

How do I make them sit?

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The moment we hear the word school, a picture of a building with many teachers and children appears in our mind. And when we talk about the academic activities of the school, we visualise a classroom where the teacher is facing the children who are sitting in rows in a systemic manner. There is nothing wrong with this imagery because this is how we see the classrooms most of the time. Almost all kinds of activities, such as giving instructions, telling and listening to stories and poems, having discussions, reading-writing, evaluation and displaying the teaching learning materials, etc. are conducted in this kind of seating arrangement. Though this arrangement has some benefits, there are certain drawbacks also which have a direct impact on the learning process of the children. I will share my experiences with the alternative ways of seating arrangements. If we pay a little attention to the way children sit in the classroom then we can see the positive effect on the understanding and learning of the children. This is especially so in the early stages of schooling, that is, in classes one and two. As a language teacher, I have had opportunities to work on different types of activities for the development of linguistic skills.

During the early days of my teaching, my methodology was not very different. Based on my routine work, experiences and challenges pertaining to classroom situations, I started making changes in the way children sit in classroom. They were made to sit in a certain manner for different activities. These changes definitely had very good impact on class. I am sharing some of these experiences with you.

1. **Circular seating arrangement** – It is a good and convenient way to sit in a big circle with children for having general conversation, giving instruction, forming rules or to have discussions. This type of seating arrangement allows us to have direct eye contact between listeners and the speaker. Everybody can see and listen to each other. It becomes easy to express oneself and listen to others. No child is left behind. Also the problem of some children sitting in front and some at back does not arise at all.
2. **Semicircular seating arrangement** – This arrangement is suitable to tell and listen to a story and poem. Gestures and facial expressions are very important in this activity. The speaker expects everybody to look at him carefully so that they can understand the spirit of the story or poem being presented with gestures and which cannot be expressed only by words. During the session, relevant pictures or TLMs are shown to the class and each child is extremely eager to see it. This type of seating arrangement is ideal in such situations. If the class is big, then two or more rows of semicircles, one behind the other, can be formed.
3. **U shaped seating arrangement** – When we work with TLMs for reading and writing in a class then first we have to demonstrate the process to be taken up. For example - arranging story-based pictures according to sequence of events, pairing words and pictures, arranging words and sentence strip in a sequence, etc when we want every student to see and listen to the proceedings carefully. This arrangement helps children to see the ongoing activities properly and the teacher also gets enough space to keep the materials and show them.
4. **Compact seating arrangement** – There are many occasions when children sit very close to each other such as during story telling activity. Their feet almost touch each other. I would also sit with them. There is no special purpose in this arrangement. It is a situation where children, especially small ones, want to sit close to the teacher and be in close proximity of the teacher so that they can talk to them. They also want to see the material brought by the teacher as soon as they can. Teachers also become closer to the children if they sit near them. This type of seating arrangement can be delightful. Teachers need less energy to speak because children are close to them and can modulate the voice and use gestures according to the events of the story better. But it is not possible to sit like this for a long period of time.



5. **Group-wise seating arrangement** – In classes one and two, we generally do activities such as drawing, discussion on pictures and arrangement of words and letters in sequence. It is convenient to do such things in smaller groups. This kind of arrangement gives children an opportunity to learn together, though we have to keep in mind the number of children per group. I have been doing these activities in class on a regular basis and have found that it is good to have four or five children in a group. If there are thirty children in a class then it is better to make six groups in two rows so that the activities can be done comfortably.
6. **Seating arrangement facing the green board** – If a teacher has to do most of the work on a green board, it is necessary that children are able to see the board clearly. The distance between the board and the children should be right and the children should be seated suitably, while the distance between the children should be such that there is no disorder and the teacher is able to keep an eye on whatever they are doing. I have tried to make them sit in different ways when they have to look at the board and do the activities of reading and writing. For example when reading is happening then the distance between the children is made less and during writing it is slightly more so that they can keep their notebooks or slates comfortably and they are sitting separately for comfort. If the activity is decided earlier then it becomes easy to plan the seating arrangement. In this kind of arrangement, I was never rigid with making them sit only in a line. I believe that the children should sit comfortably, everyone should be able to see the board clearly and I should be able to see them. Of course, one thing that I kept in mind while following this seating arrangement was that their position should change by rotation. They need not always sit in a designated place.

7. **Seating arrangement according to the level** – Sometimes in our classroom we come across a situation where we have to pay special attention to a few children to help them learn and understand better. We need to have a different kind of strategy for them and give them special work. Many a times we form a separate group of such children to work with them. If there are five or six, or more, then smaller groups of 2-3 children have been made. It is better to make them sit independently in an empty and big space within the classroom. It consists of two main groups and a few sub groups.

I have experienced that in smaller classes there are two or more different types of seating arrangements in the same period. Making changes in seating arrangement is a challenging task. We have to plan it well and practice it regularly otherwise a lot of time of the teaching period may be spent only in making these changes. It is easy to follow this arrangement for the children who are sitting on the ground. It is better to make the children of Classes 1 and 2 sit on the floor where a carpet or mattress is spread. Because then it becomes easy to make the seating arrangement quickly without spending time on moving furniture and the noise is also avoided.

In this way, having proper and activity-based seating arrangement has made it easy for me to work with the children. I have personally experienced the positive effect on children's learning. I am inspired by my own experiences which has made it possible to work smoothly with the children. For me it has now become an essential and regular part of classroom processes to use different types seating arrangements.

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