

# Computers in Primary Classrooms

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/technology/tutor/center.htm>

<http://apps.scholastic.com/swclubs/>

## Common Computer Structures

Computer learning pod:

- One to four computers set up in a learning pod.
- Works well for setting up an independent activity center where students complete tasks
- One computer can act as a presentation station where the teacher presents the lesson and the students complete the assignment at their desks.
- Regular daily work on center activities
- Possibilities of use during "down times" such as during journaling or when other work is completed
- Consider the 'distraction' factor of having one student working at the computer while the others are working at their seats.
- Student must work independently and have basic computer skills
- Whole group can access one computer using a LCD AV projector which projects the computer image on an overhead screen.
- A computer on a sturdy mobile cart can be moved around the
- All computers can be plugged into a single power strip equipped with a surge protector.
- Share. Both you and your colleagues have occasions when one computer just won't do. At times like these, arrange to share computers so you can set up a mini-lab in your classroom. If your computers are on mobile carts, transporting them will be easy.

Computer lab:

- Multiple computers, at least one computer per every two students, ideally one-to-one ratio
- Works well for whole class and independent activities
- Weekly or daily visits to the computer room to work on assignments and learning games
- Students can help each other solve problems as they work together or side-by-side.
- Use of earphones a necessity.
- Teacher requires basic skills to solve computer problems (ex. Force quit, Restart, etc.)
- Use of LCD AV projector is helpful when modeling or set up one computer as a shared presentation/teacher work-station in the front of the room.
- Colour-code each set of wires and the associated computer with stickers. That way you can identify cables when you need to trouble-shoot or move equipment.
- Tuck wires out of the way. You may want to consolidate them with one or more "cord snakes," hollow plastic tubes designed for this purpose.

### **Questions to consider:**

- Do you want to use learning centers regularly? If so, you'll find your students adapt quickly to using a computer center.
- Are computers new to your students? If centers are a new concept in your room, take the time to discuss with students your procedures for moving to and from the computer center as well as how they open programs, save their work, and navigate around the program.
- Consider your daily schedule. How many days will it take for every student to visit the computer center? Posting a computer schedule with times for each student will ensure that everybody gets a chance to learn new skills. If you are using a computer laboratory, consider how best to management the group and the activity.
- How will you use your computer time? To support class work (ex. Typing in stories, playing math games, researching information)? Learn new computer skills (ex. Learn to type, learn to word process, learn to use email)? As a fun activity (ex. Playing games, surfing the web)?
- Consider classroom management. What rules will you have for the computer room (ex. wearing earphones, printing work, sharing programs, using internet, gaining attention, movement in the room)?
- Consider computer management issues like saving work and printing documents. How students can store their work varies from school to school. Older computer models use disks while newer set-ups have access to intranet storage folders, sometimes password protected. Some schools use FirstClass as their storage option. Younger students love to print their documents, unfortunately, most printers use black ink and so colour graphics are unavailable. It is important to use paper sparingly so make sure that students have approval prior to printing.

### **Computer Center Activity Ideas**

Great ideas for your computer center activities are boundless. At the start of the school year, create scavenger hunts that help students learn to use an application while exploring the features available. This not only helps you learn which students are comfortable with computers (and will make great computer aides), it also helps build student confidence with the applications you plan to use all year long.

WebQuests are another fun activity that can be used for most any subject. Create a list of questions for students to answer, then bookmark a list of Web sites for them to use in their search. The Scholastic Web site has several great WebQuests to get you started!

Don't underestimate the value of those tried and true applications like word processors and drawing programs, either. Without a lot of software training for students, you can create an unlimited number of activities for virtually any subject. Many favourite activities start with the words: "Draw a picture to illustrate..." or "Write a letter to a friend explaining..."

The activities that you create don't have to be long or involved. In fact, some can be ongoing. One of the activities that students enjoy most is the never-ending story. The beginning of the week starts with a story starter on each of the computers. As students rotate through the center, they each add a paragraph to the story. On Friday, they spend the last period of the day reading the stories aloud.

Other ideas include creating illustrations for science terms that can be posted on a bulletin board, typing and illustrating sentences using spelling or vocabulary words, or drawing representations of fractions, decimals, or percents. The most important thing is that you give the students an opportunity to share what they've accomplished, which ultimately reinforces the concept of the computer center as a place to learn. And who knows, you might just impress your principal enough to get another computer or two!

## Helpful Computer Tips

- Tip 1:** Write directions for computer activities on index cards or poster board and laminate them.
- Tip 2:** Create activities that correlate to your current studies - you may want to check your teacher's guides for suggestions of related computer activities. Once you come up with a great idea, make a note in your subject area guide so that you'll remember to use it when you come to that unit again next year.
- Tip 3:** When it comes to activities for your computer center, start with lessons that can be completed in one session. It helps to give all students a chance to have success with several simple computer assignments before trying their hand at a long-term project.
- Tip 4:** Before assigning an activity try completing the assignment yourself, or even better, find a student to test the activity for you. (Volunteers for this job are never hard to find in my room!) This will let you know if the activity can be completed in the time you've allotted and if your directions are clear. Students have a model to work from.
- Tip 5:** Select a student to be the "Computer Expert" each week. Allow this student to complete the assignment first and then answer any questions that may arise while other students work through the activity. This helps free you from the role of task monitor while allowing your students to become mentors for one another.
- Tip 6:** Agree on a signal that students can use if they need help while working on a task. A favorite is to place a brightly colored plastic cup next to each computer. When students need help, they place their cup on top of their computer as a signal for assistance. Once they've gotten help, the cup is placed beside their computer again.
- Tip 7:** Help students make the best of limited computer time. Organize software, student disks, guides, and/or related resources nearby in a box or on a bookshelf.
- Tip 8:** Use the computer to support your curriculum. There are hundreds of excellent software titles that address specific learning objectives. Look for those that fit your students' needs.
- Tip 9:** Help is just around the corner. Create your own support group. If you and several colleagues agree to use some of the same software, you can share ideas and help each other trouble-shoot. Or, enlist your "techno-kids." Most children love computers and spend hours exploring and problem solving. In the process, they develop valuable expertise. Enlist their help as technical advisors. Let them explore new software, teach you how to use it, tutor classmates, and trouble-shoot. They'll save you time and frustration, and the experience will bolster their self-esteem.
- Tip 10:** Boost your technology learning curve. Take advantage of computer courses offered by your school, district, and local colleges and universities.

More great Computer ideas: <http://www.siec.k12.in.us/~west/slides/integrate/>

Computer suggestions:

For student use:

- Earphones
- Internet access
- Wiggleworks must be enabled on all primary computers
- The ZB Manuscripts and Cursive fonts must be on all elementary computers as well as Comic Sans.

The one computer that is for teacher use (not the same as kids computer) should contain at least the following (including fonts listed above):

- Internet
- StartWrite on each
- Report Cards (File Maker Pro)
- Mac School
- MS Word

Other programs that should be on all computers in the primary grades are:

- Reader Rabbit (all versions)
- Super Sonics Phonics
- Sticky Bear Reading and Math
- Thinking Things
- Library Pro
- Reading/Math Blaster
- Math Workshop
- Sammy's Science House
- Leap Frog
- MS Word
- KidPix