



**THE IRIS CENTER**  
FOR FACULTY ENHANCEMENT  
*Peabody College • Vanderbilt University*

---

CASE STUDY UNIT

---



**EFFECTIVE ROOM  
ARRANGEMENT**

*Created by*

*Carolyn Evertson, Ph.D. & Inge Poole, Ph.D.*

*Vanderbilt University*



**IRIS Center for Faculty Enhancement**

**<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>**

Box 160, Peabody College

Vanderbilt University

Nashville, TN 37203

1-866-626-IRIS, [iris@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:iris@vanderbilt.edu)

U.S. Department of Education Project #H325F010003



CONTENTS:	PAGE
Case Study Level A, Case 1 .....	2
Case Study Level A, Case 2 .....	3
Case Study Level B, Case 1 .....	4-5
Case Study Level B, Case 2 .....	6-7
Case Study Level C, Case 1 .....	8-9
STAR (Strategies and Resources) Sheets .....	10-16

*For a faculty guide to this case study unit please e-mail the IRIS Center at [iris@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:iris@vanderbilt.edu) with your full name, title and institutional affiliation.*

## TO CONTACT THE IRIS CENTER:

**MAIL:** Deborah D. Smith, Ed.D., Project Director  
IRIS Center for Faculty Enhancement  
Box 160  
Peabody College  
Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, TN 37203

**PHONE:** (615) 343-6006  
(866) 626-IRIS [626-4747]

**FAX:** (615) 343-5611

**E-MAIL:** [iris@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:iris@vanderbilt.edu)

**ONLINE:** <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>

EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT  
LEVEL A · CASE 1

## BACKGROUND

Student: Edward

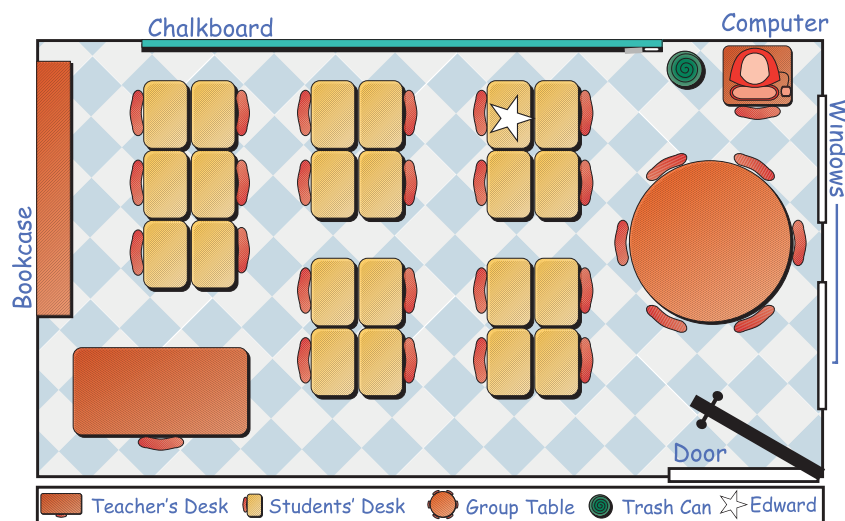
Age: 8.3

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup>

## SCENARIO

Edward is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader who seems distracted during independent work time. He is either not finishing his independent work or completing it haphazardly. Based on Edward's IEP, he is seated near the chalkboard where the independent work directions are written. However, after sketching the classroom arrangement (below), his teacher recognizes Edward's off-task behavior may be a factor of his seating location (starred). Based on this information, his teacher has decided to rearrange the classroom so that Edward will achieve the following goals within six weeks:

- Increase the quantity of time on-task during independent work
- Increase the number of assignments completed



## POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

- Minimizing distractions
- Maximizing access
- Matching arrangement to lesson purpose



## ASSIGNMENT

- Read the STAR sheets on each of the three possible strategies.
- Given what you've learned from the STAR sheets, look back at the scenario. Identify three issues (one related to each strategy) that may be distracting Edward.

EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT  
LEVEL A · CASE 2

## BACKGROUND

Student: Cheri

Age: 7.1

Grade: 1<sup>st</sup>

## SCENARIO

Cheri is a repeating first grader who missed much of her initial first grade year for medical reasons. She has been diagnosed with a syndrome that is characterized by fragile bones. For Cheri, simple jostling or bumps can result in broken bones. She walks with leg braces and most of the time uses a walker. Cheri is presently protectively seated beside the teacher's desk separate from the other students. At this location, Cheri has a place to put her walker for easy access. Cheri's academic work demonstrates that she is progressing with her peers; however, her social interaction skills are below grade level. Based on this information, Cheri's teacher is reassigning Cheri's seating location to help her achieve the following goals within nine weeks:

- Increase her positive interactions with peers.
- Increase her safe movement to and from the group table for small group reading instruction and into and out of the classroom.

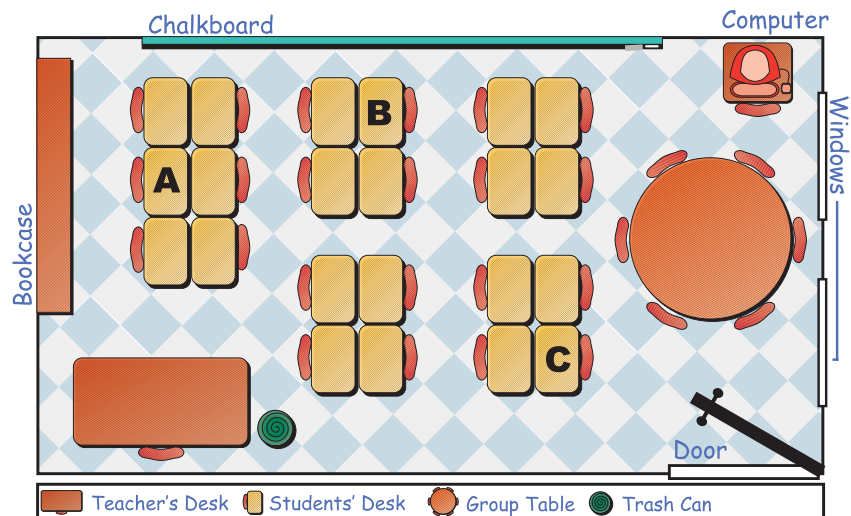
## POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

- Maximizing access
- Movement with ease



## ASSIGNMENT

- Read the STAR sheets on each possible strategy.
- Select one seating location (A, B, or C) for Cheri. Explain why this location is or is not suitable to help Cheri meet her goals based on the strategies of maximizing access and movement with ease.



EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT  
LEVEL B · CASE 1

## BACKGROUND

Student: Marcus

Age: 7.5

Grade: 2nd

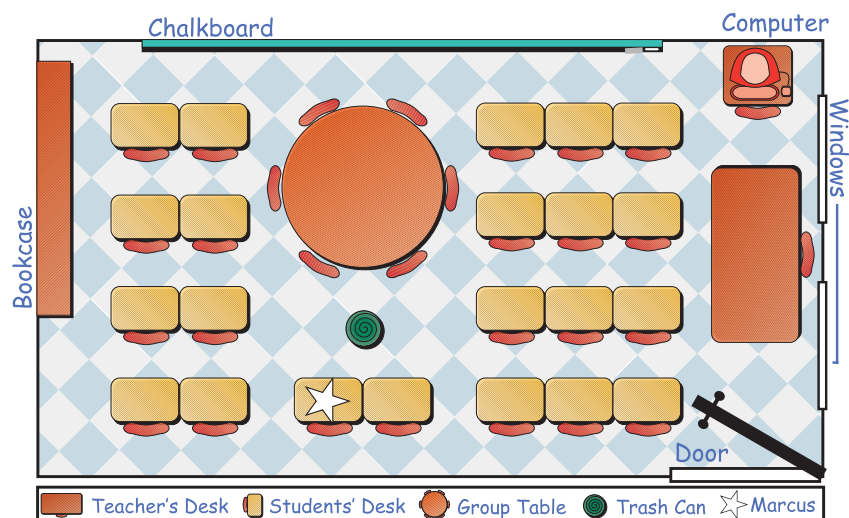
## SCENARIO

Marcus is a very active second grader. He is continuously moving, whether tapping his pencil, adjusting his seating, sharpening his pencil, shooting baskets with his trash, or walking through the room. During independent work, Marcus's constant motion is often evidence that he is off-task. This is particularly the case when his teacher is working with a small group at the group table. The teacher interrupts the small group on a regular basis to try to get Marcus refocused on his independent work. Marcus's teacher made a sketch (below) of the classroom and recognized that there were several distractions that might encourage Marcus to be off-task. The teacher is planning to rearrange the classroom and/or Marcus's seating position (starred) to help him meet the following goals in four weeks:

