

# Thinking More about Program Structure



## ECERS-3

**Purpose:** This document addresses many of the requirements for items found in the Program Structure subscale. The focus is primarily on indicators at the 3, 5, and 7 levels. It is important to review each item entirely to ensure that no indicators at the 1 or “inadequate” level apply to the classroom. Answering the questions and referring to the ECERS-3 will build familiarity with requirements, while reflecting on current practices and situations.

**Preparation:** Refer to the ECERS-3 (spiral binding on the top, published in 2015) when completing questions. To better understand the scale format and structure, review the Scoring System on page 9. It will also be helpful to refer to a copy of the most current NC Additional Notes (available at [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org)). There are many questions, so completing them all will likely take several reflection/review sessions.

This subscale considers how the classroom structure enhances children’s opportunities to explore, learn, and develop independence. There is a focus on how transitions are used to create a smooth sequence of daily events, significant opportunities for complex and interesting free play, and children’s active involvement in small and large group activities. These aspects provide a strong foundation for fun and enriching experiences, and an environment where children’s learning is optimized.

### Tips:

- If you are confused about a question, look at the item in the ECERS-3 and check any Notes for Clarification and/or NC Additional Notes to identify the specific indicator and requirement to which it refers.
- Describe current practices when answering questions. Remember, this is not about a “right answer,” but rather a way to build understanding about what occurs every day.
- Using the worksheet on an ongoing basis can help verify that the classroom structure is supportive and developmentally appropriate. This process also emphasizes how specific aspects of program structure create a framework for positive and enriching experiences for children.
- Answering the questions with someone else (co-teachers, administrators, technical assistance specialists, health consultants, etc.) promotes sharing of perspectives and may draw attention to different details.

Date(s) completed: \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom name/age group: \_\_\_\_\_

Worksheet completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Item 33 Transitions and waiting times (p. 78-79)**

Consider transitions (check all that apply):

- Supervision is provided to ensure children stay engaged and to prevent conflicts
- Supervision is positive and supportive
- Transitions are gradual or individualized
- The next activity/routine is usually ready

Describe actions to ensure the teacher is ready for the next activity/routine to ensure minimal wait times, positive behaviors, and smooth transitions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Does this prevent transitions where children must wait for more than 3 minutes at a time without activities? **Y / N** If wait times are longer than 3 minutes, list activities to keep them engaged:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are different strategies needed for certain transitions or different times of the day? **Y / N** If yes, list some: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Transitions are planned for smaller groups or individuals so the whole group is rarely transitioning all together. **Y / N**

List whole group transitions:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

List small group or individualized transitions:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Item 34 Free play (p. 80-81)**

**Hint:** Only times when children can choose both the materials they use and peers to interact with are considered free play.

List all times throughout the day when free play occurs, indoors and outdoors:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How long does free play last during the observation period? **Hints:** The observation period is defined on p. 7 of the ECERS-3. More information about this requirement can be found in the “Accessibility and time requirements” section of the Thinking More about Learning Activities worksheet; “weather permitting” is defined on p. 12 of the ECERS-3:

Indoors? \_\_\_\_\_

Outdoors (weather permitting)? \_\_\_\_\_

During free play times both indoors and outdoors, is there supervision to (check all that apply):

- Protect children’s health and safety?
- Facilitate children’s play by helping with use of materials, offering additional materials to support their play, etc.?
- Provide educational interactions related to children’s play such as problem solving, conversations about their interests, adding information and new ideas?
- Maintain awareness of the whole group, even during times a teacher is working with an individual child or small group?

During free play, are there many types of materials and equipment for children to use? **Y / N**

Is this true for both indoor and outdoor materials and equipment? **Y / N**

Are all play areas, interest centers, and areas of the playground always open during play times? **Y / N** If **no**, for what reason are they closed and for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

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Is there a system to support children’s activities as needed to make sure all interested children get a turn?

**Y / N** If **yes**, describe: \_\_\_\_\_

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Do any of the rotated materials for free play (newly purchased or homemade) relate to current classroom themes or children’s interests? **Y / N** If **yes**, give two examples: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Item 35 Whole-group activities for play and learning (p. 82-83)

**Hint:** See the definition of whole-group activities in the Notes for Clarification on p. 82.

List the times and lengths of typical whole-group activities: \_\_\_\_\_

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What types of activities are used during whole-group times? \_\_\_\_\_

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Are whole-group activities set up to promote children’s interest and engagement? Consider the following:

- The space used prevents children from feeling crowded
- All children can see and participate in the activity
- There is little passive listening and much active involvement

If children are not interested, how is this handled? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are group activities planned to encourage active engagement and support participation? **Y / N** If **yes**, list some strategies for the group or for individual children in the group (fidget toy as needed, sitting with an adult, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do group activities introduce children to themes, concepts, or plans that interest them? **Y / N**

Are most group activities offered to smaller groups, rather than the whole class? **Y / N**

Children who wish to leave are allowed to go work in another area of the classroom. **Y / N**

**Reflection for future planning:** After completing this worksheet, it can be helpful to go back and think more about the answers. Were there any questions that were answered “no” instead of “yes”? Were there any questions where you struggled to provide written examples when asked, or where the specific interactions considered do not occur daily, throughout the day? If so, this could help identify areas to work on. It can also be helpful to break bigger topics into smaller steps so that changes and progress can be easily recognized. Hopefully, this worksheet was a helpful tool in an ongoing self-study practice and will be useful in continuing with an action plan after completing the reflection questions below.

List areas where strengths were noted in program structure:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

List areas where improvements could be made or there are new ideas to think about:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Are there any issues you will work to change right away? Describe how so:

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Are there issue that will take more time to change? What were these and what resources/support may be needed?

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### Want to find out more?

Not all ECERS-3 indicators are covered in this worksheet, so review the ECERS-3 carefully and seek out other resources, as needed, since relying on these questions alone to prepare for an assessment will not be sufficient. We encourage you to review other resources on the [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org) website to stay informed about any updates and to continue to build your understanding of the ECERS-3 and the assessment process.

Register for free online training webinars. Some are live webinars; others are pre-recorded and offer training credits (contact hours). Call 1-866-362-7527 or register online at [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org).

Look for general information about the assessment process and specific ECERS-3 resources. These resources may offer ideas about what to focus on or to supplement ideas you were already considering. Check out the answers to the Frequently Asked Questions or send a new question to [ncrlap@uncg.edu](mailto:ncrlap@uncg.edu)

When planning for program enhancement, always consider the unique features of the classroom and facility such as ages and abilities of the children enrolled, the number of teachers in the classroom, and overall goals and/or philosophy. Programs may also seek advice from their DCDEE Child Care Consultant, local CCR&R and/or Smart Start Partnership TA specialists, a Child Care Health Consultant, or other child care agencies.

### References:

Harms, T., Clifford, R., & Cryer, D. (2015). Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale. (Third Edition). New York, NY. Teachers College Press.

NC Additional Notes (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ncrlap.org>.

