



## Differentiation: Steps to Getting Started

1. *First, identify the grade level and subject for which you will write the lesson.*
2. *Second, identify the standard (national, state, district, etc.) you are targeting.* A common mistake for those just beginning to differentiate is to develop three great activities and then try to force-fit them into a differentiated lesson. Start with the standard first. If you don't know where you are going, how will you know if you get there?
3. *Third, identify the key concept and generalization.* The key concept follows from the standard. Ask yourself, "What big idea am I targeting?" The generalization follows from the concept chosen. Ask, "What do I want the students to know at the end of the lesson, regardless of their placement in the tiers?"
4. *Fourth, be sure students have the background necessary to be successful in the lesson.* What scaffolding is necessary? What must you have already covered or what must the student have already learned? Are there other skills that must be taught first? It may be necessary to use some supplemental material for some students either to bring them up or to challenge them further.
5. *Fifth, determine in which part of the lesson (content, process, product) you will tier/differentiate.* You may choose to differentiate the content (what you want the students to learn), the process (the way students make sense out of the content), or the product (the outcome at the end of a lesson, lesson set, or unit—often a project). When beginning to differentiate, we suggest that you only tier/differentiate one of these three. Once you are comfortable with differentiating, you might try to differentiate more than one part in the same lesson. . .
6. *Sixth, determine the type of differentiation you will do: readiness, interest, or learning profile.* Readiness is based on the ability levels of the students. Giving a pretest is a good way to assess readiness. Students' interest in a topic is generally gauged through an interest survey, while the learning profile may be determined through various learning style inventories. In the beginning, we may want to concentrate on readiness.
7. *Seventh, based on your choices above, determine how many tiers you will need and develop the lesson.* When differentiating according to readiness, you may have three tiers: at grade level, below grade level, and above grade level. If you choose to tier in interest or learning profile, you may control the number of tiers by limiting choices or using only a few different learning styles. For example, tiering on all eight of Gardner's multiple intelligences in one lesson may not be a good place to start, so choose only a few, such as logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, and linguistic intelligence. **Differentiation means doing something different—qualitatively different.** Make sure you keep this in mind when tiering the lessons. Second, be sure that students are doing challenging, respectful, and developmentally appropriate work within each tier. In other words, no group should be given "busywork." We don't want one group doing blackline practice sheets and another doing a fabulous experiment.
8. *Finally, develop the assessment component to the lesson.* The assessment can be formative, summative, or a combination of both. You may use some means of recording observations of the various groups, such as flip cards or sticky notes. You could develop a rubric for each tier based on the particular product that is created. You may give a formal paper and- pencil test. Whatever it is, choose your assessment based on your needs and your lesson design.