- Increase the quantity of time on-task during independent work
- Increase the number of independent assignments completed
- Decrease the number of interruptions to the small group instruction

## POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

- Minimizing distractions
- Maximizing access
- Matching arrangement to lesson purpose
- Movement with ease



 **ASSIGNMENT**

- Review the STAR sheets on each possible strategy.
- Identify three things to move (items, equipment, individuals) in the classroom sketch above that are possible distractions for Marcus.
- Explain: 1) what three things you would move in this classroom; 2) why you would move them (including which strategy(ies) you are using); 3) and how your three changes to the classroom will help Marcus meet his goals.

EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT  
LEVEL B • CASE 2

## BACKGROUND

Students:	Robert	Latisha	Helen	Paulo
Ages:	9.2	9.7	9.5	10.4
Grade:	4th	4th	4th	4th

## SCENARIO

Robert, Latisha, Helen, and Paulo are fourth graders who join their fourth grade class in the science lab for science instruction following their special education math class. The special education teacher has requested that the science teacher place these fourth graders at seating locations separate from one another. This would allow the students to interact with other fourth graders during science. The special education teacher provided the following information to the science teacher to help in assigning seating locations:

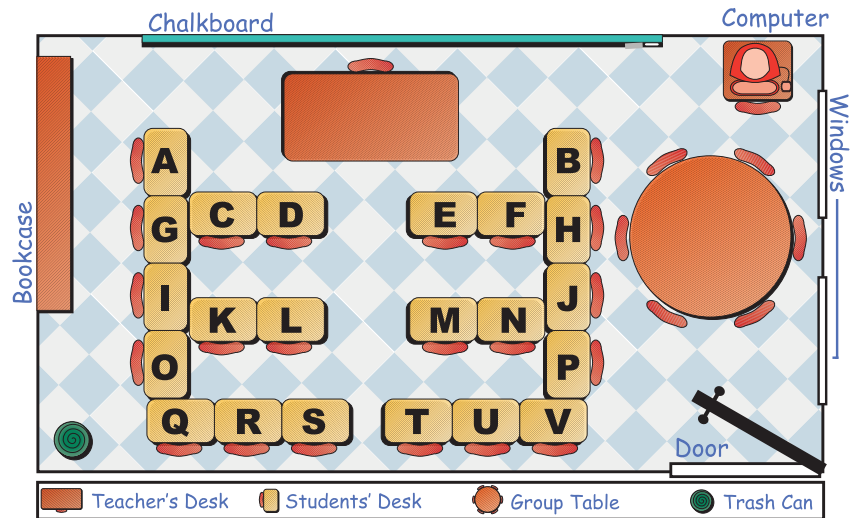
Robert	Needs to be near the chalkboard to see written material or near the demonstration table to see demonstrations. Is easily distracted by other students. Likes to volunteer to help the teacher.
Latisha	Is shy. Is easily pulled off-task by distractions, especially computers. Does a good job of pretending to be on task when she does not understand how to do something or isn't interested.
Helen	Is very talkative. Will try to monopolize the teacher's attention. Is a strong reader.
Paulo	Loves science. Gets along well with other students. Works well in groups. Has a crush on Latisha.

## POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

- Minimizing distractions
- Maximizing access
- Matching arrangement to lesson purpose
- Movement with ease

## ASSIGNMENT

- Review the STAR sheets on each possible strategy.
- Place the four students at a seating location in the classroom arrangement sketch above. For each student, write the name of the student and the letter of the assigned seat.
- For each student, explain why you selected the specific seating location you did and include which strategies you used in making your decisions.



EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT  
LEVEL C • CASE 1

## BACKGROUND

Student: Donna  
Age: 10.8  
Grade: 5th

## SCENARIO

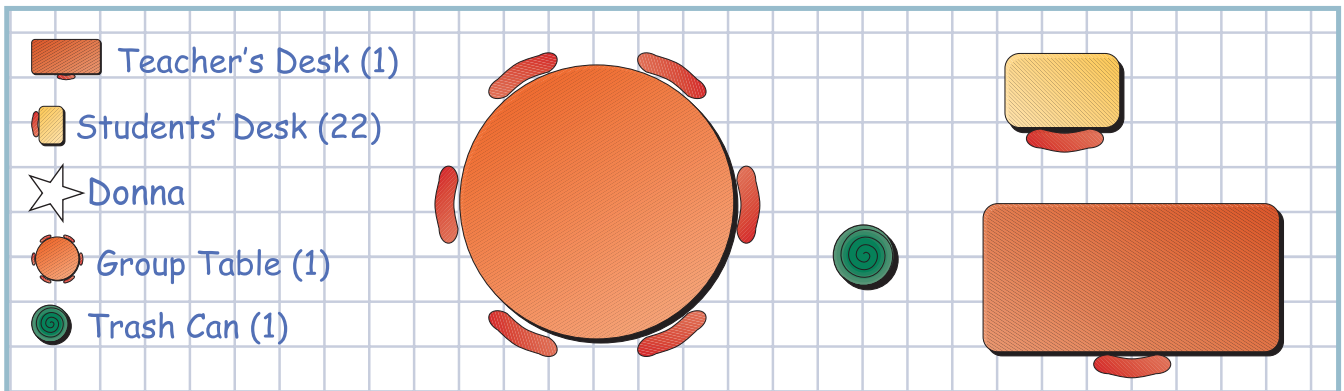
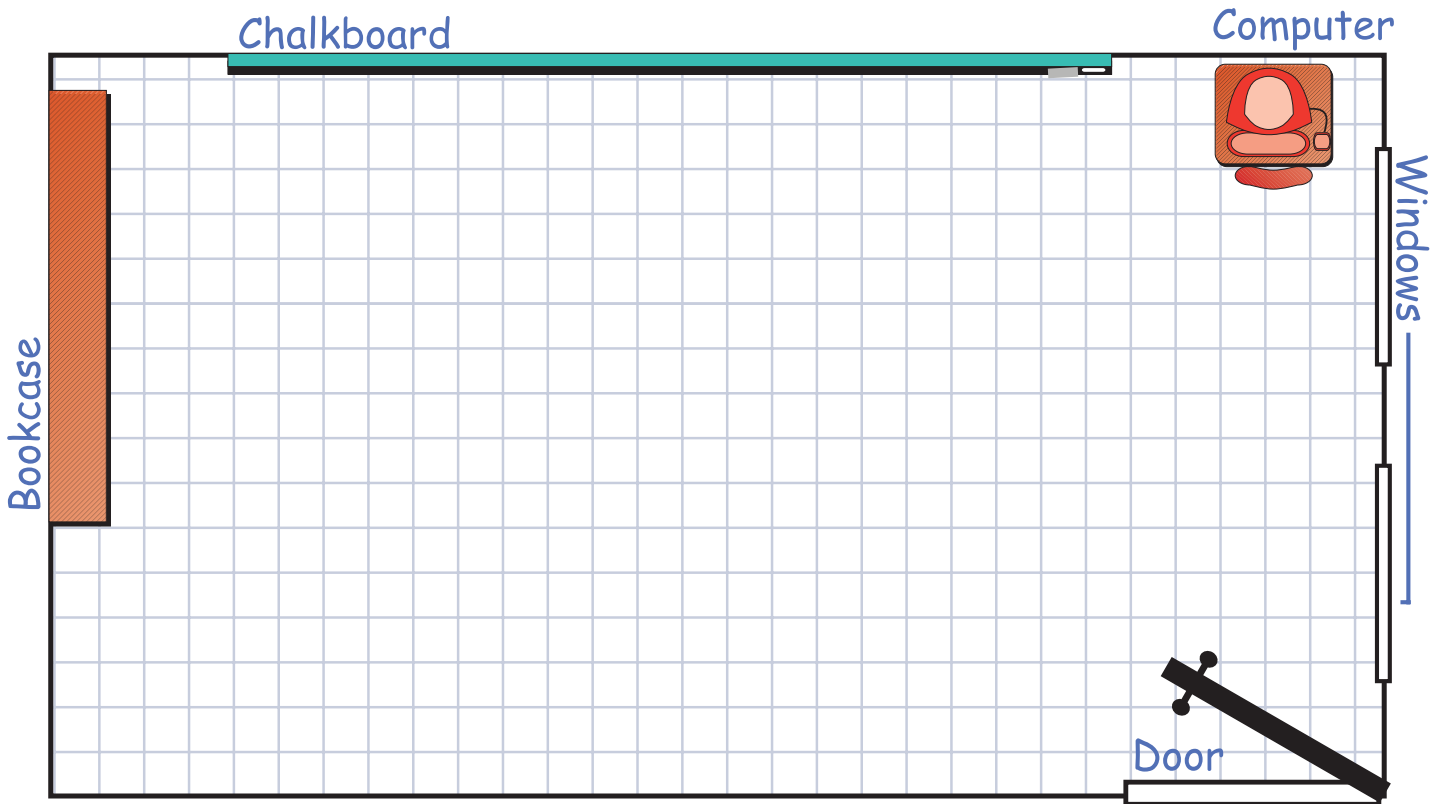
Donna is a 5th grader who has recently increased the amount of time she spends in her standard classroom to two hours. During this block of time, the class is working for 45 minutes on math, one hour on social studies or science (alternating each week), and 15 minutes in sustained silent reading. Math instruction in Donna's classroom is typically conducted with pair interactions. Social studies and science instruction varies in format from paired to small group to whole group based on the unit of study. Sustained silent reading is conducted with students seated at their individual desks. The special education teacher anticipates that Donna's strengths will help her to compensate for her difficulty with reading. Donna has progressed this semester to reading on the second grade level, but is still a shy, reluctant reader.

## AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Participates well in group activities
- Has a strong interest in science and social studies
- Follows oral directions well

 ASSIGNMENT

- Develop 2 goals for Donna.
- Complete the room arrangement below by sketching the furniture (e.g. 22 student desks) to meet the class's instructional needs and support Donna in meeting her goals. Designate Donna's specific seating location (desk) with a star.
- Explain your rationale for both the sketched classroom arrangement and Donna's seating location. Identify which strategies you used in making your decisions. (You may review the STAR sheets if necessary.) Indicate how your decisions support Donna in meeting the two goals.



**EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT  
MINIMIZING DISTRACTIONS**★ **WHAT A STAR SHEET IS...**

A STAR (S**T**rat**E**gies And Resources) Sheet provides you with a description of a well-researched strategy that can help you solve the case studies in this unit.

**WHAT IT IS...**

The strategy of minimizing distractions is arranging the physical space around a student so that this student has minimal distractions from items, equipment, or other individuals. Minimizing distractions works in tandem with maximizing access (see adjacent fact sheet) to support student learning.

**WHAT THE RESEARCH AND RESOURCES SAY...**

- Items (windows, doors, aquariums, etc.), equipment (computers, overhead projectors, etc.), and individuals (reading groups, adjacent peers, etc.) can be distracting (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).
- Preventing distractions helps to decrease misbehavior, but is even more effective when replaced by positive teacher statements (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993).
- High traffic areas (water fountain, pencil sharpener, trash can, teacher's desk, etc.) need to be arranged to avoid congestion and to minimize the distraction their use causes (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).

**TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION...**

- Identify potential distractions in the classroom.
- Arrange student seating to avoid these distractions.
- Move items, equipment, and/or individuals as needed to minimize distractions.

**KEEP IN MIND...**

- An easy way to anticipate potential distractions is to sit in each of the student seating locations prior to making seating assignments.
- Different students find different items, equipment, and individuals distracting.
- When distractions cannot be moved, they can be minimized through other means. For example, if a computer is distracting, but the only electrical/Internet connections are in that specific location, turn down the screen resolution when not in use to minimize the distraction.

