

Setting up the Room

Making participants feel comfortable enhances learning. The physical setting, how the chairs and tables are arranged, should be suitable for the number of class participants. Distractions should be eliminated as much as possible.

Physical Setting:

The classroom's physical setting can have a big impact on the success of the class. Chairs should be arranged before participants arrive. There is no one seating arrangement that is best for all situations. Some general guidelines for arranging a room include:

- For group discussion, arrange the chairs so the participants can see each other as well as the instructor.
- When using Audio-Visual equipment, make sure everyone can see the screen or TV.
- Have the chairs fairly close together. A small intimate setting encourages participation.
- If possible, arrange the chairs so the door to the room is behind the participants. This way, if anyone comes in late, it will not be distracting.
- If room allows, an area behind the chairs can be useful as a pacing site for participants with infants and small children. This area may also be used as a parking lot for strollers.
- Consider whether tables or clipboards are needed for activities.

Small Groups:

The best seating arrangements for teaching small groups are circles, tables and horseshoe shapes.

- In a circle, everyone can see each other, which encourages discussion.
- Sitting around a table also encourages group discussion. The table provides a work surface for projects and note taking.
- The horseshoe is a good arrangement if you are using audiovisuals. This arrangement makes it easy to show slides or video, use a chalkboard or a flipchart.

Large Groups:

- When teaching a large group, angle the rows of chairs so people can see each other. Angling chairs allows participants to clearly see AV presentation materials (i.e. flipcharts, screens) without looking at the backs of each other's heads. To ensure everyone can see, offset the chairs on every other row, so no one is directly behind someone else.
- In a large class, it is better to stand unless there is a riser or platform, so that people in the back can see. Walking from one side of the room to the other and from the front to the back of the class is a good way to make everyone feel

included. If possible, create a center aisle. This makes it easier for the instructor to move around.

- Make sure everyone can hear. Have a co-worker sit in the back of the class to indicate whether the speaker's voice is loud enough, or ask the class for feedback. When showing a video, walk to the back of the class after turning it on and make sure the volume is at an appropriate level. This can also be done before class.

Eliminating Distractions:

Sights, sounds, physical sensations and smells can draw participants' attention away from the topic. Instructors should plan ahead to eliminate distractions.

Sights:

Windows, lights and writing surfaces are three potential distractions.

- If teaching in a room with windows, draw the blinds or curtains before the participants arrive. If not possible, arrange the seating so that the majority of the participants have their backs to the windows.
- Make sure the lights are bright enough. When showing a video, sometimes lights need to be dimmed slightly if possible.
- If teaching in a room with a chalkboard or dry erase board, make sure the surfaces are clean. Unrelated information written on these surfaces can distract participants.

Sounds:

As much as possible, eliminate any distracting sounds from inside or outside the room.

- Check the clinic's flow, and determine if the weighing and measuring lab and play areas are creating distracting sounds in the classroom.
- If your clinic makes public address announcements, remember to stop teaching, then restart when the announcement ends. This eliminates missed information and participant frustrations.

Physical Sensations:

Learning is difficult in rooms that are too hot or cold. If choosing one or the other is required, then it is usually better to have the room a little on the cool side. This keeps people awake, particularly when the lights are low.

Smells:

No smell is as interesting as fresh popcorn or warm pizza. Ask co-workers to avoid heating foods during class time if they are located near the classroom. If the nutrition education room smells "musty," then open the doors between classes for fresh air.