

How many small groups should I have?
Small group is defined as two - eight children. Most teachers divide children into three or four groups, with five to seven children per group. Groups should be created based on children's needs, skills, and/or interest, but how many groups you have is up to you.
Do I need the same number of groups all the time?
No. One week you might have three groups and another time you might choose to have five groups.
Should I have two teacher-led groups?
You might have only one teacher-led group while the second teacher monitors several independent groups. This is a management technique that works well at the beginning of the year as children are learning to work independently. At any time during the school year, it is up to the teacher to decide how many teacher-led groups he/she may have based on the needs and abilities of the students. It is acceptable for the lead teacher and the assistant teacher to each be leading a group while monitoring independent groups at the same time.
Can I put children in two groups of 10 for cooking or science experiments?
You may choose to divide children into two groups of 10 for cooking activities or other projects, but this cannot be counted as the required small group time. Remember a small group is defined as two - eight children.
How long should small group be?
Small group should be relatively short at the beginning of the year when children are learning routines. Most teachers find that 10 minutes is a good starting point. As the year progresses, you can increase this time.
Does small group always need to be the same length of time?
It may be different for different lessons – a math game might take only 10 minutes, while a small group reading discussion might engage children for 20 minutes.
Do I have to see each child every day?
No, but you should plan for each child every day. Some children will be in teacher-facilitated groups; others will be engaged in independent activities.
Do I have to identify the children in independent groups as well as in small groups?
Yes. List the children, along with the activities you have planned for them, in both independent and teacher-led groups.
What are some independent group activities? Can I use centers for independent groups?
Using your centers is a great way to spread independent activities throughout the classroom. Independent activities should be varied and provide purposeful opportunities for children to interact with hands-on materials. Give them specific tasks-working with art materials or engaging in writing opportunities. Consider using items such as your math manipulatives in small group. This is a great way to use what you already have in your classrooms in a new, different, and specific way. However, do not tell children to "just go play." Be sure to identify standards (GELDS) for each independent activity.
How often do I need to change the children assigned to a small group? Can I keep the same children together for a week?
Small group composition should change frequently. This doesn't mean you have to change every day. However, once or twice per semester is not often enough. If you are grouping your children based on their needs and interests, then this will happen quite naturally. Many teachers find that changing group assignments weekly works well for them.

How do I decide who goes in each group?

Small groups should be based primarily on assessment information and what you know your children need. The WSO Class Profile or Class Ratings Report are great tools for use when grouping children and planning instruction. You might also consider learning styles, children's interests, and topics of study when grouping your children.

What are different ways to group children?

Homogeneously – all children in the group are on the same ability level. This allows you to focus your instruction on a specific skill or need.

Heterogeneously – there are mixed ability levels within the same group. This grouping of children promotes peer teaching and encourages group interaction.

Depending on the lesson objective and the needs of your children, both ways of grouping should be used in Pre-K.

Can I repeat the same lesson for multiple groups?

There are some instances where you would repeat the same lesson for multiple groups of children – making a class book, for example. Other examples include a science experiment, a cooking activity, or a follow-up to a field trip. It may also be appropriate at the beginning of the year or when introducing a new concept. Always ask yourself – do ALL children need the same experience? When rotating children through the same small group activities, teachers should change the directions, adjust the type/amount of materials and/or duration of the activity to reflect differentiation within the different groups of children.

Please explain reading in small groups with a follow-up activity.

At least once per week there should be a small group lesson that involves reading to children and facilitating a follow-up activity. This activity can be designed to encourage discussion and interaction. For example, you could have the students predict the outcome of the story, identify the main characters, or retell the story. You might choose to have children expand and practice concepts from the book such as identifying characteristics of insects or playing a counting game.

Does every child have to participate in the weekly small group reading activity?

No. You do not have to do this with every child during the week. However, many teachers choose to teach a small group reading lesson with various groups of children during the week.

What is scaffolding?

Scaffolding is providing support to a child to move him to the next level of learning or help him perform at a higher level than he would be able to on his own. It requires that teachers be aware of the small, discrete steps (continuum) involved in acquiring a particular skill and they know precisely where the child is on this continuum. Teachers can model and provide feedback to guide children to the next level by providing hints when they struggle to understand something or by offering a variety of answers for children to choose from when they need help getting to the correct response.

How do I show that I am scaffolding?

Scaffolding can and should occur throughout the day and may not always be demonstrated in planning documentation. Knowing the needs of students as identified through assessment documentation is key in planning lessons that scaffold learning. Basing lessons on assessment and grouping children accordingly will show you are aware of this important concept.

How much should I write in my lesson plan?

Enough so that someone else (a substitute, your supervisor, the Pre-K specialist) can identify the purpose of your lesson, the materials you are using, the standard (GELDS) and the children who are involved. However, detailed, step-by-step directions are time consuming and not necessary.

Can I put small group work in a child's WSO portfolio?

Absolutely. There must be a variety of child-initiated and teacher-initiated work in the portfolios. Small group instruction is a prime time to collect samples of teacher-initiated work.

Can the same thing be in several children’s portfolios?

Yes. Children that have participated in the same small group may have similar documentation. However, each child’s portfolio should be unique. There will be many items that are only in one child's portfolio.

What makes something a ditto or worksheet?

A common characteristic of inappropriate dittos or worksheets is that there is a very narrow focus – only one right answer, for example. Typical examples of this kind of worksheet require children to circle or color or draw a line to indicate the correct answer. Another common factor is that the work is done entirely in the child’s head; it is abstract with no concrete manipulation of objects. Pre-K children still need hands-on activities. Appropriate paper and pencil representations should always be grounded in these concrete experiences. Appropriate examples include math graphs or science data sheets; these help children begin to abstractly represent a concrete experience.

Does every small group have to result in a product?

No. For example, a small group may involve children playing a game or participating in a book discussion.

Do I have to assess every small group activity?

It is not necessary to assess every activity. Some lessons should be for introduction of a skill or for practice. Plan a few key assessments each week to make the process manageable. For example, one week you may decide to collect work samples from a science lesson, create a matrix for a math activity and take notes in the social studies domain during independent groups.