

ITERS-3: Tips and Materials

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

In the ITERS-3[®], the physical environment, children's relationships with one another and significant adults in the environment, and instructional interactions are interrelated. All are important for high-quality experiences for children.

No list of materials alone can guarantee high-quality experiences for children. The materials in the environment provide opportunities for teachers to interact with children during play and routines. Materials and classroom arrangements should be considered foundational support for teachers in their interactions with children.

This resource should be used along with the ITERS-3, ERSI Additional Notes, and All About the ITERS-3[™]. The lists below are not exhaustive. The notes for clarification in each item identify categories of materials, examples of materials from each category, and the number of materials required. Always refer to the ITERS-3 and All About the ITERS-3 for complete information.

TOP TIPS

1. **Developmentally Appropriate Materials**

Include materials of different difficulty levels and take into consideration the ages of the children present. There must be appropriate materials for each of the ages observed. Remember that the ITERS-3 defines children as younger and older infants, younger and older toddlers, and younger and older twos. As children progress in age and abilities throughout the year, it may be necessary to make changes in materials and equipment to meet their needs.

2. **Keep Materials Available**

Classrooms are dynamic settings, with the use of materials changing frequently. It is generally best to equip classrooms with more than the minimum amount or number of materials required. When materials are removed from the environment for variety or cleaning/sanitizing, make it a habit to add another material of the same type back into rotation.

3. **Free Play Interaction**

Interact with children as they use the materials from each play area/interest center. If the materials are present but not used, or teachers do not interact with children while they are using materials, it will have a negative impact on the score.

4. Free Play

Free play is fundamental. For an ITERS-3 observation, make sure that children do not have lapses in access to materials when they are awake and ready to play (when children are not eating, sleeping, or involved with diapering/toileting).

5. Gross Motor

It is important that all children (all ages) have time to exercise. If the weather permits, be sure to go outside with the children and motivate them to do activities that speed up their heart rate or encourage them to move in new/different ways. A walk or a ride in a stroller does not count as a gross motor activity. If the weather does not allow outdoor play, be sure to do some exercise or activity inside to motivate children to move.

ITERS-3 MATERIALS LIST

Books

Item 14. Encouraging children's use of books

- 3.1 More than 5 books accessible
- 3.2 Books include some fiction and some factual information
- 5.1 More than 10 books accessible
- 7.1 More than 20 books accessible*
- 7.3 Signs that accessible books are rotated

**More books may be needed to avoid problems in larger groups of children*

Fine Motor Materials

Item 15. Fine motor

- 3.1 At least 5 different choices accessible
- 5.1 At least 10 different choices accessible
- 7.1 More than 10 different choices accessible

Examples of appropriate fine motor materials:

For infants	For toddlers and older children	
grasping toys	shape sorting games	Nesting toys
busy boxes	large stringing beads	medium or large interlocking blocks
nested cups	big pegs with peg boards	
containers to fill and dump	simple puzzles	
textured toys	pop beads	
cradle gyms	stacking rings	

Art Materials

Item 16. Art

- 3.1 At least 1 drawing material accessible to children at least 24 months of age
- 5.1 At least 1 drawing material accessible to children at least 24 months of age throughout the Observation

Examples of appropriate art materials:

- crayons
- watercolor markers
- brush and finger paints
- playdough
- collage materials of different textures

Music and Movement Materials

Item 17. Music and movement

3.1 At least 3 age-appropriate music materials accessible

5.1 At least 10 music materials accessible

7.1 Age-appropriate music instruments are accessible throughout the observation to children two years and older

Examples of materials:

Music materials		Music instruments	
any toy that makes noise	rattles	drums	castanets
blocks with bells in them	busy boxes	xylophones	cymbals
push toys that pop		triangles	wrist bells
		maracas	

Blocks and Accessories

Item 18. Blocks

3.1 Some blocks accessible

3.2 At least 5 accessories for blocks accessible for children 24 months and older

5.1 Enough blocks are accessible for each age group

7.2 Large hollow blocks are accessible for older toddlers/twos

Types of blocks		Types of accessories (not required for children under 2)
soft blocks	small blocks with most sides less than 2 inches, such as table blocks or alphabet blocks	small people
large cardboard blocks		vehicles
unit blocks		animals
lightweight blocks of various sizes, shapes, colors		other accessories to enhance block play, such as road signs, fences, trees, small buildings, etc.

