

Academic Choice Note-Taking Guide

	Key points to remember	What might teachers do to set students up for success?
Planning		
Working		
Reflecting		

Academic Choice Video Viewing Guide

Use this viewing guide to make notes about what you see the teacher doing in each phase of the Academic Choice lesson.

Planning Phase

- Teacher clearly states the goal for students.
- Learning goal is part of the regular curriculum.
- Students have open-ended choices about what kind of work to do, how to do the work, or both.
- Materials are easily accessible to students.
- Teacher records student choice (public sign-up sheet, student planning sheet, teacher records on paper as students make choice).

Notes about planning phase:

Working Phase

- Before the transition to the working phase, teacher briefly gives directions or reviews expectations.
- Teacher uses open-ended questions and reinforcing language to foster students' thinking and curiosity and ensure they're meeting learning goals.
- Spaces where students work are comfortable and conducive to concentration.

Notes about working phase:

Reflecting Phase

- Students have an opportunity to reflect on their work.
- Students have an opportunity to share their work.
- Students respond to a broad, open-ended "focus question" when reflecting on their work and/or teacher provides a rubric for students to use as they reflect on their work and their learning.

Notes about reflecting phase:

What Is Academic Choice?

Academic Choice is a strategy for structuring many kinds of lessons and activities. In Academic Choice lessons, students engage in a cycle of planning, working, and reflecting and have choices of what and/or how they learn or practice.

The combination of this learning cycle and the element of choice maximizes students' learning: the strategy increases students' motivation, builds academic skills and knowledge, and strengthens classroom community. Specifically:

- ▶ **Academic Choice supports children's intrinsic motivation to learn.** When children have choices about how and/or what to practice or learn, their intrinsic desire to learn increases because they gain a sense of autonomy and control.
- ▶ **Academic Choice gives students opportunities to appreciate each other's good ideas and learn from each other.** Students can learn both content knowledge and strategies from each other, in addition to discovering shared interests, strengths, and talents.
- ▶ **Academic Choice lessons can address a range of skill levels, strengths, and interests.** Teachers can carefully structure the choices to meet the needs of all students in the class.

Use Academic Choice to Structure a Wide Range of Lessons

- ▶ Practice basic skills such as math facts or literacy skills
- ▶ Practice fluency and decoding
- ▶ Practice genres of writing
- ▶ Research and study a science, history, or social studies topic
- ▶ Look deeper into math concepts, such as geometry or fractions
- ▶ Show an understanding or mastery of any curriculum standard

Some Examples of Academic Choice Lessons

- ▶ **Kindergartners practice creating mental images when listening to a story** by illustrating a scene from a read-aloud using markers, crayons, or colored pencils. They share their scenes with a partner, then take them home to share with family members.
- ▶ **First graders practice addition facts** by using dice, number cards, or spinners to create equations and then solve the equations. Students share how their practice strategy helped them learn their facts.

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- ▶ **Second graders show what they've learned from several weeks of word study** by categorizing a list of words according to spelling patterns. Students can choose from three lists of words, and decide to arrange the words using notecards, using color to indicate shared patterns among words, or creating a chart showing the words arranged by categories. Students meet individually with the teacher to share how they categorized the words.
- ▶ **Third graders research the characteristics of desert regions of the world** using books, maps, encyclopedias, or websites and creating a poster or a brief presentation to share the facts they discover with another third grade class.
- ▶ **Fourth graders relate themes of fiction to personal experience.** They read a passage and then share their personal connection by painting or drawing a scene, making a cut-and-paste picture, or writing a story or poem. The class gathers for an around-the-circle sharing of personal connections. They play "Who Remembers?" to practice their listening skills.
- ▶ **Fifth graders show their understanding of fractional equivalency** by choosing from one of two sets of fractions and showing equivalency with fraction bars or pattern blocks or by drawing or writing. The class holds a meeting to share their work and a few students share about how they solved a problem they encountered with their choice.
- ▶ **A sixth grade class works in small groups to research an impressionist artist and his important works of art.** They present their findings to families and the school community during a schoolwide evening event called The Arts at Adams School.

FIRST GRADE

Math * Addition

Goal: Practice the skill of addition.

What: Choice	How: Choice
Solve a set of addition problems. Offer 2–4 sets of addition problems for students to choose from. Each set should represent an ability level that matches the various ability levels of the students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unifix cubes• Number line• Hundreds chart

Plan: Ask for or suggest reasons why a first grader might pick each of the three “How” choices. For example, some students might choose the number line to see the sequence of all the numbers involved in an addition problem; other students might want to work with Unifix cubes because they can build the answer using one-to-one correspondence. Students think about their own learning needs, then sign up for a choice and pick the set of problems they want to solve.