**RESOURCES...**

Evertson, C. M., Emmer, E. T., & Worsham, M. E. (2003). *Classroom management for elementary teachers (6th Edition)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Shores, R. E., Gunter, P. L., & Jack, S. L. (1993). Classroom management strategies: Are they setting events for coercion? *Behavioral Disorders, 18*(2), 92-102.



**EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT  
MAXIMIZING ACCESS****★ WHAT A STAR SHEET IS...**

A STAR (S**T**rat**E**gies And Resources) Sheet provides you with a description of a well-researched strategy that can help you solve the case studies in this unit.

**WHAT IT IS...**

Maximizing access is a strategy for arranging the physical space around a student so that the student has maximized access to instruction, materials, and demonstrations and the teacher has maximized access to the student. Maximizing access works in tandem with minimizing distractions (see adjacent fact sheet) to support student learning.

**WHAT THE RESEARCH AND RESOURCES SAY...**

- Many studies have identified teacher interaction with students is connected to student seating location (Good & Brophy, 2000; Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003; Lambert, 1995; Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993). Those students seated at the front of the room and down its center (the “action zone”) are more likely to receive attention from the teacher.
- Students facing an instructional area have easier access to it; those with their backs to instruction can avoid participation (Wong & Wong, 1998).
- Effective teacher monitoring of a class requires frequent movement throughout the classroom and constant lines of sight to each student (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).
- The arrangement of the classroom should allow teachers access to interact with every student (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993).
- Frequently used materials and equipment (pencil sharpener, texts, etc.) should be stored in easily accessible locations (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).

**TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION...**

- Provide a clear line of sight for students to instruction (chalkboard, overhead projector screen, demonstration table, you).
- Create a clear line of sight for you to the students.
- Arrange seating to allow you and the students to move through the classroom with ease.

**KEEP IN MIND...**

- An easy way to anticipate better access for students is to sit in each of the student seating locations prior to making seating assignments.
- Access can be redistributed by rearranging students in the room.
- Some students require more space (e.g., for a wheelchair) to have equitable access.

## RESOURCES...

- Evertson, C. M., Emmer, E. T., & Worsham, M. E. (2003). *Classroom management for elementary teachers (6<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Good, T. L. & Brophy, J. E. (2000). *Looking in classrooms (8<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. New York: Longman.
- Lambert, N. M. (1995). Seating arrangements. In L. W. Anderson (Ed.) *International encyclopedia of teaching and teacher education (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*. Oxford: Elsevier Science.
- Shores, R. E., Gunter, P. L., & Jack, S. L. (1993). Classroom management strategies: Are they setting events for coercion? *Behavioral Disorders, 18*(2), 92-102.
- Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (1998). *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher*. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications, Inc.



## EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT

## MATCHING ARRANGEMENT WITH LESSON PURPOSE

## ★ WHAT A STAR SHEET IS...

A STAR (STrategies And Resources) Sheet provides you with a description of a well-researched strategy that can help you solve the case studies in this unit.

## WHAT IT IS...

Matching the room arrangement with lesson purpose is a strategy for arranging the classroom in a manner to support the purpose of the lesson. Lessons designed for independent work (seatwork, tests, etc.) are supported by an arrangement in rows or paired rows. Lessons designed for group work (centers, teams, etc.) are supported by an arrangement in groups.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS...

- Seating arrangements should match lesson purpose (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003; Lambert, 1995; Wong & Wong, 1998).
- Grouped seating arrangements can increase student social interaction; seating in rows can increase the quantity of independent student work completed (Lambert, 1995; Wong & Wong, 1998).
- Flexibility in room arrangement enables a variety of instructional formats to be used (whole group, small group, student pairs, individual) (Lambert, 1995; Wong & Wong, 1998).
- Room arrangements that do not match lesson purposes can be distracting to students (Lambert, 1995).

