

## Physical Elements of the Classroom

### Space

The physical space in your classroom will have a great impact on how students learn.

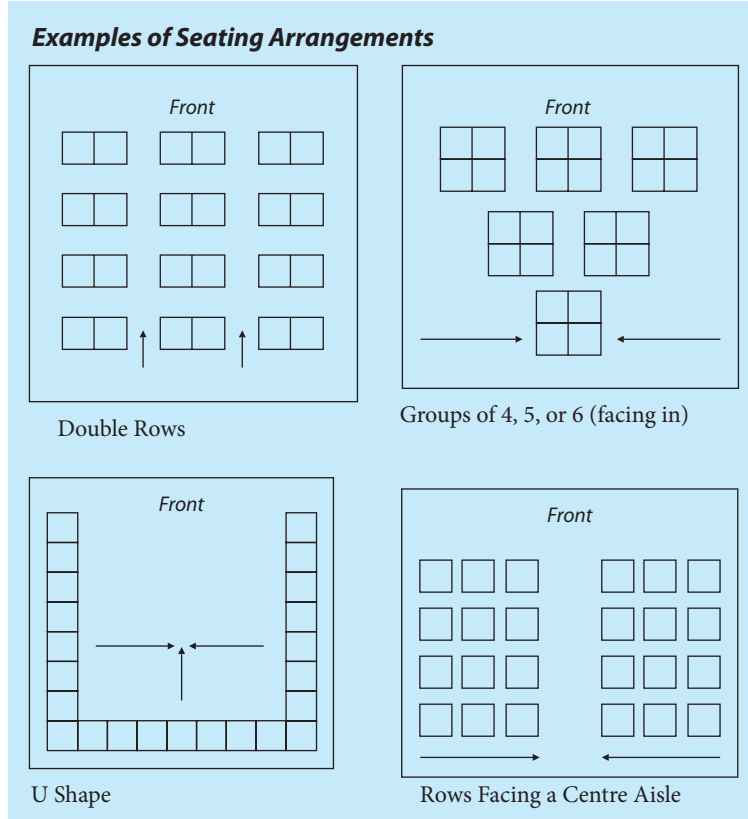
- Consider beginning the year with greater control (individual or partners) and work toward more independence and flexibility in terms of seating.
- Try to keep a seating plan long enough for students to develop a working relationship with others, but not so long so as to create frustration. Try blocks of 3–5 weeks.
- Assign students seats for independent work, and set up partners and small groups with those in close proximity. Teach students how to move into these groups; plan the physical placement of the desks and the length of time it should take to move them.
- When more than one arrangement is needed, develop a plan that involves moving the fewest desks possible. Assign students for whom movement is an issue to the anchor desks and allow other students to be seated in the desks that will be moved.

- Designate a place in the classroom for small-group instruction. Position yourself so you can see the rest of the class, with the group of students you are working with facing you.
- Set aside space for a classroom library.
- Have a chair, podium, or other item in the room to indicate an author's or sharing chair/space. Have mats, beanbag chairs, or other comfortable seating available for students to use during independent reading or other independent work time.
- Post word walls, anchor charts, and student work samples in the classroom and update them regularly.

#### ***Tips for Organizing Bulletin Boards***

- Cover all classroom bulletin boards with black cloth—student work stands out against a black background. It gives the room a cohesive look, and the background will last all year.
- Make your own borders for bulletin boards. Use word art related to the current unit of study printed on the largest paper you can print on, cut into strips and posted as a border.

- Decide where you want students to focus their attention most of the time (teacher at the front, whole-class discussion, or small group of peers). Arrange seating that focuses student attention in this area and make adjustments when the focus needs to shift.
- Decisions about room arrangement should be based on what is best for teaching and learning. Consider both the set arrangement for whole-class learning, as well as spaces and procedures for smaller groups and individual work. Possibilities include
  - Single or Double Rows
  - Groups
  - U shape
  - Rows Facing a Centre Aisle



## Materials

If you give advance thought to the materials necessary for student learning and how they will be stored and used, you will find things are easier later on.

- Keep the number of supplies and materials the students need to a minimum.
- At the beginning of the year, have students label their notebooks, binders, folders, etc. with titles that clearly identify the kind of information that is to be recorded.
- Decide what materials students will leave in the class and which ones they will be responsible for bringing back and forth to class.
- To start the year, make a poster with photos and a list of the materials required and post it as a reference for students.
- Decide what items students will keep as their own and what materials will be shared by the group. Consider assembling supplies such as glue sticks, scissors, rulers, and markers for the entire class to use.
- Assign one student per table group or row to be monitor or leader for a period of 2–3 weeks. Post their names and make these students responsible for collecting all materials or for distributing materials to each group of students.

### *COLOR CODING*

- Assign notebooks of different colors (e.g. green for writing, yellow for response journals, etc.). You can see at a glance if students are working in the correct notebook.
- Copy important handouts on colored paper. Using different colors will make it easy for you to identify the page.
- Copy a single handout on multiple colors of paper. This allows for easy grouping of students (see Grouping on page 12).
- If you teach different sections or classes, use different colors of notebooks, folders, baskets, etc. for each section.

### ***Tips for Organizing Materials***

- Using the attendance record, assign each student a number. Have students put this number on all of their supplies and the work they hand in.
- Have two pencil baskets: one for sharp and the other for dull. Students trade a dull pencil for a sharp one. Assign sharpening pencils as a diversion for a student who needs to move around during the day as a diversion.

## STORAGE

- A waist-high bookcase with deep shelves can be used for books, handouts, baskets with supplies and materials, homework folders/baskets, mini whiteboards, etc. Items needed for that class can be placed on top, while other items are still accessible on the shelves below.
- Set up *In* and *Out* baskets for student work: one basket for work being handed in to you, and another for work being returned to the students.
- Label shelves and cabinet doors to indicate what is stored in each. Use different colors to distinguish between areas that students are permitted to access and those that are for teacher access only.
- For each student, store a few books appropriate for independent reading in a large resealable bag. These bags can be labeled with the students' numbers or names and stored in each student's work space or in a central location.

## CLASSROOM LIBRARY

- Decide on a sign-out system in order to keep track of books and reduce loss.
- As much as possible, display books with the covers facing out on shelves or whiteboard ledges, in groups/baskets according to genre, author, or topic, or organized and labeled by genre, by topic, or alphabetically by title or author's last name.
- Designate a place (ledge, shelf, basket, display case, etc.) for a display of *Recommended Reading* or *Books I Like and that You Might Like Too*. Each book, with a brief description recorded on an index card and the signature of the person recommending it, can be displayed for others to consider as an option for reading.

**Tips for Posting Charts**

- Make anchor charts to post on the walls or chart stands, or to suspend from rings. Packaging tape can be used to reinforce the holes.
- Use hinged rings to hold charts together and to hang them.
- Magnets are great for hanging charts on a whiteboard. Heavy-duty magnets (like the ones that are sold to hang a wreath on a metal door) work the best.