Work: Students use their choice of tools to solve math problems as you visit with students to observe, coach, and ask questions.

Reflect: Ask the whole group: “How did your tool help you solve the math problems? Is anyone interested in trying another tool next time? Why?”

SECOND GRADE

Language Arts * Opinion Piece

Goal: Practice writing an opinion piece.

What: Choice	How: No choice
Yes or no: Should we have more recess breaks during the school day?	Write an opinion piece with an introduction of the topic, reasons to support the opinion, linking words, and a conclusion.

Plan: To help students decide which opinion to support, ask, “What are some reasons for having more recess? What are some reasons why we shouldn’t?” Students briefly consider their own thoughts about the appropriate amount of recess and then indicate which opinion they will write about.

Work: Students write independently as you circulate, providing feedback and asking questions.

To prepare for reflection, form partnerships among students.

Reflect: Students share their opinion and supporting details with a partner.

In whole-class discussion, students name convincing opinions they heard. Ask questions such as “What made them convincing?” “Did anyone change their opinion after hearing from someone else?”

THIRD GRADE

Science * Insects

Goal: Learn about insects.

What: Choice

Variety of materials for research, including print materials at various reading levels, online resources, videos, etc.

How: Choice

Students can work with a partner or individually to share what they've learned by:

- Writing an essay
- Making labeled drawings
- Writing a song
- Creating a graphic organizer

Plan: Suggest why students might select each of the four methods for sharing what they've learned. For example, students might choose to write a song if they learn best through music and movement. Drawing might be a good option for students who are visual learners. Students then sign up for the method they will use to share their knowledge and for resources if some are limited (such as technology). Assign partners for students who want to work with someone.

Work: Students gather facts and create a product to show what they've learned. You circulate, providing assistance, encouragement, and feedback and asking questions about the work.

Reflect: Students share what they have learned about insects with the class by responding to focus questions: "What is something new you discovered about insects?" "Did you discover something that surprised you?"

Social Studies * Early Settlements

Goal: Compare and contrast early settlements.

What: Choice

All students will compare and contrast the same two settlements (for example: Jamestown and Plymouth).

They can choose among a large variety of materials for gathering information, such as print materials at various reading levels, online resources, maps, videos, etc.

How: Choice

You will assign partners, but partnerships can choose to record information in one of three ways:

- Venn diagram
- Written outline
- Timelines

Plan: Give suggestions to help partnerships make their choices. For example, partners who enjoy discovering how two events are interrelated might want to create timelines. Others might choose to create a written outline because this provides some scope for individual work. Partners could divide up the research and writing, and then come together later to combine ideas into one document.

Partnerships sign up. Before releasing students to begin work, ask questions to help them plan: “What information will you need to gather first?” “Where will you find this information?” “How will you take notes?”

Work: Partnerships gather materials and find a spot to begin work. You circulate to observe, coach, provide feedback, and ask questions to stretch and extend learning.

Reflect: Have each pair join with another—ideally one that made a different “How” choice—and then the pairs in each foursome take turns sharing a summary of their work.

In a whole-group discussion, share key findings about similarities and differences. Also ask: “Which settlement seemed most successful? Why?” “Which seemed to struggle? Why?”

ALL GRADES

Guidance or Counseling

Goal: Learn and practice strategies for calming down.

What: Choice	How: No choice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take deep breaths• Count• Clench and unclench hands• Close eyes and think of a special place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit in a chair and practice your choice

Plan: Briefly model each choice. Prompt students to think about how they might decide which method to use. For example, a student might choose counting because that seems like something that might help them and they've never tried it before; another might want to do deep breathing because that's a familiar strategy that they use at home.

Work: Once students have chosen a method to try, give them a scenario in which a student is likely to become upset or angry. Students then practice their chosen self-calming method.

Reflect: Have students share how their choice helped them calm down. "How did your method help calm you?" "How could it help you in other situations where you might become angry or upset?" "Is there another strategy you want to try next time?"

ALL GRADES

Physical Education

Goal: Practice basketball skills.

What: Choice	How: No choice
Which basketball skill to work on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dribbling• Passing (work with a partner)• Shooting	Practice skill in designated area.

Plan: Give examples of why students might choose one skill over another to practice. For example, a student might choose shooting because it's an area they want to improve in; another might want to practice passing because they want to work with a partner.

Students sign up; you assign partners for those who want to practice passing. Students get a ball and move to the designated space for practicing their choice.

Work: As students are working, circulate to support, demonstrate, encourage, and coach.

Reflect: Have students share how their choice helped them to practice. What improvements did they make? What did they learn as they were practicing?