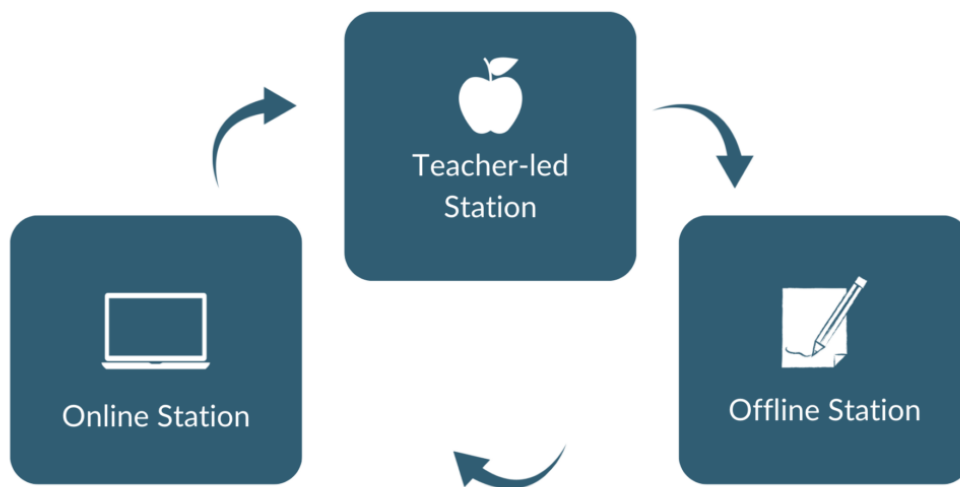


The Station Rotation Model: Must-Do vs. May-Do Stations

catlintucker.com/2024/04/station-rotation-must-do-vs-may-do/

A teacher recently asked me whether students *always* need to attend every station in a rotation. The short answer is “no.” Our classrooms are composed of diverse groups of students with different skills, abilities, preferences, language proficiencies, and academic needs. Given that variability, it makes sense that not all students would need to spend time engaged in the same learning tasks or activities. So, teachers who love the station rotation model may want to experiment with a fun variation of the traditional design of a rotation.

This twist on the station rotation model combines the strategic collection and use of data with student agency to create a more personalized and student-centered approach to this blended learning model. In a traditional station rotation, all students rotate through the same sequence of learning activities or stations.



Must-do vs. May-do: Targeting Needs & Prioritizing Agency

By contrast, the must-do versus may-do variation of a station rotation requires that teachers use data to identify student needs and design a rotation in which specific students are required to attend one or two “must-do” stations. In addition to these “must-do” stations, students can select a certain number of “may-do” stations to spend time at based on their preferences and interests.



For example, a teacher might design a station rotation with six stations. However, students will only have time to attend four of the six stations in the rotation. So, the teacher will use data to assign each student one or two “must-do” learning activities. These are the stations they must attend in the rotation. Once students have attended their “must-do” stations, they can decide which other “may-do” stations are appealing because they align with the student’s interests and preferences or target a concept or skill they want to spend time on.

When Should Teachers Use This Strategy?

As educators, we always look for ways to enhance our students’ learning experiences, making them more engaging and effective. With its blend of mandatory and elective stations, the modified station rotation model offers a powerful tool for personalized learning. But when is it most beneficial to implement this variation?

Differentiated Learning Needs: In a class with diverse skill levels, a teacher uses assessment data to identify critical areas where individual students need extra support. Must-do stations are tailored for skill reinforcement, while may-do stations offer extension activities, review games, and metacognitive skill-building activities.

Interest-Based Learning: In a unit of study, a teacher sets up must-do stations addressing core curriculum requirements and may-do stations that invite students to delve into subtopics related to the subject, allowing students to choose based on their interests and passions.

Preparation for an Assessment: To prepare for upcoming tests or assessments, must-do stations provide practice and support in areas where data shows students struggle. In contrast, may-do stations offer practice in areas where students feel they can benefit from additional practice and review.

Math Skills Reinforcement: For math classes, must-do stations could focus on foundational math skills that need reinforcement, as identified by assessment data, while may-do stations could offer problem-solving activities, collaborative real-world math challenges, or math games that stimulate critical thinking and application.

Language Acquisition: In language classes, must-do stations target specific speaking, grammar, vocabulary, and writing skills that need improvement, while may-do stations provide opportunities for conversational practice, engagement with media to improve comprehension skills, or cultural exploration.

Project-Based Learning (PBL): In a PBL environment, must-do stations could be essential steps in the project process, such as research or prototype development, while may-do stations offer optional skills workshops or resources for deepening project work, like using organizational project management tools or conducting interviews.

Collecting Data to Inform “Must-do” Stations

The effectiveness of this approach to the station rotation model hinges on accurately identifying the “must-do” stations for each student. This process begins with collecting and analyzing data to pinpoint individual learning needs and strengths.



Formative Assessment Data: Regular formative assessments can provide immediate feedback on student understanding and mastery of specific skills. These formative assessments can take the form of quizzes, short written responses, exit tickets, online discussions, and graphic organizers.

Summative Assessment Data: When students complete a summative assessment, that data often reveals that the class is in different places in terms of their concept knowledge and skill set. Instead of moving on to the next unit of study, teachers can pause and design a must-do versus may-do station rotation to address specific areas of need that surfaced from the summative assessment data. This gives the teacher time to address gaps or misconceptions before starting a new unit.

Once teachers have used data to identify specific areas of need, they can assign each student one or two “must-do” stations.

Communicating “Must-do” Stations to Students

Logistically, teachers can use a few strategies to communicate with students about which stations are “must-do” during a rotation.

Digital or Printed Learning Plans: Provide students with digital or printed learning plans that detail their must-do stations for a station rotation lesson. These can include checkboxes or spaces for stamps/stickers to mark completion, helping students track their progress.

Color-Coded Systems: Use color-coded cards or folders to signify different stations. Each student receives cards or folders indicating their must-do stations at the beginning of class.

Personalized Station Maps: Give each student a “map” of the classroom with their must-do stations highlighted or marked. This map can be paired with a personal itinerary or schedule outlining the times or order for visiting each station.

My favorite strategy is to give students a [blank personalized learning plan](#), like the one pictured below, and pass out color-coded cards that signify specific stations. This allows teachers to quickly communicate the “must-do” stations to students and reuse those blank colored cards for future may-do versus must-do station rotations.



Teachers can quickly distribute the cards to individual students during the welcome activity or warm-up. When they receive the colored cards, students can fill in their “must-do” on their individual learning plans. This reduces the time teachers spend preparing for this lesson and encourages students to participate actively in the planning process.

Wrap Up

The “must-do” versus “may-do” approach to station rotation blends structured, data-driven tasks with flexible, interest-based activities, balancing needs-based learning activities with student agency. The “must-do” stations ensure that essential skills and knowledge gaps are addressed, while the “may-do” stations invite students to explore their interests and passions, promoting higher levels of engagement and motivation.

Implementing this model requires thoughtful planning and a deep understanding of each student’s needs and preferences. Whether leveraging high-tech platforms for seamless communication and tracking or utilizing low-tech methods for organizing and managing stations, the focus remains on creating a student-centered learning environment. Ultimately, this approach enhances academic outcomes and empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey.

As educators, our mission is to prepare students for success in an ever-changing world. By adopting the “must-do” versus “may-do” station rotation model, we tailor the educational experience to fit the unique needs of each learner, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and excel.

Get the Blended & Online Learning Toolkit

Subscribe to the newsletter and get the Blended & Online Learning Toolkit for Free.

I won't send you spam. Unsubscribe at any time.