



Cleveland School District

Learning is Essential For All

Small Group Instruction Guidance

Small group instruction is a strategy used to grow students' academic skills. This strategy focuses on attention and individual feedback, as well. Many students enter school with learning gaps several years behind their current grade level. Teachers are expected to provide instruction to students and grow their academic competency within one school year. Therefore, educators implement small group instruction to best meet the needs of their students to ensure their success

Values of Small Group Instruction

- Smaller student-teacher ratio
- Provides targeted, [differentiated instruction](#) for small groups of students.
- Gives the teacher an opportunity to evaluate and assess more closely, what each student can do.
- Teachers can build strategic plans around assessments.
- Reduces the anxiety of struggling students as opposed to whole group setting improving chances for academic success
- Fast-paced lessons, which, typically, help students maintain focus.

Challenges of Small Group Instruction

- Lesson planning
- Classroom management
- Organization of materials, stations, classroom, etc...
- Establishing [routines](#) and small group procedures
- Readiness of activities for early finishers

Developing and Implementing Effective Small Groups

Eight elements can assist in developing and implementing effective classroom management. These elements include procedures that help to facilitate differentiated small group instruction and to support independent student center activities.

- [Small Group Instruction: Teaching Best Practices](#)

Pre-Planning

Form Flexible Groups Based on Assessment-

Flexible Grouping and Collaborative Learning

How Can I Compose Groups?

When forming flexible groups based on assessment, important guidelines to consider are:

- [Keep group sizes small \(5-7 students as a maximum\)](#)
- Reduce the group size to 3-5 for students in need of intensive support
- Base small groups on instructional need with specific instructional strategies in mind
- Consider attitudes, behaviors, and work ethics of each student
- Monitor the progress of high-risk students more frequently in order to make instructional changes, small group changes, and to accelerate learning

*One way to formulate flexible groups is to use a Class Status Report from the Progress monitoring in conjunction with teacher observation and, when needed, diagnostic assessments.

Identify Appropriate Center Activities Based on Assessment

Important things to consider when planning activities:

- For learning to take place, activities at the student centers should be within each student's zone of proximal development (ZPD) described as "the distance between a child's actual developmental level as determined through independent problem solving and his or her potential development level as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or a collaboration with more capable peers." To put it simply, students must participate either in activities they may do independently or with help from a peer of higher skill ability. Otherwise, small groups may not provide opportunity for optimal learning.
- Plan with the learning objective, not the product, in mind. The idea of small group instruction is to improve students' ability with a skill.
- Time must also be a consideration. If you have allotted 20 minutes for the center and the Activity only requires 10 minutes, the students will need something else to do. Be sure to include additional activities for early finishers.
- Examples of Small Group Activities: [Small Group Instruction Resources](#)

Design a Small Group Management System

Center management systems help to establish time efficient routines, protecting valuable instructional time. A center management system helps coordinate the following:

- Group formation
 - [Activities](#)
 - Center locations/areas
 - Systematic movement of student groups
 - Scheduling of student center times
- [Small Group Procedures](#)

**Anchor charts and center management boards are great ways to establish routines and procedures for small groups and emphasize accountability from students.*

Anchor Charts

Give thoughtful feedback
Respect others & their thoughts
On task all the time
Use soft voices
Participate actively
Stay with your group

We want our group members to...

- 1) Stay on task and complete the task.
- 2) Participate and contribute.
- 3) Ask specific questions.
- 4) Help group members who ask.
- 5) Justify and explain ideas.
- 6) Listen carefully to others.
- 7) Praise and complement.
- 8) Work together as a team.

The next five elements are used to implement and manage independent student center activities with the students (these steps are not necessarily listed in sequential order, but may be done simultaneously):

Implement a Behavior Management System

It is essential to spend time at the beginning of the school year modeling, practicing, and reviewing appropriate classroom procedures in order to establish time efficient routines and to encourage positive classroom behaviors. Experts suggest that it may take at least six weeks to implement student centers before beginning teacherled centers (especially in the primary grades). During this time, the teacher should be “roaming the room” monitoring students and providing assistance as needed. Many experts also suggest sending students to one rotation daily until they “get the hang of it” before trying two or three rotations daily.

