

ECERS-3 FAQ

DISCLAIMER: It is difficult to answer written questions without knowing the complete details of a scenario. Therefore, this document is an attempt to provide you with general information. Feel free to contact the Simpson RTC with any questions.

Question	Answer	Reference
Should we discontinue using All About the ECERS-R?	Yes. Although this book has a lot of good information, it could become confusing to use it with ECERS-3.	NA
Are you allowed to ring a bell for clean-up?	Yes. It is a great way to signal the transition.	NA
Can we limit the number of children in each center?	Yes.	ECERS-3, p. 80
What if your room is not spacious enough?	It is recommended that the staff set up the classroom as best they can. Be intentional. This may impact a few item scores. It falls in the category of “beyond your control.”	NA
Does time stop for free play when you tell children in 5 minutes I am putting the clean-up record on?	No. Time stops when the first children are required to begin cleaning up.	
Will ECERS-3 observations be prescheduled?	Yes.	NA
Are materials on the top shelf counted as being accessible?	It depends. You must ensure that the children can access the materials independently.	ECERS-3, p. 10 (see definition of accessibility)
Why do we have to do ECERS-3 and CLASS when they contradict each other?	ECERS-3 and CLASS are observation tools that look at different aspects of a high-quality early childhood environment. Both tools share a focus on teacher-child interactions. WE are unaware of any contradicting criteria between the tools.	NA
Is there a certain amount of time you should spend in each center with the children?	No. Sufficient time should be spent in the centers to engage in quality interactions with the children.	NA
While cleaning toys with bleach water, can we use the same cloth for each toy?	This is not addressed in ECERS-3. Please ask your program director.	NA
Who is considered “staff” by ECERS-3?	“Staff generally refers to the adults who are directly involved with the children...those adults who are in the classroom and who work with the children daily (or almost daily), for a large part of the day.”	ECERS-3, pp. 11-12
If you have to combine	You can put writing materials in any center, but the best choices	NA

your writing create with another area, which area do you recommend?	for a combo would be art or language.				
What materials can be counted as “other?”	The materials checklist provides many materials that would count in the given category. However, it is not exhaustive. Any material that meets the criteria but is not included on the list would be counted under “other.”	NA			
Item 2: Furnishings for Care, Play, and Learning					
Is there a specific amount of special equipment required for children with disabilities?	Children with disabilities should be provided adaptive equipment to meet their needs no specific amount.	ECERS-3, p. 16, 2.3.3			
What counts as specially designed furniture for a specific activity for reading center?	There is nothing. A small couch would be a generic piece of furniture. The bookshelf is not used for an activity.	ECERS-3, p.17, 2.5.3 & 2.7.2			
Does each center need a rug?	No. However, to receive credit for 2.5.4 there must be furnishings that provide a substantial amount of softness. A rug is required for block play (3.72).	ECERS-3, p. 19			
Would the following scenario receive credit as individual cubbies? A box above and below the open space that has coat hooks. The top and bottom box belong to two different children, but they share the middle, open space.	Yes for 2.31, but no for 2.5.1. The 3 level requires that each child has some individual space to store personal possessions. The top and bottom boxes would meet this criteria. However, the 5 level requires that each child has ample space to store personal possessions. Additionally, the personal possessions should not touch any other child’s. For this reason, credit could not be given for 2.5.1, because the two children sharing the middle, open space would have their personal possessions touching.	ECERS-3, p.17 <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Child 1</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Shared Space</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Child 2</td> </tr> </table>	Child 1	Shared Space	Child 2
Child 1					
Shared Space					
Child 2					
What is considered softness in a quiet space?	Softness is addressed in Items 2 and 3. Examples of softness include several pillows on a rug, cushioned couch, bean bag, etc.	ECERS-3, pp. 16-19			
ITEM 3: Room Arrangement for Play and Learning					
Can a buffer and noisy area be together with only a shelf separating?	Yes. Buffer centers can be used to help separate the noisy centers from the quiet centers. However, there should not be active, noisy play observed interfering with activities within the buffer center.	ECERS-3, p. 18, 3.7.1			
Is the reading center considered a cozy area?	It depends. For the reading center to be considered a cozy area, the children must be able to “completely” escape the normal hardness of the classroom.	ECERS-3, p. 18, (note for clarification 5.2)			
Can a cozy area and a private area/all by	Yes, as long as the space is limited to 1-2 children and is protected from active play and interruptions. Remember, a cozy area must	ECERS-3, p. 18, 3.5.2 and p. 20,			

