

2 Setting up the room for specific activities

I'd like to organise my room differently – to make some familiar activities more exciting.

Aim

To create layouts of seating and desks that facilitate and encourage communication in some common activities.

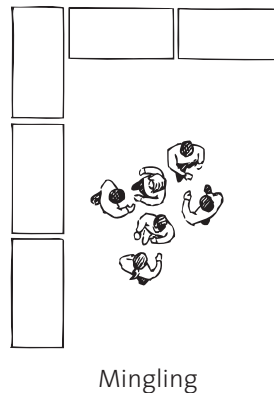
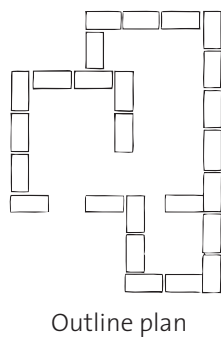
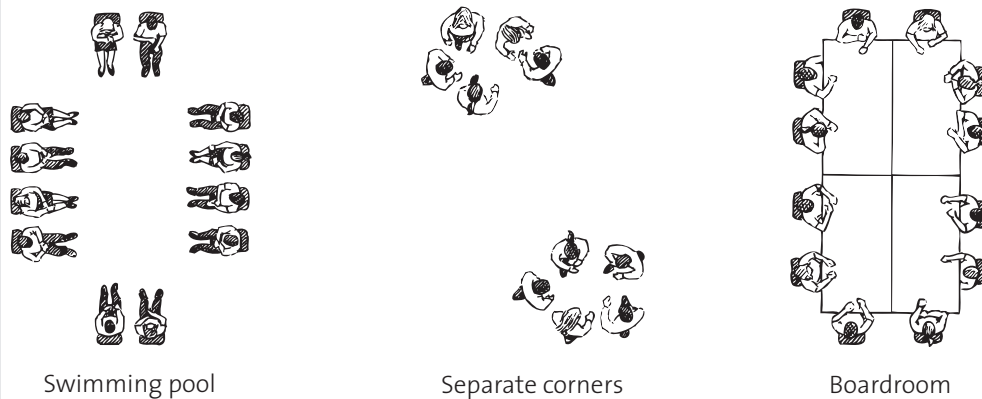
Introduction

If students always do the same or similar tasks in the same seats (perhaps with the same people), there is a danger of *sameness* about everything, and hence boredom and lack of commitment. One activity blends into the next.

Techniques: Layouts for specific activities

The diagram illustrates three classroom seating techniques:

- Houses of Parliament:** Shows two rows of four desks. In the top row, students are seated with their backs to the front of the room. In the bottom row, students are seated with their backs to the back of the room. This layout allows students to see each other across the room.
- Railway carriages:** Shows two rows of four desks. In the top row, students are seated with their backs to the front of the room. In the bottom row, students are seated with their backs to the back of the room. This layout allows students to see each other across the room.
- Aeroplane:** Shows two rows of two desks. In the top row, students are seated with their backs to the front of the room. In the bottom row, students are seated with their backs to the back of the room. This layout allows students to see each other across the room.



1 Debates or discussions

If these involve two (or more) opposing viewpoints, try a 'Houses of Parliament' divide, with two ranks of seats (perhaps without desks/tables) facing each other. This isn't suitable for general use, as it deliberately seeks to stir argument and disagreement: *us* versus *them*.

2 Social interaction and conversational activities

Try making 'railway carriages', i.e. separate blocks that have four or five seats facing a similar four or five. Similarly, make an 'airplane'. Or a lounge in a 'hotel'. Or a 'restaurant'. Or arrange seats in a rectangle around an imaginary 'swimming pool'.

3 Planning

Some activities (designing solutions, making plans, simulations, mock elections, etc.) require students to work together in groups to prepare their own ideas before coming back together for a meeting or discussion. The more dramatic the separation of the

different groups in the preparation stage (e.g. into separate corners of the room), the more it might encourage a team spirit and an urge to compete against the other team.

4 Meetings, presentations and oral report backs

Pull all the desks or tables together to make a single large 'boardroom' table which everyone sits round.

5 Role plays and simulations set in offices, houses and other buildings

Arrange seats or tables to create the *outline plan* of a number of different connected room shapes, corridors, doorways, communal areas, etc. Establish clearly what each shape is: waiting room, surgery, reception desk, lobby with coffee machine, office and so on. Learners can take the roles of people doing different things in all the separate locations.

6 Mingling

When you have a task where learners must mingle, meet and talk with a number of different people, clear the desks/tables to one side of the room to create a 'party space'. Turn on some suitable loud music (if this is possible) as this will help to create an atmosphere and may encourage the quieter ones to speak up, realising that they are less likely to be overheard. You could even serve imaginary drinks!

Questions for reflection

- Which of the classroom layouts in this unit would you like to try tomorrow with your students? What activity would you use them with?
- Are there any layouts here that you would never consider using? Why?