This is a productive use of time for two important reasons:

1. Students need to be on-task in order for centers to support learning.
2. The teacher needs to focus on students at the teacher-led center and this is not possible if the other students are off-task.

When teachers implement a behavior management system students should be involved in role modeling positive classroom behaviors. Boundaries and consequences should be fair, consistent, and age-appropriate. Throughout the year, teachers may want to occasionally use the teacher-led time to circulate during student centers to support

on-task behavior. If this is the case, all students go to student centers while the teacher “roams the room.”

Successful implementation of student centers involves helping students know how to problem solve.

For example, before implementing a system, students need to know:

- What to do when something does not work
- What to do when they do not understand the Activity at a center
- What to do when they complete an Activity at a center
- Whom to go to for help (e.g., “Ask 3 before you see me.”)
- How to clean up (where to put their product, where to put materials away, etc.)
- How to decide who goes first when engaged in a pair or group Activity

Even in the best-managed classrooms, there are many reasons why students may not be academically engaged at student centers.

Here is a list of questions for teachers to use when behavior problems begin to impede the successful implementation of student Activity centers:

- Did I do an effective job explicitly teaching the Activity?
- Is the Activity interesting to the student?
- Have the students mastered the skill and need to move on?
- Is this Center too difficult for students to do independently?
- Did I introduce too many new centers at once?

Answering these questions may help teachers reorganize centers so that student behavior gets back on track. It may also be helpful to have a problem solving discussion with the students about a certain Center or Activity.

*Reward students as they work through the centers and give feedback through your [reward system](#) installed in the classroom. Let them know that they are doing a great job, so they are encouraged to continue to stay engaged on the task at hand. *

Give Explicit Directions

The goal of [explicit directions](#) is to help students understand what they are expected to accomplish at a specific center. Clear directions and work expectations encourage academic engagement in centers.

It is essential to model each Activity before students are expected to participate in the center. Giving directions in manageable steps helps students to understand the sequence of completing an activity. Model the use of new materials before placing them in a center either during the whole group lesson or at the teacher-led center.

Activities to be completed at centers should be introduced by the teacher in the following format:

- Teacher Models and Explains the Activity
 - § Some activities need repeated modeling, while others need to be modeled only one time.
 - For example, an alphabet matching game may be modeled once at the teacher- led center and then placed at a student center. Completing an [open sort](#) may require many whole group lessons in addition to modeling at the teacher-led center before being placed at a student center.
- Teacher provides Guided Practice
 - § Students practice what the teacher models and the teacher provides prompts and feedback.
- Teacher provides Supported Application
 - § Students apply the skill as the teacher scaffolds instruction.
- Independent Practice
 - § Students apply the skill independently. This same format should also be used to teach students how to use the manipulatives and/or technology at each center

Organize the Classroom - [Organizing and Managing Classroom Centers](#)

The goal of creating an organized classroom is maximum student achievement.

Keeping an organized classroom enables students to:

- Easily locate materials
- Focus on academic tasks
- Use center time productively

Additional Organization Tips

- Clearly define, organize, and label centers to facilitate the flow of student movement during center rotations.
- Set center materials in an orderly arrangement, allowing adequate workspace for each student.
- Place skill leveled materials in baskets or tubs and label accordingly.
- Teach students how to keep materials organized, replace materials when needed, and clean up in an orderly and timely manner.
- Student cooperation in helping take care of centers and good organization of materials limits classroom disruptions.
- Preserve and protect materials by laminating or using another creative method so that they do not have to constantly be remade.

Manage Transitions

The intent of managing transitions is to protect instructional time. It is important to keep a quick pace when transitioning between centers. Instill set routines and

expectations for changing centers, putting materials away, and cleaning up center areas. It is important to use this transition time effectively. There are varieties of [signals](#) that may be used to indicate to students that it is time to change centers. To reinforce skills, make every minute count by singing rhyming songs, nursery rhymes, or playing word games while the students are cleaning up. Be consistent with all techniques.

