

Literacy Stations Basics

and Frequently Asked Questions

What Is a Literacy Station?

A literacy station is a small, defined space (portable or stationary) where students **practice** with a **partner**. Students work together using **familiar** materials and tasks they can do to practice reading, writing, listening, speaking, and/or working with words. The children use previously taught academic vocabulary as they engage in **meaningful work** that has been modeled previously in whole or small group instruction.

The Writing station is a space equipped with resources you've modeled with previously, so students can write without your help there. You'll just need a small table near a bulletin board or wall space where you can place materials related to writing after you've taught with them. Some teachers choose to duplicate the Writing station by having a space where pairs of kids write fiction and another small place where another pair of students practice writing informational text. Kids may discuss what they will write about before writing, they may write together, or they may choose to write alone but share what they're writing with their partner.



EL TIP: Conversation cards have sentence stems to help your multilingual learners respond orally to what they've read. (There are printable conversation cards at resources.corwin.com/simple-stations-writing.)

How Do Literacy Stations Fit Into the Literacy Block?

In a classroom where Reading and Writing Workshop takes place, the literacy block is broken into segments: whole class lessons for modeling, small group instruction, and stations work time. Stations work happens simultaneous to small group instruction during reading time. As the teacher meets with a small group, the rest of the class works in pairs reading and writing at **literacy stations** around the classroom. Literacy stations provide purposeful practice.

Around the classroom, pairs of students work together at a variety of stations, including an Independent Reading station (or two), a Listening and Speaking station (or two), a Writing station, two Partner Reading stations, a Word Study station, and a Poetry station. Two children are using retelling pieces and a familiar book at a Drama station; several students are engaged in asking and answering questions at the Inquiry and Research station; and two scholars are talking about a fine art print at the Let's Talk station. (For more information on each station, please see the related title in the Simply Stations series.)

Some stations, such as the Writing station, may be duplicated. At the Writing station, two students sit at a small table writing about topics they've chosen.

They may spend a few minutes talking with their partner about what they plan to do as a writer today (come up with an idea for a new piece, reread and revise a piece from Writing Workshop, check for punctuation and spelling with a peer). In another Writing station, two other children choose a piece of writing they started in Writing Workshop from their writing folders and continue to work on those. They are seated at a table while others sit on stools by the countertop. At both Writing stations, all materials needed are at students' fingertips. After they write a bit, partners may share what they wrote with each other. They help each other improve their writing by listening and asking questions.

Each station has been carefully introduced, one at a time, over the first month of school. Students know what is expected of them, they have everything they need, and they are working on tasks they *can* do successfully. In every book of the Simply Stations series, you'll find suggestions for how to set up and introduce a station.

During the first few weeks of school while children are learning to work at stations, the teacher circulates freely around the classroom facilitating, listening in on students, and talking with them about what they are learning. Once children demonstrate independence with classroom routines for literacy stations (usually about four to six weeks into the school year), the teacher begins to work with small groups. A management board is used to help children move independently to several stations daily. Everything you need for your management board can be found on pages 18–21 of this book!

What Is the Ideal Number of Students at Each Station?

I recommend having children work in pairs (yes, just two kids!) at each station. This increases student engagement and reduces classroom noise if you space children thoughtfully around the room. You will need more stations, but they will be easier to maintain because you don't have to change things out as often. Use the easy-to-follow directions throughout this series for how to introduce each station to ensure success for you and your students.

How Do I Determine Partnerships?

At the start of the year, think about who gets along well and pair those children together. Once you begin small groups, try pairing students from the same flexible reading group. That way they won't lose their partners when you meet with a group. Also, you'll find that if you plan for things children *can* do, they will push each other further if paired with someone at about the same reading level. If you have an odd number of children, you might have a group of three students work at the Writing station. Because they might be writing alone, there is enough for three kids to do here without distracting each other. Nonetheless, be sure the three get along well together if you partner them!



TIME-SAVING TIP:

If you establish stations well during your first few weeks with your students, you will save time in the long run (even if you are taking over a class partway through the school year). Get to know your students, so you'll be ready to start small groups as soon as possible. Building relationships and routines is a valuable use of time.

How Long Do Students Work at Each Station?

Each literacy station lasts about twenty minutes in Grades 1-4. In kindergarten, children may spend about fifteen minutes per station. Typically, students go to two rotations back-to-back while the teacher meets with two small groups. If you decide to meet with three groups a day, you might have a whole group lesson after two rounds of stations and then meet with a third small group while all students do independent reading or go to a third round of literacy stations.

How Do Literacy Stations Fit Into the Day?

Literacy stations are just one component in a balanced literacy or a workshop approach to teaching reading and writing. Several sample schedules follow from primary and intermediate classrooms to show where stations fit in the day. Be flexible and create a schedule that works for you.

SAMPLE PRIMARY SCHEDULE for LITERACY

- 8:00–8:10** Morning Meeting (community building time)
- 8:10–8:25** Whole Group Lesson for Modeling Using Interactive Read Aloud
- 8:25–8:45** Literacy Stations and Small Group (round one)
- 8:45–9:05** Literacy Stations and Small Group (round two)
- 9:05–9:15** Reflection Time for Stations and Small Group
- 9:15–9:20** Brain Break
- 9:20–9:35** Whole Group Lesson for Modeling Using Shared Reading and Word Study
- 9:35–9:55** Whole Class Independent Reading Time (teacher confers 1:1 or may meet with a third small group)
- 9:55–10:05** Whole Group Lesson for Modeling Writing
- 10:05–10:30** Whole Class Independent Writing Time (teacher confers with students 1:1 or may meet with a small group for writing)
- 10:30–10:40** Sharing/Reflection Time for Writing