myself center/space for privacy be the same?	allow children to completely escape the hardness of the room.	first paragraph
Can you count an individual chair as a cozy area?	No. A cozy area must provide a “substantial amount of softness.”	ECERS-3, p. 18, 3.5.2
Can the cozy area consist of a large soft pillow and some books and stuffed animals?	No, usually not. These things alone would not allow children to “completely escape” the hardness of the classroom. It would depend on the size of the furnishings.	ECERS-3, p. 18, 3.5.2
What is the difference between a play area and an interest center?	“A play area is a space where play materials are provided for children to use. An interest center is a clearly defined play area for a particular kind of play. Materials (in interest centers)	ECERS-3, p. 11
Does fine motor and art count as one center?	No, an interest center is for a particular kind of play/work.	NA
Is a child’s tent counted as furniture for cozy area and a space for privacy?	It depends. If the tent meets the criteria for a cozy area (complete escape from hardness) then YES. If not, then NO.	ECERS-3, p. 16, 3.5.2
If you have a student in a wheelchair, do the pathways to centers have to be wide enough for the student to access the center?	Yes. Item 3.5.4 requires that all the play areas be accessible to enrolled children with disabilities.	ECERS-3, p. 19
If you use headphones with computers, is it considered a quiet area?	No.	ECERS-3, p. 18, 37.1
Can the science center be an organized shelf in the corner of the room on a carpet without a table?	It depends. A carpet in the center can be the designated space for children to use the science materials if it is protected from walkways.	ECERS-3, p. 11
Can we use wooden base couch in cozy center if we use soft pillows and throws?	It depends. “The cozy area must provide enough soft furnishings to allow a child to <i>completely</i> escape the normal hardness of the typical early childhood classroom.” Ask yourself, “Will the child feel the wooden frame?” If yes, then no. If no, then likely yes.	ECERS-3, p. 18, 3.5.2
Item 5: Child-Related Display		
If you have two science shelves and an art shelf with tables and chairs in the middle, would that be considered an interest area?	No, an interest area must be clearly defined for a particular kind of play.	ECERS-3, p. 11, #5

Does 5.5.3 mean at least 1/3 of display should be children's art work or 1/3 and no more art work and 2/3 other things?	At least 1/3 of the display should be children's individualized artwork to receive credit.	ECERS-3, p. 22, 5.5.3
Do display pictures need to be low?	They should be at child's eye level or large enough to be easily seen by a child.	ECERS-3, p. 22, first paragraph
Do hallway displays count?	No.	ECERS-3, p. 22, first paragraph
Exactly what needs to be on the walls?	Posters displayed on walls, shelves, or other vertical surfaces are usually considered part of the display.	ECERS-3, p. 22, first paragraph
If we write what each child draws on the paper, will this count for the theme?	It is appropriate practice to write captions for children's art. This practice would also make it easier for observers to know if specific art is related to the current theme or interest.	ECERS-3, pp. 22-23, 5.5.2 & 5.37.1
Item 7: Gross Motor Equipment		
Can bean bags be given credit for "catching?"	It depends on how they are being used. If children are using them in a way that they are catching, then YES. If not, then NO.	Item #7: Gross Motor Equipment handout
Are there any restrictions to using a barrier such as shower caps or coffee filters between child's head and a helmet?	Nothing in ECERS-3 would prohibit these items, but the RTC's opinion is that a coffee filter would not sufficiently protect heads from lice. Also, it would require lots of disposable shower caps that could be a possible suffocation hazard for children.	ECERS-3, p. 27, 7.7.2; also see Riding Toys and Helmets handout from Caring for Our Children
What are the best ways to protect students from lice when sharing helmets and clothing?	Refer to the Riding Toys and Helmets from Caring for Our Children that advises wiping with a damp cloth. Clothing should be laundered frequently.	ECERS-3, p.27, 7.7.2.; p. 55, 21.5.1; also see Riding Toys and Helmets handouts from Caring for Our Children
Are dancing and scarves considered gross motor play?	Dancing and scarves can be used as part of gross motor play. Remember 7.3.3 requires that the equipment used stimulate at least 7 different skills.	ECERS-3, pp. 226-27 Item #7: Gross Motor Equipment handout
Are mini trampolines appropriate?	No. Trampolines are identified as inappropriate on the Playground Information to Use with the Environment Rating Scales. It is important to remember, however, that a child's IEP always overrides ECERS-3.	Playground information to Use with the Environment Rating Scales handout

