Effective Classroom Seating Arrangements

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Your classroom seating arrangement is just as important as your syllabus. Here are some tips on finding the perfect desk configuration that fits your teaching style, your students, and your classroom space.

You’ve spent countless hours creating the perfect curriculum. You’ve searched the deepest corners of the internet to find creative lesson plans. You’ve stayed after school to give students extra help more days than not. Don’t squander all your hard work by not using an effective classroom seating arrangement.

When your classroom setup is in harmony with your teaching style, your students, and the space and furniture you have to work with, the benefits can be endless. But, when it’s not, it can be detrimental.

Many factors contribute to determining the most effective classroom seating arrangement. With some of these factors changing daily (and sometimes even hourly), it’s important to have a configuration that can be flexible to accommodate classroom variety.

Factors That Influence Classroom Configurations

**Classroom Size and Shape**

Before you start moving your desks all around, make sure your preferred seating arrangement can work within the space and school furniture you have. Some configurations may not be feasible with certain classrooms. Also, be mindful of obstructions like support beams, poles, walls and other fixtures that can’t be moved. For many teachers, the chalkboard or whiteboard is a major focus in their teaching. Make sure your students can clearly see it without too much strain or difficulty. For more mobility and flexibility, consider swapping your wall-mounted chalkboard for a rolling whiteboard or TV cart or stand with wheels that can be easily moved around the classroom.

**Distractions**

Identifying and mitigating possible distractions will help streamline your lessons and boost classroom activity. Things like windows overlooking the playground, nearby busy lobbies and hallways, water fountains or even someone using the pencil sharpener can easily grab the attention of a borderline engaged student. Try to keep these distractions out of your students’ line of sight.
Student Age and Size

The number of students in your class cannot be discounted when considering classroom seating arrangements. However, just because you have a larger class of 20 or more students doesn’t mean you have to abandon your preferred desk configuration. There is a bevy of variations of each design idea to accommodate most class sizes: you just have to be creative.

The age and maturity level of your students can also hinder your choice selection. When selecting a classroom setup, be aware of what would be age appropriate for your class. If you have students who display behavior issues, be mindful of special seating considerations (//www.ngsslifescience.com/science.php/science/classroom_management_seating_chart).

Teaching Style & Objectives

This is the most important factor and, unlike the others we’ve listed, it’s completely in your hands. Classroom seating arrangements support your teaching style and objectives (//www.tesolclass.com/classroom-management/classroom-seating-arrangements) or sabotage them.

Who do you want to be the focus of the class?

- **Teacher-Centered Class:** If your class is going to be lecture- and presentation-centric, use a configuration where all students can see you and the lectern.
- **Learner-Centered Class:** With these classes, student discussion and group work are paramount. Find a seating arrangement that encourages students to interact with one another.
- **Both:** Many educators adhere to the belief that a balanced education has a healthy mixture of both teacher-centered presentations and student-based discussions and work. Look for seating layouts that are flexible and functional.

How do you want the class to interact?

- **Minimal:** Interaction flows from the teacher to the student. Student-to-student discussion is scarce. Testing and individual work also dominate the class.
- **Small Groups:** Students interact in pairs or small groups.
- **Large Groups:** Students engage in group discussions and lessons with the entire class.

What are your learning objectives?

- **Knowledge:** Students will learn and understand the content of the coursework. Use configurations that support independent activity and emphasize focus on content.
- **Skill Growth:** Students develop a certain set of skills during this course. For skills that rely on cooperation, communication, teamwork, reflection, etc., layouts that encourage group work and discussion are preferred. For more independent skills like troubleshooting, analysis, listening, etc., look for configurations that support independent work and minimize distractions.
With many school systems moving away from online learning and gearing up to teach in the classroom come September, it is vital to the safety of students and employees alike to have a firm grasp of which social distancing practices will help maintain a healthy environment. No matter the landscape, or if we have flattened the curve outside of the classroom, we can be sure that the way we teach our children in public or private schools will be drastically different. Helping students transition from the freedom of summer is always a difficult task, but with our current public health concerns, teachers around the country have an even bigger challenge; keeping students healthy while maintaining a productive and supportive environment.

What steps can you take to prepare your school to socially distance?

