Design of Instruction: Designing any product or environment involves the consideration of many factors including aesthetics, engineering options, environmental issues, safety concerns, and cost. Often the design is created for the "average" user. In contrast universal design is "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design."

Step III-Evaluating what you have and ordering new materials

Do not be surprised that when you enter your room for the first time you find very few materials available for use. What you need to do is hope for the best and prepare for the worst. In the worst case scenario, you will need to catalog what is available to you. The following checklist might help determine what you have available and what you may need to order:

Furniture

Chairs	Tables	Round Table
Computer table or cart	Bookshelves	Blackboard
Portable blackboard	Book carts	Filing Cabinets
Children's mailboxes or cubby holes	Closets for storage	Teacher's desk & chair

Classroom Supplies

Writing, drawing, and construction paper	Pencils/Pens	Paper clips
Crayons	Paste/glue	Rubber bands
Stapler/staples	Straight and safety pins	Transparent tape
Manila file folders	Marking pens	Rulers
Art supplies	Grade book	Lesson plan book
Attendance materials	Textbooks/workbooks	Boxes for keeping units
Calculator	Post-it notes	Kleenex
Hole punch	Pencil sharpener	Lined & blank paper
Scissors	Chalk board erasers	Graph paper in several sizes
Pencil grips	markers	12" and 3' rulers
gummed reinforcements for 3-holed paper	pencil erasers	pencil holder
key ring	personal a coffee cup or beverage mug	5 x 8 index cards
changing files	push tacks & safety pins	calendar

small size legal pads	small screwdriver for glasses repair	small sewing kit and tool kit
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Academic Materials

Textbooks at several levels	Workbooks & Worksheets
Reading Programs	Math Programs

Technology

Computer	Printer & Color Printer	Scanner
Cable hook up to the Internet	Internet access	Word Processing program
Reading Software	Math Software	Spelling Software
Writing Software	Voice Recognition software and devices	Magnification devices

Summary

In summary, the atmosphere of your classroom will go a long way in minimizing problems and hopefully provide your students with a warm, comfortable, logical, and exciting atmosphere in which to work.