		ECERS-3, pp. 26-27
What if a dome climber is present on the playground?	A dome climber is identified as inappropriate on the Playground Information to “Use with the Environment Rating Scales. This will be addressed by an ECERS-3 rater on Item 7 (7.3.2, 7.5.2, and 7.7.2) and Item 11 (it would likely be considered a major hazard).	Playground Information to Use with the Environment Rating Scales handout
Can we use Go-Noodle for gross motor?	It may be used as one station for gross motor play, but by itself would not meet the requirements for 7.3.3. Remember 7.3.3 requires that the equipment used stimulate at least 7 different skills. Consideration should also be given to the time limits for technology (Item 27)	ECERS-3, pp. 26-27
Item 8: Meals/Snacks		
Do you have to wash hands after meals?	“If children use hands to eat, handwashing is required after eating to remove saliva and food.”	ECERS-3, p. 28
Item 9: Toileting/Diapering		
Do students have to use paper towels at restroom time?	Air hand dryers are allowed. According to the Handwashing Tips handout from the Day 1 ECERS-3 training, the dryer should be turned on with an elbow in order to avoid recontamination of clean hands	ECERS-3, p. 31, 9.3.3, 9.5.2, 9.7.2 and p. 33, 10.3.1, 10.5.1, and 10.7.1
Item 10: Health Practices		
Do students have to wash hands after returning from the motor room?	ECERS-3 requires washing hands upon entering the classroom and re-entering the classroom after outdoor play. The RTC considers gross motor room play similar to that of outdoor play, with center wide shared materials and equipment. We believe it is a good practice to wash hands after gross motor room play.	ECERS-3, p. 32 first paragraph
How do you handle handwashing requirements when a parent complains about their child’s hands being dry and cracked from washing hands frequently?	The ECERS-3 gives recommended practices and procedures for handwashing. 10.7.1 states “Proper sanitary procedures used consistently as needed, with a few lapses.” One child unable to wash hands as frequently as the others will not lower your score. It is always important to be considerate of individual needs of children.	ECERS-3, p. 33, 7.1
Item 11: Safety Practices		
I have seen furniture shelves placed in the center of classrooms. Do these need to be	It depends on the height and stability of the shelf. If children can easily knock over the shelf, then additional precautions should be taken.	NA

secured?		
Item 13: Encouraging Children to Use Language		
What if a child is non-verbal? If you show them another way to get someone's attention, does that count?	Encouraging non-verbal children to communicate in ways other than speaking would be given credit at 3.4. For 5.4, the indicator is specific to verbal communication.	ECERS-3, pp. 38-9, 3.4, 5.4
If there are less than 5 exchanges during a conversation, do we still get credit?	Yes, as long as the exchanges are meaningful and not just one word answers. "Both staff and child must take turns for the interaction to be considered a conversation." Turns indicates multiple, so there should be at least two exchanges. It's still best to strive for five!	eCERS-3, p. 38, note for 1.3, 3.3, 5.2, 7.2, and 7.3
Item 17: Fine Motor		
What or where do you place your manipulative, if you do not need a manipulative center?	Though ECERS-3 does not require a manipulative center, the Simpson RTC recommends this practice.	NA
Item 18: Art		
What are some examples of 3D art?	Creations that a child can produce independently that are built up and out. Playdough and clay sculptures are good examples. Using 3d items such as toilet paper or paper towel rolls are good, along with pipe cleaners, wood scraps, Styrofoam, boxes, or other similar things.	ECERS-3, pp.48-49, 18.7.1 and paragraph 1 on p. 46
Item 19: Music and Movement		
Can you sing with a CD for singing during free play? Is it okay to sing without music?	Yes. The indicator states singing. This can be done with or without music.	ECERS-3, 51, 5.2
Does singing and dancing have to be done with more than 1 or 2 children?	No. During free play, staff should be observed singing or doing dance/movement activity with the children. "Children" refers to any child or multiple children in any area of the classroom during free play OR during gross motor free play.	ECERS-3, p. 51, 5.2
Item 20: Blocks		
Is it acceptable to have a barrier marked off for blocks on the rug, or can they use the whole carpet?	A barrier is acceptable, as long as there is an appropriate amount of space for blocks, etc. Be aware that traffic patterns and/or adjoining activities should not disrupt block play.	ECERS-3, p. 53, 20.5.1
Is it best to have blocks stacked on the shelf?	Yes (see answer below)	ECERS-3, p. 52, 20.5.2