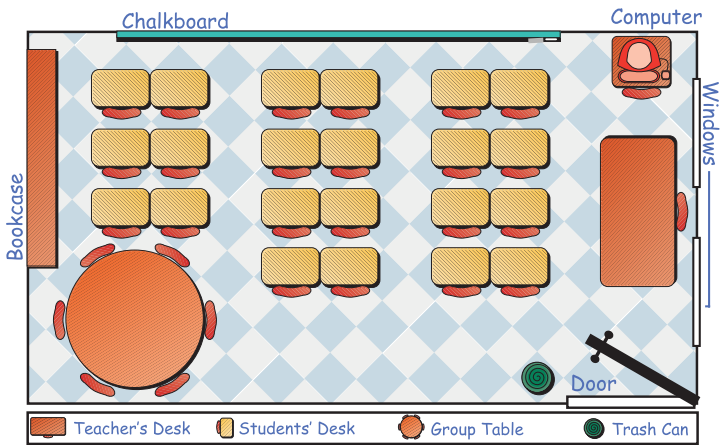
## TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION...

- Select the lesson purpose and format.
- Select a room arrangement that supports the lesson purpose. Consider the different arrangements below.
- Adapt your present arrangement to support the lesson purpose, or
- Arrange the room accordingly, or
- Teach students to arrange the classroom for specific lesson formats and assign the task of arranging the room to the class based on your direction. Successful student rearrangement requires practice.

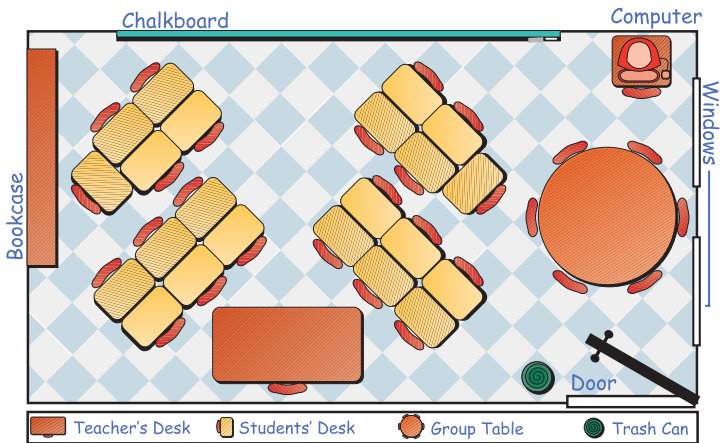
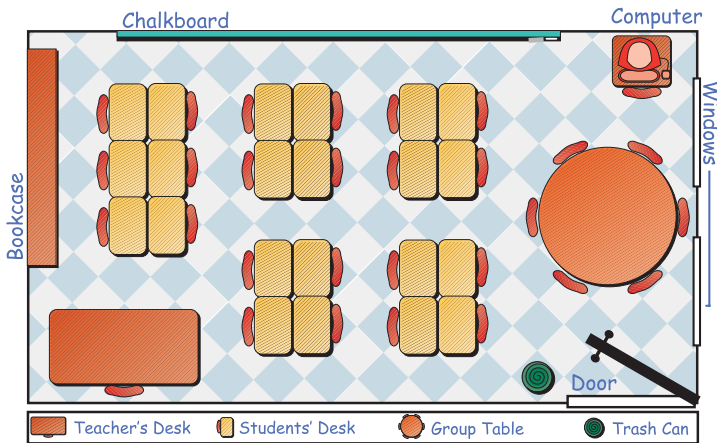
## KEEP IN MIND...

1. Effective lesson planning and teaching procedures for a given lesson format work in combination with matching arrangement to lesson purpose to achieve successful lesson implementation.
2. Continuous rearrangement of the classroom can be as disruptive as a mismatch of arrangement to lesson purpose. Plan your room arrangement to fit the majority of your day's instruction and find ways to adjust this arrangement to meet other lesson purposes.