- Helpful Links: [5 Steps to Perfect Transitions](#) [Mastering Transitions](#)

Establish Accountability

Small groups are an excellent opportunity for teachers to assess student progress. It is important that accountability be established for activities completed in groups

Accountability is a way to encourage students to stay academically engaged and for teachers to determine whether or not students can apply what they have been taught. Communicate the fact that students are expected to stay on task and complete quality work. Students need to receive feedback in a timely manner.

Reviewing center work daily:

- Prevents students from practicing the same errors
- Provides opportunity for teachers to instill the importance of quality work
- Conveys the importance of each academic task

This is intended to help students develop an appreciation for learning and to view centers as a meaningful and productive time of day

Other key ideas to keep in mind concerning accountability:

- The process of learning to read is more important than creating a product at each center. Students need to be accountable for work completed at centers, but this does not mean there always needs to be a product. Make it a balance.
- Have “with-it-ness”—even though teachers are involved with other students in an intense small group activity, they must be aware of what is going on at the student centers. This teaching skill comes with time and practice.

Organizing Small Groups - [Group Work in the Classroom: Types of Small Groups](#)

When it is time to form small groups, remember to keep your options fluid and flexible. Students will welcome the many opportunities to work with different classmates in different ways. Here are some additional grouping techniques and the best times to use them!

Random Grouping: This is completely arbitrary grouping. Use this technique when your focus is on management and forming groups of equal size. Random grouping can also help students get to know each other better.

Achievement or Ability Grouping: In this grouping situation, students with similar achievement levels or academic strengths are placed in the same group.

Social (Cooperative) Grouping: With this kind of grouping, you assign each of your students a different role (e.g., leader, presenter, or helper) in order to give them the opportunity to practice specific social skills.

Interest Grouping: With this kind of grouping, you assign students to a group or have them assign themselves to a group based on their interest in particular topics of study.

Task Grouping: With this kind of grouping, you put together students who are successful in completing given types of activities. For example, students who find drawing enjoyable are grouped together to construct scenery to re-enact a story.

Knowledge of Subject Grouping: Here, you put together students with background knowledge of a given subject or hobby. Use it when you want students to see likenesses among one another and share information. For example, students who are interested in baseball cards are grouped together to share the statistics of their favorite players.

Skill/Strategy Grouping: Here, you group together students who need practice with a specific skill or strategy.

Student Choice Grouping: Allow students to group themselves according to a shared preference, for an author or genre in reading, for example, or historical period or country in social studies. This grouping system is good to use when student success is not dependent on choice, when you want students to take the lead.

Small group instruction should provide opportunities for students to remediate, practice, demonstrate, and extend previously taught skills. Using assessment data to form groups, planning appropriate teacher-led and independent student center activities, and consistently monitoring progress will help teachers establish a supportive learning environment.

Implementing Small Group Instruction into Distance Learning

Small group instruction has a significant impact on student achievement and is widely used in elementary classrooms. Many middle and high schools are increasingly using these structures in all content areas and should be able to continue these methods during distance learning using some of the following strategies.

- **Clear and concise instructional goals-** A well-structured distance learning course must place instructional objectives foremost. Regardless of whether the technology is audiotape or satellite video, ample time must be allocated to ensure that the materials are accurate, appropriate, and

structured to maximize the benefits for distant students and to minimize the limitations.

- **Explicitly teach expectations and engagement**-teach how to use new instructional media. Co-create and **share expectations** for how to engage in this learning environment. Give opportunities for practice.

Teacher Toolbox (Additional Resources)

[Quick Reference - Guidelines for Small Group Instruction](#)

[Types of Small Groups](#)

[6 Tips for Secondary Small Groups](#)

[Common Mistakes with Small Groups and How to Avoid Them](#)

[Behavior System for Middle School Students](#)

[Sample Activity for Math Groups- Word Problems](#)

[Effective teacher-led small group sessions](#)

[What Matter Most in Small Group Instruction](#)

[HOW TO FACILITATE SUCCESSFUL LEARNING STATIONS IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM](#)

[Optimizing Station Rotations in Blended Learning](#)

[Station Rotation Model](#)

[Blended Learning: The Station Rotation Model](#)

[Designing Effective Learning Centers](#)