



# DESIGNING FOR LEARNING

A Guide to Classroom Layouts

# INTRODUCTION

## Designing for Learning – A Guide to Classroom Layouts

Classroom layout plays a vital role in shaping the learning experience. More than just arranging furniture, thoughtful design considers how space can support student engagement, collaboration, and well-being. This guide explores a range of flexible, student-centered layouts that align with different teaching approaches and course goals. As you plan your setup, consider how each element of your classroom can help create an inclusive, effective, and inspiring learning environment.

### Resources

Consider the tools available in the space—such as whiteboards, digital displays, power outlets, or movable furniture—and how they can support both teaching and learning. Consider how your lesson plan includes these tools in the layout design to make them accessible and usable for everyone.

### Accessibility

Design with inclusivity in mind. Account for accessibility, sensory needs, learning preferences, and the value of student choice in where and how they learn best.

Lean more about [how to create more accessible learning spaces on our website](#).

### Interactions

Think about the type of interaction you want to foster—student-to-student, student-to-instructor, or student-to-content. Layouts can either encourage or inhibit dialogue, collaboration, and participation.

### Focus of Class

Is your course primarily discussion-based, skills-focused, lecture-driven, or project-oriented? The layout should reflect and reinforce the primary mode of learning in your class.

### Course Outcomes

Let your learning outcomes guide your design. Choose layouts that best support students in achieving the intended knowledge, skills, and mindsets by the end of the course.



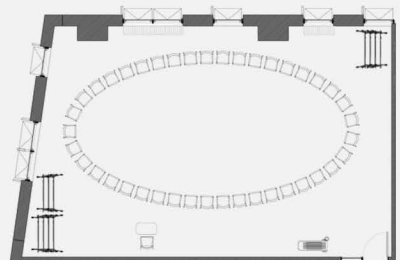
# CLASSROOM LAYOUT IDEAS

## Circle or Oval Layout

A circular classroom layout arranges chairs in a circle or oval shape, allowing all participants to face each other.

This layout encourages open communication, eye contact, and inclusive discussion, making it ideal for seminars, collaborative learning, and dialogue.

By flattening the power dynamic, it reduces the hierarchy typically seen in traditional layouts, fostering a more democratic and student-centered environment. Wheelchairs can be added just like the other chairs.



Classroom layout - oval

Note: Not great for using laptops.

# Group Layout

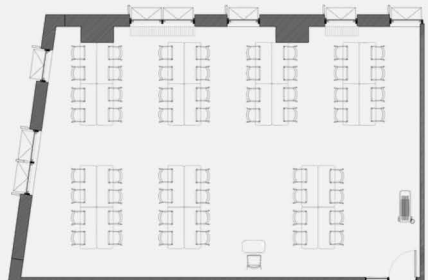
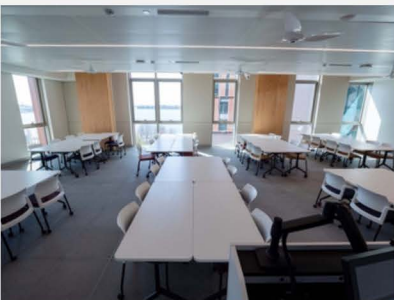
A group-shaped classroom layout consists of small clusters of desks or tables, each accommodating 4 to 6 students.

This layout supports collaborative learning by encouraging teamwork, communication, and peer support within each group. Having learners facing one another while working on individual and shared tasks supports collaboration and communication. Grouping layouts are also well-suited for project-based activities, problem-solving tasks, and active learning strategies.

The setup fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility, while still allowing the instructor to circulate and engage with each group easily.



Classroom layout - group 6



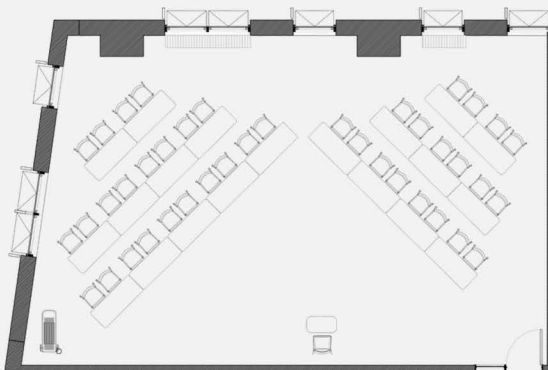
Classroom layout - group 8

## V-Shape Layout (Runway)

A V-shaped classroom layout arranges desks or tables in two angled rows that form a "V" facing the front of the room.

This layout allows all students to maintain a clear line of sight to the facilitator or presentation area, while also promoting peer interaction. It balances focus and collaboration, making it effective for both lectures and group discussions.

The open angle creates a sense of inclusion and engagement, helping learners feel more connected to both the content and each other. It is an inclusive and collaborative layout for presentations or debates.



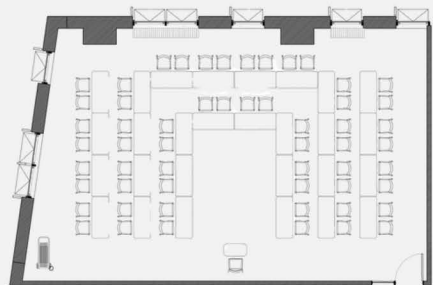
Classroom layout - V shape

## U-Shape Layout (Horseshoe)

A U-shaped classroom layout arranges desks or tables in the shape of a "U," with the open end typically facing a presentation area, whiteboard, or instructor.

This layout promotes interaction between the facilitator and students as well as among peers, making it ideal for discussions, presentations, and collaborative activities.

It provides clear sightlines for everyone and encourages active participation while still maintaining a focal point at the front of the room. Expanded U-shape adds more rows to included larger classes.



Classroom layout - U shape

## Gallery Tour

This setup features whiteboards placed throughout the room, allowing learners to collaboratively create and display their ideas or designs in groups. Peers are then invited to engage with each group's work by offering observations, questions, or feedback in a respectful and constructive way. This can be used in many classroom layouts.



## Open-Space Layout

An open-space classroom layout features a flexible and uncluttered layout with minimal fixed furniture, allowing for easy movement and reconfiguration. Desks and tables are typically arranged around the edges of the room, with open areas left available for group activities, discussions, or hands-on learning. This setup encourages creativity, flexibility, and interaction, making it ideal for active learning environments. It also supports inclusivity by allowing learners and educators to adapt the space based on different needs, tasks, and learning styles.

## Students-Choice Layout

A student choice classroom layout offers a flexible arrangement that includes a variety of seating and workspace options—such as individual desks, group tables, standing stations, floor seating, or soft seating areas. This layout empowers learners to choose the environment that best supports their comfort, focus, and learning preferences. It promotes autonomy, inclusivity, and engagement by recognizing that students thrive in different ways. The adaptable design also allows for easy transitions between independent work, collaboration, and whole-class activities.



## The Teaching and Learning Exchange (TLX)

Website: [www.georgebrown.ca/tlx](http://www.georgebrown.ca/tlx)

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