

How to Use Curriculum-Based Die-Cut Projects to Stimulate Learning

As a teacher, your greatest challenge is coaxing students into the “learning zone,” where they are so deeply engaged that learning is easy, and comprehension and retention rise dramatically. Some students are easier than others to draw into the learning process.

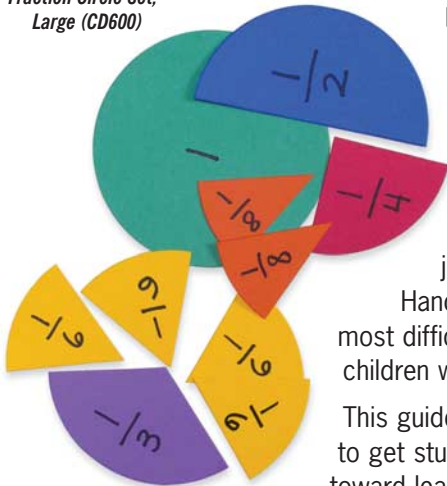
AccuCut die-cutting machines and dies, as with other hands-on learning tools, can help you claim students’ attention with easy-to-make, colorful, interactive projects that lead them directly to the learning zone, where they can make true progress! When you use die-cutting equipment, as opposed to purchasing pre-made materials, you can customize the projects to fit your needs, you can make repeated batches of materials as long as you have paper to cut, and you save time.

A New Era of Die Cutting: More than Decoration

Years ago, schools, libraries, churches and community centers purchased die-cutting equipment solely to make classroom and hallway decorations. Although die-cut letters and shapes still are useful for decorative projects, AccuCut has forged a new era of die cutting for curriculum activities.

With the help of teachers, parents and others who are concerned with the education of children, we have researched and designed educational dies that are deeply connected to the goals and standards of education.

*Fraction Circle Set,
Large (CD600)*

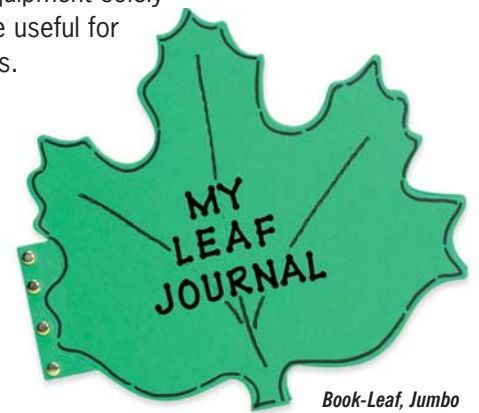


From the child’s point of view, die cuts are just plain fun! They are colorful and tempting. Students might not even realize they are learning.

From the teacher’s point of view, die cuts provide an opportunity for students to use fine motor skills, to sort and recognize patterns, to identify beginning sounds and vowels, to create self-made journals, to learn complex concepts through demonstration...and so much more.

Hands-on die-cut projects even have been known to break through to the children who are most difficult to reach—children with learning disabilities, children who speak little English, and children who have lost interest in school.

This guide will introduce you to the uses of die cuts in curriculum—and show you ways to get students so engaged in the lessons you are teaching that they forget all their inhibitions toward learning.



*Book-Leaf, Jumbo
(ZB1543)*

Teaching with Die Cuts

Die cuts help us teach concepts in a number of ways—for the most part, in ways very similar to the exercises and problems you are used to in worksheets, workbooks and other learning materials. The teaching concept is no different. With die-cut activities, it is the stimulating materials and presentation that are different. That is what hooks students.

You can use die cuts to teach to national and state standards, just as you do other teaching materials. The projects in AccuCut’s *100 Great Ideas* series all are designed to meet standards. If an activity from one of the project sheets doesn’t match your needs exactly, don’t be afraid to modify it to fit.

Below are a few of the different types of learning situations you can create with die-cut pieces. You will discover many more ways to teach with die cuts, the more often you use them.

Visual Assembly (*pattern blocks, collages, self-portraits*)

Students can assemble small die cuts into compositions. Give them mini die-cut animal shapes, people and environmental characteristics, such as grass and trees, to create a diorama scene. Allow them to create pattern block designs that match a theme, or that tell something about themselves. Students can dress larger cutouts in human body shapes to look like themselves, which adds to their self-esteem and boosts self-awareness.

