

Creating Learning Centers

Classroom Activities for the Differentiated ESL Classroom–

Why Do We Need Differentiated Instruction?

Our English classrooms in Israel have learners of varying levels of knowledge and skills. We want to try to challenge each learner to learn material at his/her own pace and level.

When students work individually or in pairs at learning centers or at their desks, it allows the teacher to work with a small group at the “teacher’s table.” This way, the teacher can divide the class into flexible groups by need (learners who need more systematic basic phonics work, vs. those who read well and need to concentrate more on vocabulary or comprehension, etc.) The centers provide learning activity for students to work independently at their own pace and level.

Support for Independent Learners

At the beginning of the year, the teacher can start independent work at centers to accustom learners to working this way and to develop good habits (to take the materials quietly, work on them independently, and when finished, return them and take another set of materials.) Once the learners are accustomed to this way of working, the teacher can start meeting with small groups while the rest of the class is doing independent study using centers.

It is helpful, perhaps essential until students have mastered self-regulation, to have another adult in the classroom supervising and answering the questions of the “independent” learners, so that the teacher can work undisturbed with the small group at the teacher’s table.

If the class does not have an assistant teacher or other aide, consider asking your learners’ families to do “toranut” – to take turns coming in for one or more days per year to assist in the classroom. You can ask them to sign up for a date at the beginning-of-year class meetings. (Pass around a sign-up sheet of dates from which they can choose.) If the parents work or are otherwise not available, they can delegate this volunteer day to a grandparent, adult sibling, or other friend or family member. (This is a common practice at schools in the U.S., even in communities where both parents work outside of the home.)

How do I make a “take-it-to-your-desk” learning center folder?

Learning center folders should be:

- attractive, interesting and provide multi-sensory stimulation.
- as self-explanatory as possible, with clear instructions and a self-check.
- active, with manipulatives and activities.

Elements of a Center:

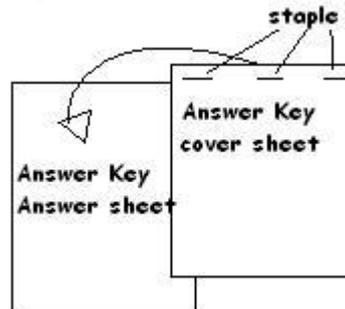
Get a package of colorful pocket folders, one to hold the materials for each center.

For each center, make the following elements. Label each element with a title and graphic to identify it as part of the set. Laminate pages for durability

1. **Front cover**, showing and illustrating the content or subject of the center. (example: “Objects in the Classroom”, with pictures of all kinds of classroom objects.) *Tape this to the front cover of the folder.*
2. **Student instructions:** Directions to learners for using the center, in simple English and/or the language the learner knows how to read (Hebrew, Arabic, or other). *Tape this to the back outside cover of the folder.*
3. **Activities:** One or more activities pertaining to the subject, that practice the target material in an active and engaging way, at the learner’s level.

- a. **Game rules.**
 - b. **Game cards, boards, puzzles,** etc.
 - c. **Activity worksheets** (laminare so the learner can write on them with dry-erase markers).
4. **Self-check Sheet or Answer Key,** per activity, covered with a flap so that the learner has to open it to check the answers.

To assemble Answer Key: Print the answers and the cover sheet. Glue each sheet to a colored back for stiffness. Laminate. Make a stack (answer key on bottom, cover over it, both facing up.) Staple the cover of the answer key across the top so that the learner lifts it from the bottom to check the answers.



The following pages contain samples of each element, demonstrated for the target material “Classroom Objects.” Included are activities for two levels of learners: those who are only learning the vocabulary orally (the tasks do not involve reading or writing, though the words are included for any learners who can “absorb” them), and those who are learning to read and write the English words for each object.

The rest of the document contains examples of the following activities. Adapt for other target material.

- Concentration, or matching cards, both picture-to-picture and word-to-picture.
- Word sort (which objects can go in a pencil box? which cannot?) (both oral & reading versions)
- Matching puzzles (word-to-picture)
- Writing sheet, to write the name of the object next to its picture (and to locate recurring components of the words)
- Crossword puzzle

Another idea for practice of listening comprehension: Equip one center with a tape player with earphones, and a tape of you saying the names of the objects, for the learner to repeat out loud or mark on a worksheet with a number. (e.g. (Instruct in learner’s native language): “Write the number of this object under its picture on your worksheet. (Say in English) Number one: “table.”)

This file contains multiple activities, for two levels of learner. Also provided are one example of a folder front cover sheet, one example of student instructions, and one cover for an “Answer Key”. (You can customize it by adding the name of each activity.)

Each folder can include multiple activities if you can provide instructions for each and if the activities are suitable for the same profile of learner.