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Description automatically generated with medium confidenceActivity Center Planner

**Activity Ideas**



**What to do:** Use the planning considerations, activity center ideas, and checklist in this tool to help you plan interesting, age-appropriate activity centers in your out-of-school time program.

**Why it matters:** Activity centers are a quick and comfortable way to ease staff and students into learning opportunities. Well-planned activity centers engage students in hands-on, independent exploration, collaborative experiences, and learning targeted to specific objectives.

# Planning Considerations

**Space:** A “center” can be as simple as a table or area where students can work on activities they choose by selecting from shoeboxes filled with activity-specific materials.

**Materials:** The materials needed will vary by activity. Start with free or low-cost materials that are easily available. As you add centers, you may decide to purchase some materials and ask businesses, organizations, and community members to donate materials as needed.

**Time:** Decide when centers will be available. On certain days, or daily at set times? During homework time for those who finish early or need a break?

**Student engagement:** Students can help develop ideas, organize materials, and manage centers.

**Purpose, objectives, and expectations:** Specify learning objectives in the planning stage. Make the purpose, objectives, and expectations clear. Include rules and procedures about behavior, safety, and clean-up.

**Variety:** Build a repertoire of activities for students to choose from. Experiment with making several different activities available at the same time.

**Assessment:** Watch centers in use. Note whether children are engaged, distracted, or bored. Talk to students to gauge outcomes. Discuss findings with staff, and revise activity centers as needed.

# Activity Center Ideas for Various Grade Levels

**Time:** Calendars to customize, daily and weekly schedules with dates and times, clocks and watches to play with and take apart, appointment books (K-3)

**Money:** Penny jar, pennies, play money, menus, catalogs, store items (K-3); balancing a checkbook and budgeting (Grade 5 and up)

**Measuring:** Measuring cups, measuring spoons, containers of different sizes, scale, sand, pebbles, liquids to measure (K-3); designing a garden or room (Grade 4 and up)

**Sorting:** Buttons or beads in a variety of colors, sizes, and shapes for sorting, estimating, and counting (K-2)

**Building, construction:** Blocks, Legos, paper cups, cardboard, straws, and twist-ties to construct two- and three-dimensional shapes (K-4); straws, tape, scissors, papers, graph paper, and paint with instructions for completing different challenges (Grades 3-6); plywood, wood scraps, tools, and electronics equipment (Grade 6 and up)

**Puzzles:** Various types of two- and three-dimensional puzzles, with increasing complexity (K-12)

**Shapes:** Posters with shapes, crayons, pencils, construction paper, graph paper, different sizes of triangles, squares, rectangles, and circles; two- and three-dimensional shapes and objects to trace, draw, cut out, and play with (K-3)

**Patterns and rhythms:** Rhythm instruments to beat out patterns, paper for students to write beat patterns in symbols for others to follow (e.g., a = short tap, b = long tap) (Grades 2-4)

**Experiments and building kits:** Use downloaded instructions and gather materials for experiments and make them available regularly. Include kits for things like building sun dials, paper airplanes, and boats, and mixing paint colors (Grades 2-6)

# Activity Center Planner

**Description/theme of center**

**Focus areas** (check all that apply)

\_\_\_\_ Science \_\_\_\_\_ Technology \_\_\_\_\_ Engineering \_\_\_\_\_ the Arts \_\_\_\_\_ Mathematics

\_\_\_\_ Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Learning objectives/purpose**

**Number of users at one time** \_\_\_\_

**Primarily for** \_\_\_ Individual work \_\_\_ Pairs \_\_\_ Small groups \_\_\_ Any

**Instructions** \_\_\_ Clearly written

\_\_\_ Needs verbal explanation or demonstration

\_\_\_ Users can explain to each other

**Availability** \_\_\_ Always \_\_\_ Days/times \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Homework \_\_\_ By request

**Supervision** \_\_\_ None, general only \_\_\_ Periodic check

\_\_\_ Demonstrations and explanations needed

\_\_\_ Active supervision required

**Extensions and support**

\_\_\_\_\_ Additional resources \_\_\_\_\_ Expertise \_\_\_\_\_ Specialized support

**Supplies needed**

Instruction sheet

Materials, tools, equipment

Activity Center Observation Checklist

Use this checklist to record observations and suggestions.

\_\_\_\_\_ The center is actively used by all or most students

\_\_\_\_\_ Most students can follow the written activity instructions

\_\_\_\_\_ Students seem to enjoy the activities offered

\_\_\_\_\_ Objectives are being met

\_\_\_\_\_ Materials or supplies need to be updated or replenished

* For the center in general? Specify: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* For certain activities? Specify: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Positive outcomes are achieved

\_\_\_\_\_ Possible improvements (Specify: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_\_ Possible changes or extensions (Specify: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_)

Additional ideas or comments:

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