In art class, dies can be used to cut pieces for collages. Because standard-style dies cut through anything scissors can cut and more, you can cut various types of fabric, magazine covers, thin sheet metal, and more.

Cognitive Practice (*counting, matching, categorizing, calculating*)

Cognitive skills practice is probably the most common use of die cuts in curriculum. Cut out sets of fish, paper dolls, frogs, insects or any other shape to use for counting—including story problems, estimating and matching. Use die-cut shapes, such as dominoes, flashcards and pockets, to provide easy-to-make bases for activity pieces.

In the language arts department, you can make jumbo shaped books (dies include covers and inside pages) for practicing reading and writing skills. Flashcards using die-cut letters and numbers are useful for practice drills. Use die-cut bags and boxes to store pieces.



Cup Huggers™-Monkey, Jumbo (C2515)

Games (*paths, puzzles, bingo, spinners*)

Games are a low-stress way to teach children a concept. Using colorful paper and AccuCut game dies, you can quickly and easily create game boards in a number of different formats. Use dies to cut out game pieces, the actual boards for path games, puzzle shapes complete with all the pieces, spinners, dice and even storage containers.

Use your imagination to make games unexpectedly fun. Add fabric and other textured materials to them. Cut markers from unexpected materials, such as milk bottles, leather-look vinyl and rugs. Seal completed game sets in plastic bags or envelopes for storage. Allow students to take them home and play with family members.

Experiences (*learning by doing, measuring feet*)

In some cases, die cuts provide actual real-life items that students can manipulate to create experiences. For example, one project uses feet for measuring, rather than a ruler. Students can create their own greeting cards and give to classmates. Die-cut letters can be used on posters to help promote the upcoming school carnival.

Many schools, churches and community centers have found that the dies they already own are also useful for creating professional-style crafts that can be sold to raise money.

Demonstrations (*clock, “no” and “yes” hands*)

It's much easier to teach children how to tell time if you have a large colorful clock to manipulate. Many teachers own reusable cardboard clocks with plastic hands to demonstrate time. Wouldn't it be better if each child had his or her own clock? It's easy and inexpensive to do with die cutting equipment. This is an example of the way die cuts can be used to make items for demonstration teaching.

Another example is giving each child a set of “No” and “Yes” hands to raise in answer to questions. They can look around to see which hand other students have raised. In some cases it will help them realize they gave a right or wrong answer. In other cases, it will give the class a visual demonstration of the majority answer. You might ask whether students like ice cream, for example. They will be able to look around and see in an instant whether more people like ice cream or don't like ice cream.



Clock-Alarm w/Hands, Jumbo (C1112)

More than Shapes: A Springboard for Involvement

The key to successfully leading students to deeper learning with die cuts is to use the shapes you cut out in interactive, hands-on projects that are at the heart of lessons. It's tempting to use shapes simply as props in passive learning—as when students decorate notebooks with small die cuts, for example, or when they decorate the die cuts themselves.

Although this type of passive activity has a place in learning, if you think of die-cut shapes as components for serious curriculum activities, you will begin to understand the depth of their value. Students can make graphic organizers, for example, using a flip-flap die (F1359, F1362 and F1363) of their choice. Students who organize the concepts of their lesson using this hands-on tool will become engaged in the process, learn the lesson more thoroughly, and remember it longer. At the same time, they will be practicing small motor skills, cooperation, following directions and more.



Research shows that students become more involved with one another and cooperate more naturally when they are working on hands-on craft-like projects. According to a study completed by the Craft & Hobby Association (“The Academic Value of Hands-on Craft Projects in Elementary Schools,” www.hobby.org): “On a seven-point scale, teachers observed greater cooperative behavior (5.8) and perseverance (6.4) by students during learning activities involving hands-on projects than they observed during learning activities without hands-on projects (4.5 and 4.1 respectively).”

Hands-on projects help students with learning disabilities, language challenges and lack of motivation by giving them a non-verbal method of absorbing information and demonstrating their knowledge of a concept.

An educator who participated in the Craft & Hobby Association study explained that hands-on activities helped kinesthetic and visual learners “transfer their expertise and enthusiasm to reading and writing activities after having experienced the concepts with their eyes and hands.”