Can blocks be in bins?	To receive credit for 20.5.2, the blocks (wooden unit, plastic unit, foam unit, etc.) must be stored on open, labeled shelves. This means they cannot be in bins. However, accessories may be stored in bins if both the shelves and containers are labeled.	ECERS-3, pp. 52-53, 20.5.2
If a barn is not supposed to be in the block center, what center should it be in?	The barn should be placed in any other center. Be reminded that a barn can be in the block center as long as it is used enhance block play. ECERS-3 does not specify where a barn should be. It does however; specify that all accessories in the block area must be used to enhance block play.	ECERS-3, pp. 52-53
Should hard hats be in the block center or dramatic play?	Dramatic play	
If Lincoln Logs can't be in the block center, where can you put them?	It is recommended that these be placed in a fine motor center or other play area (i.e., carpet area). Lincoln Logs are considered interlocking building materials.	ECERS-3, p. 46, 17.5.1
Does a block area have to have 3 sides?	No. The issue is not the number of sides the block area has, but instead is how well it is protected from other types of play and traffic patterns.	ECERS-3, pp. 18-19, 3.5.1 and p. 52, 20.5.3
How many square feet is required to meet the requirement for one child to build?	There is not a square foot requirement. But there should be enough space for 3 children to build "sizable independent structures at the same time."	ECERS-3, p. 53, 21.3.2, 21.5.1
Item 21 Dramatic Play		
Can tools go into dramatic play?	Yes. Tools are an example of materials for different kinds of work.	ECERS-3, p. 55, 21.5.1
Item 22: Nature/Science		
Is the science area required to be near a window?	No. This is not required, but placing the science area near a window allows children to observe nature while using nature/science materials. See question/answer below.	ECERS-3, pp. 56-57
Can window bird feeders be outside the window and still count as a living thing?	Yes, if it is actively used (i.e., has bird seed). A bird does not have to be seen. BUT the feeder must be a part of the science interest center to count for science materials. For example, the bird feeder could be in the window within the science interest center. However, a bird feeder outside of the interest center could be used for 22.7.2. In this indicator, the staff would need to talk about the bird feeder at some point with children to receive credit.	ECERS-3, p. 57, 22.5.1, 22.7.2
Can you use rice and beans in sensory boxes?	Yes. ECERS-3 only states that food cannot be used as a substitute for sand.	Item 22 Nature/Science: Additional note for clarification from www.ersi.info
Would 2 plants count as 2 living things?	Yes, if they are different kinds of plants and in different pots.	
Is bird seed okay to	Yes	

use in sand/water table?		
What type of plant would be suggested to use in the classroom? Give a few examples.	Unfortunately, we are not plant experts. Please ask for advice from your local County Extension office. The link below also has information on non-poisonous plants https://www.uwhealth.org/files/uwhealth/docs/pdf/poisonous_plants.pdf	NA
What if more children want to use science center materials than there are chairs available? Can they take the work elsewhere/	Yes. However, if this happens on a consistent basis you should consider adding more chairs to the center	NA
Can the math and science be together and still qualify as meeting the required science interest center?	No, an interest center is for a particular kind of play/work. All math and science materials should NOT be included in one, combined center. However, the science center will likely include some math materials (i.e., measuring cups, scales)	ECERS-3, p. 11, #5
Item 23: Math Materials and Activities		
Item 24 Math in Daily Events		
Does “Five Little Monkeys” finger play with chart count for Item 24 (Math in daily events) and Item 25 (Understanding written numbers)?	It depends on what the chart looks like. It would count during transitions for Item 24. If numbers and dots or objects on the chart are connected with numbers in the song, it would count for Item 25.	ECERS-3, p. 61 p. 63
Is having students count along while counting how many students are in line an example of using math in the daily environment?	Yes. This is one example which would give credit for 24.3.1 and 24.5.1.	ECERS-3, p. 61
Item 25: Understanding Written Numbers		
Item 26: Promoting Acceptance of Diversity		
Can pictures of students in the class with grandparents or blended families with different ethnic origins count?	No. It will not count for Item 26. However, children enjoy seeing pictures of themselves and family members, so feel free to display them. Credit can be given for 5.3.1, Child-related display.	ECERS-3, p.23, 5.31.1 and p. 64, last sentence of first paragraph
I need clarification on	On Asian doll is an EXAMPLE of diversity, but NOT a contrast.	ECERS-3,