SAMPLE INTERMEDIATE SCHEDULE for LITERACY

- 8:00–8:10** Morning Meeting (community building time; students do book talks/share what they're reading)
- 8:10–8:25** Whole Group Lesson for Modeling Using Interactive Read Aloud or Shared Reading Integrating Word Study/Vocabulary
- 8:25–8:45** Whole Class Independent Reading Time (teacher confers 1:1 or may meet with a small group for reading)
- 8:45–9:05** Literacy Stations, Book Clubs, and Small Group (some teachers do another twenty-minute round of stations if schedules allow)
- 9:05–9:15** Whole Group Lesson for Modeling Writing
- 9:15–9:40** Whole Class Independent Writing Time (teacher confers with students 1:1 or may meet with a small group for writing)
- 9:40–9:50** Reflection Time for Reading and Writing

How Long Is It Going to Take Me to Prepare for These Stations?

I've included time-saving tips in each book to help ease preparation. The most important thing to remember is to take what you're teaching and *transfer those materials and tasks* to each literacy station. Don't make a bunch of stuff just for stations!

How Often Should the Teacher Change Things at a Station?

Stations are not changed out weekly but involve **spiral reviews** with young scholars returning to work multiple times over several weeks with the same materials and tasks. It's okay for children to write narratives (or informational text) week after week at the Writing station, but give them options so they might write something different if they'd like. Let them make stuff, such as books, postcards, or directions, at this station, and you'll see them sticking with a piece of writing for several sessions. This is the work of an authentic writer. (I worked on this book many, many days in a row!)

Spiral review means that students keep practicing things multiple times throughout the year. For example, if you've been teaching children about choosing topics they're interested in, students can keep practicing this all year long at the Writing station. You don't have to have kids just do this the week you've taught it. When students become familiar with how to choose a writing idea, it will be easier for them to transfer what they're learning to new compositions as they use a heart map or browse through photos or look at model texts at the Writing station—just like they did in Writing Workshop.

In Section 3 of this book, I'll show you how to teach and then have children practice for transfer at the Writing station using what you've already taught. (No need to constantly create new stations materials!)

Simply change out the genres students choose to write from (e.g., list, letter, card, story, fractured folktale, informational text, poem) and what they might try as writers (author's craft, such as adding details, variety of punctuation, different sentence lengths) over time. Be intentional with your changes. Pay attention to student interests and what they're learning to do as writers. Ask for children's input when possible.

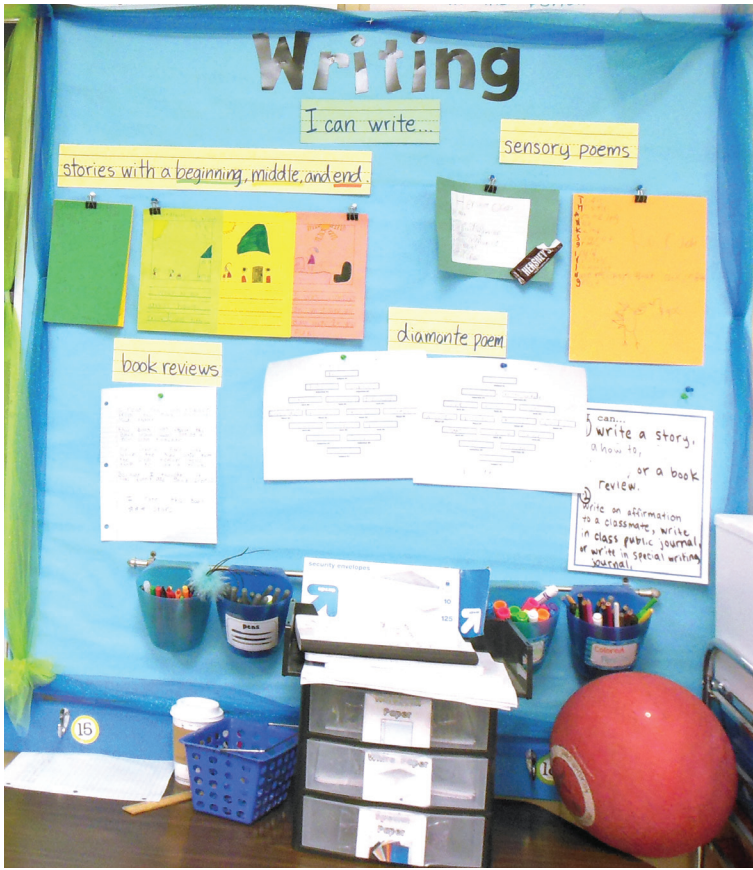
Why Are Literacy Stations Effective?

- This is **meaningful** work for the rest of the class during small group time.
- Children like to **talk** and to work with their **peers**. Enjoyment increases engagement!

- **Partner practice** helps students become **independent of the teacher**. Kids aren't working alone. They practice *with* a partner, doing tasks together.
- **Choice** and **student ownership** promote independence. At the Writing station, students should have a choice of what they write about, the materials they use, and the genre they use. Provide writing samples and supports, but give kids choices! Watch, listen, and be open to the kinds of things your students *like* to write!
- **Transfer of learning** occurs as scholars work with familiar tasks and materials previously modeled by the teacher. Discuss what you'll add to the Writing station as a result of what they've been learning to do as writers. For example, if you are reading books with dialogue in speech bubbles and notice kids want to give this a try, add blank speech bubbles (or a bubble pattern to trace). Or, if a student is ill and classmates want to create get well cards, model how to do this and add cardmaking materials.



Two students work at a Writing station.



Class-made writing samples are displayed in the Writing station as reminders of what students might write.



This class has a Fiction Writing station and another Nonfiction Writing station on the countertop by the windows.