The classroom schedule is much more than just a list of activities and their times. The schedule is an important part of the curriculum and provides structure for classroom activities as well as daily routines. Developing the classroom schedule can be a challenge for educators and requires careful adjustment, good time management skills, and creative thinking.

The Importance of a Good Schedule
A good schedule meets the developmental and individual needs of the children in the classroom. The schedule includes planned learning activities as well as routines such as greeting/departing; snack and lunch time; hand washing and toileting; tooth brushing; and nap or rest time. The daily schedule should also include a balance of quiet and active times as well as large and small group activities. Transitions, such as story time or quiet table activities, are also an important part of the schedule because they help ease the children from one activity to the next.

The classroom schedule provides a written plan for when various curriculum activities and routines will occur, thereby providing a helpful reference for parents and educators. Young children need a predictable routine, so it is important to have a schedule that will help them develop a sense of security and trust. It is especially helpful to young children to have the schedule posted in picture form and at their eye level. A pictorial schedule allows the young child to practice developing concepts of time and sequence. Although the schedule provides needed consistency for children, educators should be flexible when “teachable” moments arise or when the children are actively involved in projects so that the clock doesn’t disrupt the children’s “work.”

Schedules can provide important documentation for program quality assessment because the schedule demonstrates the priorities and emphases of the classroom teacher. For example, the schedule documents the amount of time that will be spent in group or individual activities, routines, free-choice centers, teacher and child-initiated activities, language and literacy activities, or outdoor activities. Ideally, the schedule will offer activities that interest the children and that allow a balance of child-directed and teacher-directed activities that include ample opportunity for active,
hands-on learning both inside and outside. A carefully selected flow of active and quiet activities will ensure more effective lessons and help children remain interested, focused, and on-task.

Scheduling Tips for Preschool and Kindergarten
Daily routines for preschool and kindergarten age children call for a more predictable yet flexible schedule. With their growing independence and mastery of new skills, children can make choices and follow their own interests while feeling comfortable within the secure framework of a schedule.

- **Arrival and Greeting Time** This is a time to welcome children individually, to talk with parents, to do health checks, and to organize children’s personal belongings. Depending on program structure, this time may include routines like breakfast and handwashing. Plan a variety of informal activities for children to engage in while waiting for others to arrive.

- **Group Time** The preschool or kindergarten group may involve the whole class. This is a time for group “hellos” and transitioning into the day’s activities. Group activities may include a song or fingerplay, a story, an opportunity for caregivers and children to share with the group, and an introduction to themes or the day’s activities. Although the content may vary, keeping some things consistent will help children move into the day’s schedule. For example, a daily hello song will cue children to settle in.

- **Curriculum Activities** After group time, various activities in the curriculum centers are usually scheduled, allowing children to rotate throughout different centers. Some activities may involve small groups while others include individual activities. It is good to have a variety of more and less structured activities.

- **After-Curriculum Group Time** For preschool and kindergarten children, a short time to get back together as a group after curriculum activities provides an opportunity to review morning activities. It is also a good time for sharing a story or music and movement activities.

- **Washing Up and Snack Time** This should be a relaxed, pleasant time. Try to keep the wait time to a minimum by engaging children in an activity while waiting for others to wash and join the group for snack. Snack preparations may involve a thematic or curriculum connection.

- **Toileting Schedule** Set aside time after eating, napping, and before and after outdoor play for toileting and washing up. Allow this option as needed.

- **Active and Outdoor Play** If staff is available, it is preferable to let children leave the snack or activity as they finish, toilet, wash up, and
then go outside. Outdoor centers may be set up for a variety of activity choices. There should always be adequate time for free active play.

- **Washing Up and Lunch Time** Make lunch a pleasant experience. As with snack time, meal preparations may also involve curriculum connections, and the wait time for washing up should be kept to a minimum. Family style dining provides opportunities to promote self-help skills and to model table manners and informal conversations. It also allows for spontaneous teaching and learning opportunities.

- **Nap and Rest Time** Setting aside a time in which lights are dim and the activity level is calm allows children to rest and recharge. The length of time will vary with the age of the children. Older children may benefit from a quiet group story before settling in. Planning quiet individual activities in an area removed from where others are resting will entertain children who do not sleep and offer a place for children to go as they awaken.

- **Afternoon Snack** Depending on the length of the program’s day, afternoon snack may follow rest time or come in the middle of the afternoon.

- **Quiet Activities** After rest time is a good time to give children an individual choice of quiet activities such as book experiences, puzzle play, drawing, table top constructions, etc.

- **Afternoon Outdoor Play** Child care centers that operate for the full day need to give children an opportunity to play freely outside in the afternoon as well as in the morning.

- **Afternoon Group Time** Help children transition from afternoon outdoor play by coming together in large or small groups for music activities and story sharing.

- **Informal Afternoon Activities** Centers with a full day schedule may have another time in their daily schedule for quiet activity choices after children return from outside play.

- **Departure and Good-bye Time** Providing quiet, easy to pick-up books and manipulatives – along with keeping activities confined to a few areas of the room – will facilitate going home times. This will make it easier for staff to care for children, to talk with parents, and to gather things to go home.
References