



Budgeting Starter Set

Free Library · Three no-setup budgeting activities

Budgeting sticks when students live it, not when they read about it. Three ready-to-run activities: a needs-vs-wants card sort, a salary simulation with a surprise expense, and the 50/30/20 rule as a self-check. Teacher guide and answers here; the cards, sorting mat, simulation, and rule worksheet are the student pages. Edit any of it in the Word version.

HOW TO USE IT

Pick one activity or run all three in order over a class or two. Start with the card sort to warm up the argument (what even counts as a need), move to the salary simulation so students feel the trade-offs, then use the 50/30/20 rule to check their own plan. Everything here is teacher-only: hand out the student pages, keep these facilitation notes and answers for yourself.

ACTIVITY 1: NEEDS VS. WANTS

TEACHER

Goal: students learn to separate what they truly need from what they simply want, and discover that the line is blurrier than it looks.

How to run it (about 15 minutes)

- 1 Print the student card page and cut apart the twelve item cards (one set per pair or group).
- 2 Hand each group the cards and the Need / Want sorting mat.
- 3 Groups place every card in a column and must agree before they commit.
- 4 Regroup as a class. Ask a group to defend one card that another group placed differently.

THE POINT IS THE ARGUMENT, NOT THE ANSWER

Several cards are deliberate gray areas (a phone plan, a bus pass, a haircut). Let students fight it out and justify their calls with a reason. Push them: is it a need because of the person's situation, or just a strong want? The suggested sort and gray-area notes are below.

ACTIVITY 1: SUGGESTED SORT

ANSWER KEY · TEACHER

There is no single right answer, but here is a defensible starting point. The value is in making students justify the gray areas.

Clear needs	Clear wants	Gray area (worth debating)
Rent Groceries Doctor visit Savings	Concert tickets New sneakers Coffee Video game	Phone plan Bus pass Streaming Haircut

- **Phone plan:** close to a need today for work, school, and safety, but the plan size (unlimited vs. basic) is a want.
- **Bus pass:** a need if it is the only way to get to work or school; a want if a cheaper option exists.
- **Streaming:** almost always a want, but students may argue it replaces pricier entertainment.
- **Haircut:** basic grooming leans need; a salon style leans want.

ACTIVITY 2: SALARY SIMULATION

TEACHER

Goal: students plan a full month on a fixed take-home pay of \$2,400, then absorb a surprise \$300 car repair and rebalance. The point is the trade-off.

- Any plan works as long as the total is exactly \$2,400 and every category has a number.
- The curveball forces a real trade-off. Most students cut Fun or Other first, which is the healthy instinct; if they cut Savings, use it to discuss why an emergency fund exists in the first place.
- Tie it back: this is exactly why the 50/30/20 rule reserves 20% for savings.

ACTIVITY 3: THE 50/30/20 RULE

TEACHER

Goal: students check their Activity 2 plan against a pro rule of thumb. On \$2,400 the targets are \$1,200 to needs, \$720 to wants, and \$480 to savings.

Students rarely hit these exactly, and that is fine. Reward honest comparison and a realistic change, not a perfect match.

WANT THE WHOLE UNIT?

This kit is a taste. The editable personal finance curriculum in the shop builds the lessons, slides, and answer keys around budgeting, saving, credit, banking, and paying for college, so you can teach the whole unit start to finish.