CONTRAST in diversity.	An Asian doll and an African-American doll in a crib in housekeeping would be. See the first paragraph on p. 64 for several examples of contrasts in diversity.	pp. 64-65
Is this one or two examples of contrast – 1 poster depicting a white mother, black father, and children of various ages?	“Do not count one item more than once when scoring” (p. 64). Though the scenario includes two examples of contrast, credit could only be given for one.	ECERS-3, p. 64, 26.1.1, 26.3.1, and 26.5.2
Item 27: Appropriate use of Technology		
When we do songs on the Smart Board, does that count as screen time?	If the screen has moving pictures, it would fall into the category of electronic media. 27.1.2 limits the use of electronic media to NO MORE THAN 30 minutes with any child. Therefore, use of the Smart Board would need to be factored into the amount of time children have access to iPad/computer or the time they spend viewing a video/TV.	ECERS-3, p. 67, 27.1.2
If the school counselor is using the Smart Board during an E-3 observation, does this count toward the 15 minute technology time?	Yes, because it is still screen time for the students. See above.	ECERS-3, pp. 66-67
What are some ways to monitor time on the iPads and computer?	Using zoning to assign a teacher to monitor with a kitchen or electronic timer, a smart phone timer in a teacher’s pocket or a sand timer.	ECERS-3, p. 67
If technology isn’t used during the observation, will we be counted off?	No. “If no use of electronic media is observed, score the item NA	ECERS-3, p. 66, first sentence
If 15 minutes is the time limit for 3-and 4-years old, what about 5-years old? Do they get more or the same amount of time?	The time limit is for any child in a preschool classroom.	ECERS-3, p. 67, 5.2
Is the TV time (10 minutes) in 27.3.2 counted additionally to the time for technology in 27.5.2 (limit of 15 minutes)?	Yes, so that would make a total of 25 minutes if all time were used. This is within the 30 minute maximum time for electronic media stated in 1.2.	ECERS-3, p. 66, second sentence
Is it a state requirement to have computers in a classroom?	No. This item can be scored Not Applicable if no electronic media is used during the observation.	ECERS-3, p. 66, first sentence
Does a radio fall under technology?	No. “Note that e-books or music players are not considered electronic media unless animated with moving pictures or print.”	ECERS-3, p.66, second

		sentence
Do you time when children are on computers or iPads?	Yes.	ECERS-3, p. 67, 27.5.2
Item 29: Individualized Teaching and Learning		
Is it acceptable to do away with large group circle time (calendar, for example)?	Yes. Whole group is the least effective means of instruction for preschool students.	ECERS-3, p. 71, 29.7.1
Item 33: Transitions and Waiting Times		
How does the waiting time frame align with handwashing?	No waiting time should be 3 minutes or longer. Transitions should be gradual or individualized. If whole group handwashing is unavoidable, children should be productively engage. This might include singing, finger-plays, conversations, games, gross motor activities (hopping), storytelling, etc.	
Item 34: Free Play		
Can we limit the number of students in a center?	Yes. However, children should be able to find engaging activities for free play with little if any competition. (p. 81, 5.3). A clear system should be in place to ensure children can have a satisfying experience (examples include wait list, sign-up sheet, etc.).	ECERS-3, p. 81, 34.5.4
Is it okay to set a timer when a child is waiting to go into a center?	34.5.4 states that a timer may be used to limit turns to a reasonable time so that the activity can be completed. However, the same indicator says that participation in activities should be satisfying. Some activities have a clear and specific ending or limit. Block play and dramatic play do not. A child may be building an intricate structure that is not complete after 15 or 30 minutes. A waiting list or other clear system is a good way to ensure that all who are interested get a chance to use the activity or center, although it may not be on the same day.	ECERS-3, p. 81, Item 34
Can a teacher use a checklist to select students to use centers?	Free Play means that the child is permitted to select materials and companions and as far as possible manage play independently. Free Play is not credited when staff pre-select materials/centers. However, waiting lists or other systems can be used to ensure all children have a chance to use popular centers. Additional author note for Clarification (8/2015), www.ersi.info	ECERS-3, p. 81, 5.4 Additional note for clarification from www.ersi.info
Do we have to let the kinds change centers?	Yes. “Free Play means that the child is permitted to select materials and companions and as far as possible manage play independently.” (Additional Note for Clarification from authors). This means children have a choice concerning when they enter and/or leave a center.	Additional note for clarification from www.ersi.info