Another educator pointed out that “students who may have other learning styles benefit too because they are challenged to excel in other areas.”

Die-cut shapes increase the likelihood that you will draw students of every type into the learning zone.

Harnessing the Power of Die Cuts: General Tips

In many ways, die-cut activities are like any other hands-on project. Bright colors draw children in with a promise of fun. The activities provide opportunities for experiencing and doing, rather than just reading—for becoming involved holistically in the study of a concept. Hands-on projects provide opportunities for critical thinking. They also make it more fun to teach!

Although die-cut materials are similar to other hands-on teaching materials, there are a few tips that will help you make the most of the opportunity that die cuts provide.

- **Materials:** Roller die-cutting machines cut materials other than paper. You can cut anything scissors can cut and more: cardstock, plastic, poly foam, mat board, sponge, flexible magnetic sheets, cling vinyl, fabric, etc.
- **Patterned Paper:** Although you will no doubt use plain colored materials to make classroom activities with die cuts, you should experiment with patterned papers to add an unexpected element that will further engage students. Be sure to cut with the pattern side down on the die for best results. (The blade in a die rolls the paper slightly when cutting and creates a finished edge.)
- **Lamination:** To make project pieces last longer, as for a learning center, laminate the paper before cutting. Cold laminators work best for this. If you use a hot laminator, be sure to use 3.0 mil film so the lamination doesn't come off during cutting.



- **Creative Cutting:** We think of a die cut as a piece of paper or other material that mirrors the shape of the blade in the die. However, with a little creative cutting, you can use the dies you own to cut more shapes and combinations of shapes. Use a scalloped heart, for example to cut a “bite” in the side of a picture frame that holds a photo of an animal. Cut small shapes out of the middles of larger shapes. Fold paper before cutting and place folds inside of the blade to create unusual note cards and accordion chains.
- **Home Connection:** Die cuts are inexpensive when you already own the equipment. Don't hesitate to send projects home with children to share with their families. This is especially useful for die-cut games, because they encourage interaction between students and those at home.
- **Individual Sets:** With cutting dies, you can produce hundreds of small shapes in practically no time. This allows you to give each child in your class a set of their own shapes to use for lesson practice. If you give them choices about which shapes to use for exercises, they will feel a personal connection to the project, which helps the learning process.
- **Language Stimulation:** To make the most of die-cut projects, encourage interaction between students and ask them to talk about the projects they are creating. Die-cut materials offers more effective opportunities for interaction than cognitive worksheets do, partly because there are more opportunities to look up from hands-on activities, and partly because the element of fun in most of these activities puts children in a mood for interaction with the teacher and their peers.
- **Creative Project Design:** Although AccuCut makes it very easy to follow instructions to make curriculum projects, it's important to “bend” the projects to make them work for you, your students and your curriculum. Don't be afraid to modify the projects as needed. You will find project ideas on the AccuCut Web site (www.accucut.com) under “Ideas”, and also in AccuCut's *100 Great Ideas* books for educators (see catalog or online store).
- **Save Scraps:** Because AccuCut dies are placed face up in the tray, it is easy to place paper exactly where you want to cut without any worry of shifting. Save paper scraps and cut smaller shapes from them to make the most of your paper supplies.
- **Computer Printing:** To make neat, polished curriculum activities with computer-generated words on them, first print the words on the paper, then position a die over the words and roll through an AccuCut die-cutting machine to cut out the shape around the words. You might need to experiment to see where to place the die, so the cut is made where you want it. AccuCut offers clear acrylic dies that make it easier to position the die where you want to cut.



Door Hanger #1,
Long Cut (D1060)
Insects, Mini (I1056)



Book-Birthday Cake,
Jumbo (ZB1540)

The Joy of Learning

Above all, colorful die cuts inject an element of joy into the learning process. To handle the pretty die-cut pieces...to be asked to write on a perfectly-cut-out practice card...to feel the challenge of finding the puzzle pieces that go together... it all inspires and delights children. It makes learning easy!

Put the irresistible power of die cutting to work in your own situation, whether you are teaching children in a school, at home, at church, in your community center or anywhere!