

Classroom Desk Arrangement Ideas

Your Desk Arrangement Choices Reflect Your Teaching Goals and Philosophy:

The furniture in your classroom isn't just a bunch of meaningless wood, metal, and plastic. In fact, how you arrange the desks in your room says a lot to students, parents, and visitors about what you want to accomplish and even what you believe about student interactions and learning. So before you start sliding desks and chairs around, consider how various student desk arrangements can make it easier for you to accomplish learning goals and manage student discipline issues.



Classic Rows:

I would bet that most of us sat in traditional rows during our school years, from elementary school all the way through college. Picture a room with students facing forward to the teacher and whiteboard in either horizontal or vertical rows. The classic row set-up places students in an audience collectively focused on traditional teacher-centric lessons as the day goes along. It's relatively easy for teachers to spot chatty or misbehaving students because every child should be facing forward at all times. One drawback is that rows make it difficult for students to work in small groups.

Cooperative Clusters:

Many elementary school teachers utilize cooperative clusters, generally disappearing as students move into junior high school and beyond. If, for example, you have twenty students, you could organize their desks into four groups of five, or five groups of four. By strategically forming the groups based on student personality and work style, you can have students work together cooperatively throughout the day without having to take time to rearrange desks or form new groups every day. One drawback is that some students will get easily distracted by facing other students and not the front of the class.

Horseshoe or U-shape:

Arranging desks in a wide horseshoe shape or angular u-shape (facing the teacher and whiteboard) facilitates whole group discussions while still forcing students to face forward for teacher-directed instruction. It might be a tight squeeze to fit all of your students' desks into a horseshoe shape, but try forming more than one row or tightening the horseshoe, if necessary.

Full Circle:

It's unlikely that you will want elementary-aged students to sit in a full circle all day every day. However, you may want to have your students move their desks into a closed circle on a temporary basis in order to hold a class meeting or hold a writer's workshop where students will be sharing their work and offering each other feedback.

Remember to Include Aisles:

No matter how you choose to arrange your students' desks, remember to build in aisles for easy movement around the classroom. Not only do you need to allow students space to move, it's important to note that effective teachers are always walking around the classroom using proximity to manage behavior and help students as they need assistance.

Final Tip: Keep It Fluid:

It may be tempting to set up your students' desks once in the beginning of the school year and keep it that way all year long. But the art of desk arrangement should actually be fluid, functional, and creative. If a certain set-up isn't working for you, make a change. If you notice a recurring behavior problem that could be alleviated by moving desks, I encourage you to give it a try. Remember to move your students around, too - not just their desks. This keeps students on their toes. As you get to know them better, you can judge where each student should sit for maximal learning and minimal distraction.