

Cafeteria Tables

- 1** Always plan for 10% more seating than your expected peak
Cafeterias rarely hit exactly their expected occupancy. Seasonal events, all-hands meetings, and special lunch programs regularly spike headcount. Buying 10% extra seating capacity upfront is far cheaper than a second furniture order with separate freight costs.
- 2** Use laminate, not veneer, in any food service environment
Wood veneer looks appealing in showrooms but delaminates quickly when exposed to cleaning chemicals, food spills, and moisture. High-pressure laminate (HPL) withstands the same abuse for years without peeling, bubbling, or staining.
- 3** Calculate your ADA requirement before you order
Many buyers realize after delivery that they don't have enough ADA-accessible tables. The formula is simple: multiply your total table count by 0.05 and round up to get your minimum ADA table count. Order those units at the same time to ensure matching finishes.
- 4** For multipurpose rooms, invest in quality folding mechanisms
Folding tables get folded and unfolded hundreds of times per year. Cheap folding mechanisms fail within 12–24 months of heavy use. Look for positive-locking leg mechanisms with steel cams or positive-action latches, not simple gravity-lock or plastic clips.
- 5** Round tables increase perceived space in smaller cafeterias
In break rooms under 500 sq ft, round tables feel less institutional and create better traffic flow because there are no corners to navigate around. The tradeoff is slightly lower seating density than rectangular tables.
- 6** Order a sample top finish before committing to a large quantity
Laminate colors look different under fluorescent cafeteria lighting than they do on a website swatch or printed catalog. Request a physical laminate sample or a single-table sample before placing a 20-table order.
- 7** Specify commercial weight ratings, not residential
Tables marketed to offices often carry residential or light-commercial ratings of 200–400 lbs. Cafeteria tables need to handle trays, dishes, leaning users, and cleaning equipment — always specify a minimum 750 lb distributed load rating for food service applications.
- 8** Plan your traffic flow before you plan your table layout
Sketch out where people enter, where the food service line is, where beverage stations and waste bins are located, and where they exit — then design the table layout around those paths. Fighting natural traffic flow with table placement creates bottlenecks and complaints.
- 9** For outdoor cafeteria tables, HDPE outlasts wood and standard metal
Recycled HDPE plastic is the most maintenance-free outdoor cafeteria table material available. Unlike wood, it never needs sealing or painting. Unlike standard steel, it cannot rust. In most climates, HDPE tables require nothing more than an occasional rinse to stay looking new.
- 10** Stagger replacement rather than replacing all tables at once
If you're on a budget and replacing an aging cafeteria, stagger the replacement over 2–3 procurement cycles rather than replacing everything at once. Prioritize the most visible and highest-traffic tables first, and use consistent finishes across cycles so the mix doesn't look mismatched.