- **Increase signage** and place them in highly-visible locations wherever students gather. Think about placing illustrated or boldly printed reminders in crowded locker rooms, cafeterias, sports practices, and libraries. Quick-change sign holders or snap frames can allow your faculty to swap out messages as new guidelines roll out from your state, and can even be repurposed for non-COVID related bulletins at a later date.

- **Direct foot traffic** with stanchions, barriers, and signage in order to limit instances where hallways or corridors become congested between classes. Proper use of barriers can help guide students in and out of classrooms while allowing them to remain 6 feet apart at all times. Take advantage of vinyl floor decals with easy-to-read messaging, clearly telling students where to stand while waiting in lines.

- **Partitions, bulletins, and whiteboards** will become transformative tools in the classroom; both providing separation between smaller groups of students and giving teachers the ability to present more information where needed. Portable whiteboards can allow faculty to teach in unconventional places such as repurposed gymnasiums, cafeterias, or even outside areas where impromptu classrooms may be built to accommodate smaller classes.

Waste management
will be more important than ever, and facilities & grounds workers will be thankful to have an increased number of bins for students to dispose of potentially hazardous material. An increased presence of trash cans, even some featuring custom printed covers with public health reminders, will go a long way to promote better hygiene across the board.

It is no secret that we have our work cut out for us this coming school year, however, with preparedness and open communication with our students, we can make this process as seamless and risk-free as possible. Displays2go is dedicated to ensuring the safety and security of our students in the coming school year and am committed to helping your teachers and administrators equip each classroom in the best way possible.

**Most Common Configurations**
Traditional Rows or Columns

The rows configuration (also known as the columns configuration) is the most common classroom arrangement. This type of setup complements class structures that revolve around teacher-based instruction and presentations. Students are more focused on coursework and independent assignments. They are also less likely and/or able to cheat with this layout. Though this seating arrangement can be used with any class size, large classes may often see uneven levels of interaction as students in the front row will participate more while those in the back may lose focus.
Horseshoe or U-Shape

This model supports both student-to-student interaction and teacher-to-student interaction. The class interacts in a large group format, though teachers have ample opportunity to work with students one on one. Courses that emphasize discussions and presentations typically function well with this configuration.
Clusters

Clustering the desks into small groups promotes student-to-student interaction. Students develop skills such as communication, problem solving, collaboration, and more in this arrangement. These clusters offer safe and comfortable environments for students to share ideas. This comfort, however, also lends itself to off-task behavior and large increase in noise level and distractions.

Pros
- Encourages interaction of all students
- Creates a more personal and safe environment for students to convey their ideas
- Promotes cooperation and teamwork
- Develops reflection, problem solving, and communication skills
- Flexibility to strategically form groups
- Suitable for small spaces

Cons
- Increased noise level, distractions, and off-task behavior
- Decreased productivity
- Less individual accountability (ex. strongest student may do the bulk of the work)
- Harder to assess students' abilities and level of understanding

Alternative Configurations

Some educators, the most common classroom seating arrangements aren't the most effective. There are infinite amounts of variations of clusters, horseshoes, and rows, and even more classroom setups that are completely new and different. Here is just a handful of examples of more alternative

Runway

Best used with smaller classes, this setup puts the emphasis on the educator. The teacher uses the runway between the two rows of facing desks to conduct the lessons. This layout is great for discussions and lecture based classes.

Stadium

A variation of the classic row configuration and runway, desks are grouped in clusters but all facing the same direction. Like runway, this layout is best suited teacher-centric classes.

Combination
Conclusion

Every classroom, teacher, student, and situation is unique. To find the best classroom seating arrangement for you, a little ingenuity and creativity may be necessary. Think outside the box, rows, and horseshoes and create your own configuration. There are plenty of online tools such as Scholastics Class Set-Up Tool (//teacher.scholastic.com/tools/class_setup/) and Kaplans Floorplanner (//www.kaplancourses.com/resources/floorplanner.asp) to help you develop your own classroom desk (/P-35849/Rectangular-School-Table-Gray-Melamine-Top) layout.

Which classroom layout is right for you?

Take the Quiz! (https://www.tryinteract.com/share/quiz/5d32224c57f4bb00148711aa)
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