

Teacher

SURVIVAL SHEETS™ #4

Designing an effective classroom layout

OVERVIEW

Good classroom design eases the teacher's work. A well-designed classroom makes it easier to stay calm and in control.

PROCEDURE

1. **Start with your movement, not the furniture.** Ask: *Can I see every student easily? Can I reach any desk quickly? Can I move without squeezing or detouring?* Your ability to move freely is one of your most important behavior management tools.
2. **Consider your own comfort.** You'll spend a lot of time in your classroom; you need a space that works for you. Do you have an area that's clearly yours, where students aren't allowed? How will students know it's your space?
 - a. Also consider locking up all of your valuables if you can. It's better to remove the temptation than deal with the fallout from a stolen purse or cell phone.
3. **Consider different layouts for different activities.** For a computer-based test, for example, you'll want to be able to see all of their screens. For group work, you may want them to be facing each other. Furniture is usually movable. Students are always movable.
4. **Examine choke points.** Do all of the students have to funnel through a narrow space to get their papers? That wastes time and can lead to bullying behaviors.
5. **Consider distractions.** What feels like a "cute decoration" for you may feel like a constant distraction for a student.
 - a. You might consider simply paring down the decorations. For example, if you want to show your love for *Star Wars*, keep it to one poster instead of five.
6. **Place student materials in as few spaces as possible.** If the tissues, pencil sharpener, and all other student materials are in roughly the same place, there is less instructional time you have to waste pointing them out to students.
7. **Test the room from a student perspective.** Walk around, testing common scenarios. What will it look like to enter my room? How will I get my materials? Think of how the students will interact with the space.
8. **Test the room from the teacher's perspective.** If you can't see a student easily, you can't manage them effectively.
 - a. Also keep in mind that you'll need to find spaces to get the students' attention, you'll need room for your private materials, etc.
9. **Revisit the layout when problems arise.**

TIPS/TRICKS

- It's common for new teachers to spend hours decorating their rooms. Early on, that time is often better spent planning lessons and building relationships.
- **Classroom layouts can be fluid.** Students can reset chairs for multiple activities. They can adjust the desks for group work and test-taking. You don't have to be the one that does all of the physical labor.
- **You must be able to easily visit every space in your room.** No layout choice is worth losing that ability.