Dramatic Play Materials

Item 19. Dramatic Play

- 3.1 At least 4 age-appropriate toys accessible, including dolls and soft animals
- 3.2 Materials represent what children experience in everyday life
- 5.1 Many and varied appropriate materials accessible throughout the observation
 - Some appropriate dress-ups accessible for toddlers and twos
- 7.1 At least 4 dramatic play examples accessible that clearly represent diversity
- 7.2 Materials provided for toddlers and twos to use outdoors or in another large area

Examples of materials:

For infants		For toddlers and twos	
soft dolls	soft animals	simple dress-up clothes	toy telephones
pots and pans	toy telephones	child-sized house furniture	small people figures
small people figures	toy foods	dolls	toy animal figures
toy animal figures	toy vehicles	doll furnishings	toy vehicles
hats	purses	soft animals	small play buildings with accessories
		cooking/eating equipment (e.g., pots and pans, dishes, cups, play food)	

Nature/Science Materials

Item 20. Nature/science

- 3.1 Some appropriate pictures, books, or toys that represent nature realistically are accessible
- 5.2 Some easily experienced living plants or animals observed indoors
- 5.4 Some sand and/or water play accessible for children 24 months and older, indoors or outdoors, during the observation

Examples of materials:

Natural Objects		Toys for infants	
*natural objects are not manmade or plastic	pinecones (check for safety)	realistic plastic or rubber wild animals, farm animals, insects, dinosaurs	infant activity mat with realistic nature pictures displayed
sturdy, unbroken seashells	gourds and pumpkins of various colors, sizes, shapes	realistic plastic vegetables and fruits	realistic animal-shaped rattles
different types of natural wood, tree bark, wood slices (no splinters)	sand or water play	activity gym with realistic hanging birds or butterflies that infants can play with	busy boxes with realistic animals, foods, etc.
	dried flowers	nature/science puzzles with pictures showing realistic-looking animals, bugs, plants, or trees	picture cards of animals for children to look at, match, or sort (for older children)

Math/Number Materials

Item 21. Math/number

3.1 Some appropriate math/number play materials that show size, shape, or number are accessible

5.1 Many appropriate math/number materials are accessible throughout the observation

Examples of materials:

For infants	For toddlers	For twos
number picture books	number picture books	number picture books
grasping toys or rattles of different shapes	busy boxes with numbers or shapes	big pegs with number boards
busy boxes with numbers or shapes	nesting cups	nesting cups
nesting cups	easy shape puzzles	easy shape puzzles and shape sorters
stacking rings	easy shape sorters	cash registers with numbers on keys
	cash registers and toy telephones with numbers on keys	toy telephones
	number blocks	number blocks
	materials that show both a number and the corresponding number of objects	materials that show both a numeral and the corresponding number of objects
	stacking rings	stacking rings
	activity boxes with different shapes to push	activity boxes with different shapes to insert
		set of blocks with various shapes and sizes
		simple number puzzles
		large safe tape measures

Diversity Materials

Item 23. Promoting acceptance of diversity

3.1 At least 3 examples of racial/cultural diversity in materials are easily observable to the children

3.3 Dolls representing at least 3 races accessible

5.1 At least 10 positive examples of diversity are easily visible, with at least one example in each of the following: books, displayed pictures, and accessible play materials

5.2 Classroom materials include at least 4 of the 5 types of diversity: race, culture, age, ability, and nontraditional gender roles

Examples of diversity in materials:

- images in books
- easily visible pictures in the display
- music played from a variety of cultures
- foods or dress-ups representing varied cultures

Gross Motor

Item 24. Gross Motor

- 3.3 Some appropriate materials and equipment, in good repair, used during the observation, and none is extremely dangerous
- 5.3 There are enough appropriate gross motor materials and equipment accessible (stationary or portable) to allow children to be active and involved
- 7.4 Materials/equipment (portable and stationary) accessible during the observation stimulate a variety of developmentally appropriate large-muscle skills

Examples of appropriate materials and equipment:

For infants	For toddlers and twos	
outdoor pad or blanket	riding toys without pedals	slide
crib gym for younger infants	small riding toys with pedals	cushions or rugs for tumbling
push toys	large push-pull wheeled toys	tunnels
grasping toys to reach for or shake	balls and beanbags	large cardboard boxes
balls	age-appropriate climbing equipment	low balance beam and small tricycles for twos
ramps for crawling		

WHERE DO I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

The Environment Rating Scales Institute website provides extensive information at

www.ersi.info/scales

- See explanation of terms and updates from ERSI: <https://www.ersi.info/additionalnotes>
- See supplementary materials: <https://www.ersi.info/resources-3rdeditions>
- The All About the ITERS-3 book provides detailed explanations, photos, and resources.

References:

Harms, T., Cryer, D., Clifford, R., & Yazejian, N. (2017). *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Third Edition*, New York: Teachers College Press.

Cryer, D., Riley, C., Link, T., McCullough, V. (2022). *All About the ITERS-3*, Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.

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