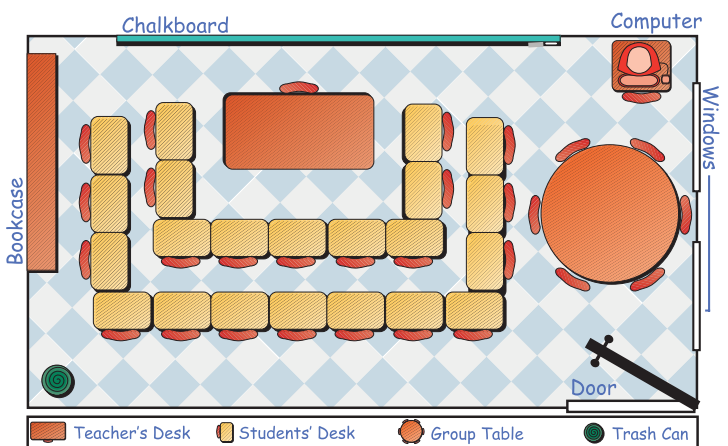
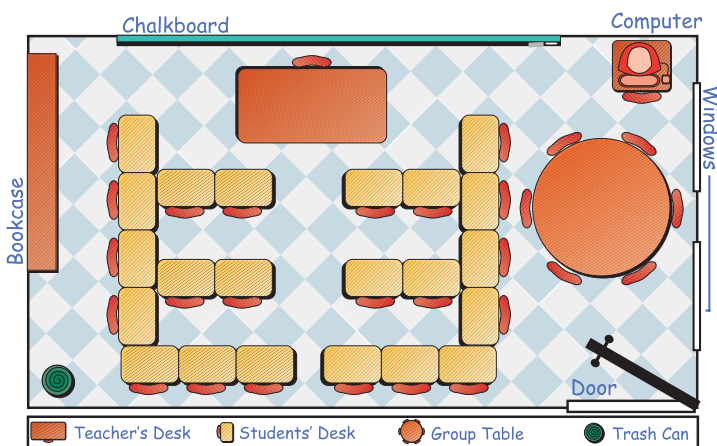
Possible arrangements for independent work/tests/beginning of the year/lecture:



Possible arrangements for group work/stations:



Possible arrangements for demonstration/discussion:



RESOURCES...

Evertson, C. M., Emmer, E. T., & Worsham, M. E. (2003). *Classroom management for elementary teachers (6th Edition)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Lambert, N. M. (1995). Seating arrangements. In L. W. Anderson (Ed.) *International encyclopedia of teaching and teacher education (2nd Edition)*. Oxford: Elsevier Science.

Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (1998). *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher*. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications, Inc.

**EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT  
MOVEMENT WITH EASE****★ WHAT A STAR SHEET IS...**

A STAR (S**T**rat**E**gies And **R**esources) Sheet provides you with a description of a well-researched strategy that can help you solve the case studies in this unit.

**WHAT IT IS...**

Movement with ease is a strategy for arranging the physical space of a classroom to insure that both the teacher and the students can move through the room without difficulty.

**WHAT THE RESEARCH AND RESOURCES SAY...**

- Effective teacher monitoring of a class requires frequent movement throughout the classroom and constant lines of sight to each student (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).
- The arrangement of the classroom should allow teachers to be able to move to interact with every student (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993).
- Students need easy access to needed supplies, equipment, and materials (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).
- Constrained spaces increase the physical contact between individuals and the likelihood of tension (Hall, 1966/1982).
- In a study focused on classrooms with low-income African American students, researchers found that the students required movement as a part of their learning process (Ellison, Boykin, Towns, & Stokes, 2000).

**TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION...**

- Arrange the furniture and equipment in the classroom to provide walking space between and around these items as needed.
- Anticipate special circumstances that may require additional space (e.g., wheelchair use).
- Select to place frequently utilized supplies, equipment, and materials in easy-to-reach locations.
- Remove unused or unnecessary equipment and furniture from the classroom.

**KEEP IN MIND...**

- An easy way to anticipate movement with ease through the classroom is to try walking through all of the designated areas with the chairs placed as if students are seated in them.
- Establishing procedures for moving through the room is necessary to make a good classroom arrangement successful.
- Blocked walkways can serve as emergency exit hazards.

## RESOURCES...

- Ellison, C. M., Boykin, A. W., Towns, D. P., & Stokes, A. (2000). *Classroom cultural ecology: The dynamics of classroom life in schools serving low-income African American children (Report No. CRESPAR-R-44)*. East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED442886)
- Evertson, C. M., Emmer, E. T., & Worsham, M. E. (2003). *Classroom management for elementary teachers (6th Edition)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hall, E. T. (1966/1982). *The hidden dimension*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc.
- Shores, R. E., Gunter, P. L., & Jack, S. L. (1993). Classroom management strategies: Are they setting events for coercion? *Behavioral Disorders*, 18(2), 92-102.