

What Is It?

Arranging the classroom is a universal strategy that refers to physically organizing toys, materials, and furniture to encourage children's positive social interactions and behavior. Adults can encourage learning and positive social interactions by strategically arranging small group compositions, learning and play materials, use of wall space, or modifying the temperature, lighting, and noise level in the classroom. By arranging the learning environment strategically, it's easier to manage large numbers of children and still support individual child needs, monitor child learning and social interactions, and ensure that children are engaged in appropriate activities.

When to Use It

- At the beginning of the school or program year.
- When setting up a new space.
- When children or adults are not visible in all areas of the classroom.
- When children are disengaged in certain areas of the classroom (e.g., reading corner, pretend play area).
- When children or adults cannot access materials or other important aspects of the environment.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Arrange centers so they are consistent with classroom routines and expectations. Centers requiring active engagement (e.g., pretend play, water table) should be placed together and away from centers with quieter activities (e.g., book center).
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Place preferred and novel toys in centers to promote child engagement and social interaction. Rotate materials at least monthly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Arrange furniture and materials so that all children are visible during classroom activities, especially activities that need active adult supervision due to safety issues (e.g., water table). Use adult zoning to ensure an adult is in proximity to children who may require additional support.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Arrange visual supports and materials so that they are visible to all children during routine activities (e.g., circle time).
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Set up the classroom and furniture so that adults and children can easily transition and access necessary materials without congestion.
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Review the classroom arrangement regularly and make changes as necessary.

Example

Miss Makayla is setting up her inclusive preschool classroom for the upcoming year. She wants to ensure her classroom is arranged to support learners of all abilities. First, she arranges centers with plenty of room between each one to prevent congestion. She labels each center with a picture and leaves a few materials out, but organizes the rest in closed cubbies or bins that children can easily access during free play and center time. Next, she uses colored butcher paper to visually highlight the classroom expectations on one wall. On another wall, she arranges pictures of her students with their names underneath and posts classroom rules. She leaves plenty of wall space open for children's artwork.

Following the first week of school, Miss Makayla meets with her instructional assistant, Mr. Cameron, to discuss children's reactions to the initial classroom arrangement. They both noticed that centers were arranged well for traffic flow and access. However, one child, Adam, seemed to enjoy pulling the butcher paper off the wall and ripping it into strips. They decide to move the butcher paper higher on the wall, where it is still visible but out of reach. They also plan an art activity that involves ripping and cutting paper so they have an opportunity to teach Adam when and where it is appropriate to engage in that behavior.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- Decorate the classroom while leaving room to add children's art and classwork later in the program year.
- Use color strategically (e.g., colored butcher paper) to bring attention to children's art displays and important classroom visuals.
- Periodically rotate toys and learning materials to increase child interest and engagement.
- Use appropriately-sized furniture. In general, children should be able to put their elbows on the table and rest their chins in their hands with their feet flat on the floor.
- Consider the needs of individual children. Offer a range of seating options (e.g., cube chair, yoga ball, carpet square) and space to stand during activities.
- Consider the temperature, lighting, and noise level of the classroom alongside the sensory needs of individual children.

Resources

Bovey, T, & Strain, P. (n.d.) [Using environmental strategies to promote positive social interactions.](#) (Issue Brief No. 6). Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.