



Activity Center Planner

Activity centers are a quick and easy way to ease staff and students into makerspaces and STEAM learning. Well-planned activity centers engage students in hands-on, independent exploration and learning targeted to specific objectives. Start with these ideas and the planner on the next page.

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 for students to move among freely.

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 (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)





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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 or paper airplanes and boats, and mixing paint colors (2-6)

STEAM Center Planner

Description/theme of center _____

STEAM focus areas (check all that apply)

___ Science ___ Technology ___ Engineering ___ the Arts ___ Mathematics

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 _____





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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: