



## GETTING STARTED WITH GROUPING

After a teacher creates their student groups, it is normal to be eager to jump right in and get started. However, in order to set up students to be successful with small groups it's important that teachers take the time to intentionally plan and prepare students. The best practices listed below will help teachers get their class started with small groups, while ensuring time spent in groups is productive in the long run.

Administrators should make sure that teachers take the time to get their groups started on the right foot. It is critical that school leaders stress the importance of establishing routines and systems for small groups so that groups can run smoothly throughout the entire year. Not doing so in the beginning could cause disruptions and pull the focus away from learning. Taking this time up front to get groups started correctly will help classes be more effective in the long run.

For additional information about creating small groups, be sure to check out these resources-[using NWEA MAP data](#) or [through other data sources](#).

### Best practices for getting started with small groups

#### 1. Model how small groups will run, including how students should behave

Before starting small groups, show students where they will sit at each station and explain what will happen when they are there. Model what students should be doing and how they should be acting during small groups, including showing the rotations, routines, and procedures used during small groups. Be sure to show students that the teacher can see what they are doing. Take modeling to the next level by asking some students to show the class how each station will run. Some teachers like to check for students' understanding and make modeling fun by letting students give feedback and using incentives for repeated successful groups.

#### 2. Practice small groups with students

When up and running, students will be at each small group station for 20+ minutes. Giving students the opportunity to practice what to do and how to behave at each station is critical to instill good habits. It is beneficial to run small groups for short durations (5-10 minutes per station) so that students can become familiar with each station and can receive feedback from the teacher on how they are doing. Practice may look like this:

- Teacher led station (5 minutes): Students work on a worksheet so teacher can monitor all stations and provide students feedback and redirection
- Computer station (5 minutes): Students practice logging on to their computers and getting into the correct software
- Independent station (5 minutes): Students read independently in assigned or approved flexible seating arrangements

Practice opportunities should happen 3-5 times, in varying durations, before starting normal small group instruction.



**3. Display small groups for students to see**

Teachers should display a list of who is in each small group for students (and guests/substitute teachers) to see. The list should be shown every day or be a poster displayed in the classroom. This helps to ensure that students end up at the correct station without the teacher needing to tell students where to be and decreases the amount of time it takes for students to get from one place to another. It also promotes student independence, as a student can determine where they need to be if they forget their group or enter class after small groups have started.

**4. Ensure students know how to succeed on independent and computer learning**

Teachers running small groups often worry about how students will receive help and be successful when working independently. This fear can often be minimized by teaching students how to complete work at the computer and independent stations. Teachers should walk the class through computer lessons, including how to take notes and use help features, before starting small groups. Teachers should also ensure that students are aware of the systems to follow when they are struggling or need help with either academic or technology issues. While the teacher will need to continue to monitor students, ensuring that kids know how to engage with each station and problem-solve on their own will allow the teacher to minimize interruptions during teacher-led instruction. For a list of systems that will support small group instruction, [click here](#).

**5. Review expectations regularly and practice when needed**

It is common for teachers to need to remind students about small group expectations, especially when groups change, or after holiday breaks. Teachers should have a clear set of expectations that are reviewed weekly to ensure students know how to succeed at each station. At any point, if large numbers of students fail to meet expectations, take a day to reset and practice with students again. This will give the teacher the opportunity to give students feedback during the practice and get groups running smoothly again. Since students know the expectations at this point, a reset is a good opportunity to engage students in a quick discussion about what expectations they are struggling to meet and involve them in the solution to get back up and running. Taking the time to do this type of quick reset when expectations are not followed will prevent the need for a larger, more time-consuming reset later on.