

# Teaching in Active Learning Classrooms with Fixed Tables



Carroll 111; Murphey 202; Phillips 206, 208, 275, and 335

The active learning classrooms listed above use fixed round, square, or rectangular tables and moveable chairs. Some of them are also referred to as studio classrooms. This format is designed to support collaborative learning groups. Tables in these classrooms include electrical outlets to power students' personal computing devices or laboratory equipment.

Faculty members who have taught in classrooms with fixed tables report that they enjoy a closer level of interaction with students and are better able to gauge student understanding of course concepts. Students also appreciate the ability to interact more closely with instructors and peers and to be part of a learning community. More information on the University's use of and evaluation of these seats is available at: <http://cfe.unc.edu/studio-classrooms/>

## Guidelines for Success

### Lesson planning

In these classrooms, students will expect opportunities to discuss course concepts with peers at their tables. Small group activities should be a regular part of lesson plans, although your approach to group formation, specific activities and frequency of use will be informed by your course and lesson goals. Center for Faculty Excellence staff are available to discuss ideas for adopting and implementing active learning techniques for your course that take advantage of active learning classroom features. For more information on best practices, workshops, videos, consultations, and other resources that you can use to make the most of these classrooms, visit the [Flexible Learning Spaces Initiative website](#).

### Mobility

Manage student expectations about eye contact with instructor. Many students have been encouraged throughout their school experiences to always watch the instructor. In an active learning classroom, you will likely be moving regularly throughout the room. Furthermore, students at tables may be facing different directions.

- Give your students explicit permission *not* to watch you at all times.
- Talk to them about why that is the case.
- Compensate for the lack of sustained eye contact with students by moving throughout the room and interacting with students directly.

Keeping classroom floor space clear will help you avoid trip hazards while navigating the room.

- Have students keep book bags and personal items stored underneath the tables.

- Depending on the weight of book bags, hanging them on the back of a seat may also be an option.

Tables in some of these classrooms are built with a short pedestal in the center that houses the electrical and network outlets. These can be utilized for other purposes as well.

- Some faculty members use them for document distribution and pickup.
- They are a great place for student name tents that can help you and students quickly learn names. This may be especially effective if you are changing student seating assignments throughout the semester.

Administering exams in a classroom designed to facilitate cooperative learning can be a challenge, especially when students are sitting at round tables and can easily see their peers' work. In addition to monitoring student behavior closely during an exam,

- If your classroom includes personal whiteboards and table brackets, the whiteboards at each table can be used as partitions between students during exams.
- Others distribute multiple versions of an exam to reduce the possibility of cheating.
- If enrollment for your course is less than the classroom's capacity, you may also be able to simply spread student seats out a little more at each table.
- Some instructors have avoided giving exams in these rooms (by scheduling exams in alternative classrooms).

## **Whiteboards**

Your classroom may also feature additional wall-mounted or personal white boards. Shared writing surfaces provide students with opportunities to visualize their understanding and to learn from one another. They can be used to facilitate a variety of easy-to-implement active learning techniques.

- Maintain access to the walls by encouraging students to plug laptops into power towers instead of wall outlets where available.
- Establish a routine of having students erase their work at the end of class.
- At the end of the week, consider using the provided cleanser to wipe down the boards (or ask your students to do so).
- Contact the ITS Classroom Hotline if you notice that there are no working dry erase markers or if the boards are dirty or broken.

## **Adjusting to the classroom**

Depending on the layout of the classroom, it may not feel as if there is a clear front and back of the classroom. Allow yourself several class periods to acclimate to the space.

On the first day of class, introduce students to the classroom and how it will support your learning goals for the course. If appropriate, encourage student buy-in by letting them help you

craft the policies that will govern use of the classroom. Make your expectations clear on day one and take the time to enforce them the first week to help make class norms stick.

We welcome your own suggestions for teaching in this classroom.

**Questions about using this classroom to support your instructional goals?**

Emily Boehm, Faculty Development Consultant

[emily.boehm@unc.edu](mailto:emily.boehm@unc.edu)

919 962-9971

Bob Henshaw, ITS Liaison to the Center for Faculty Excellence

[bob\\_henshaw@unc.edu](mailto:bob_henshaw@unc.edu)

**Questions about classroom technology?**

If you have any problems or questions regarding the technology in the classroom, please pick up the **red phone** that connects you immediately with someone at ITS Classroom Hotline. You can also access support resources or request an individual consultation by visiting the website [hotline.unc.edu](http://hotline.unc.edu).