



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.



Differentiation Strategies

Flexible Grouping – Grouping that is not static

- Heterogeneous - Group students by varied ability levels.
- Homogeneous – Group students according to ability level so that students can work with content in a process that suits their ability level.
- Flexogeneous – allows for flexible grouping of homogeneous and heterogeneous groups within the same lesson. It involves switching groups at least one time to create another group during the lesson. An example of this is jigsawing (see Education Designs website CAT Materials Tab)

Flexible Grouping can be used for differentiating interest groups and learning profiles as well as readiness.

Tiered Assignments –

1. Pre-assess student knowledge on lesson.
2. Have anchor activity that all students will do.
3. Based on ability levels, divide students in ability groups. In these groups, students will participate in mini-activities that support/lead up to anchor activity.
4. Write each of the mini-activity to meet the needs of each of the ability groups.
5. In whole group setting, have students complete anchor activity.

Tiered Graphic Organizers –

1. Choose a graphic organizer for your grade-level students to use an assignment. Make modifications to graphic organizer prior to distribution to the class.
 - Level text
 - Use word bank with and without definitions (appropriately leveled)
 - Allow students to answer in pictures
 - Provide examples
 - Simplify directions
 - For above grade level – add another dynamic to the graphic organizer (another circle to the Venn Diagram or another column to the T-Chart)
2. Distribute graphic organizer having the students work in homogeneous groups or individually.
3. Assess students as they work and make adjustments as needed.
4. At end of assignments, assess student work and make notes for future use of graphic organizer.

Leveled Questions – adjusting the language of questions to the level of student readiness.

- Key is making the question accessible for all students.
- Questions ask ALL students for same information just in different ways.
- Should be used in small homogeneous group discussions or as individual assignments
- For below-grade level, questions need to be narrowed, need vocabulary support and examples.
- For above-grade level, questions should offer students a challenge. Ask them the “what if...,” “support your reason for...,” etc.

Realia – Using real-life objects to build vocabulary and background knowledge

- Allows students to use their senses
- Differentiates for the multiple intelligences
- Examples of Realia – primary source documents, food, tools, clothing, plants

Allows students to make connections with vocabulary from a lesson

Leveled Learning Centers – centers with activities that are leveled according to academic difficulty

- Combines the use of choice and tiered assignments
- All students are given choice to work at any of the centers
- Each center has activities for on-grade, below-grade and above-grade level learners
- Four to Five areas of the room should serve as areas for the centers
- Activities are identified using symbols (on-grade – square, below-grade – circle, above-grade – triangle)
- Students are given card of instructions telling them which symbol to look for at each center

Choices Board or Bonus Boxes – combines both choices and tiering

- Similar to leveled learning centers
 - One activity should be academically appropriate and one should challenge the student
1. To make choices board, write assignments on different cards.
 2. Place cards in random order on hanging chart. Make a typed copy of assignments so that students have a paper copy in hand.
 3. Pre-assess students' knowledge through class discussion, KWL Chart or some other means. You will use this to place students into ability groups.
 4. Assign students a symbol according to ability level
 5. Display Choices Board at front of the room. Explain that to the students that they will choose an activity that correlates with the symbol on their choices handout.
 6. After students complete first activity, students can choose additional activity or activities to complete with a partner(s)

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Differentiation: Begin Slowly – Just Begin!

Low Prep-Differentiation	High-Prep Differentiation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choices of books • Homework option • Use of reading buddies • Varied journal prompts • Varied pacing with anchor options • Student-teacher goal setting • Work alone/together • Whole-to-part and part-to-whole explanations • Flexible seating • Varied computer programs • Varied supplementary materials • Options for expressing knowledge • Varying scaffolding on same organizer • Let's Make a Deal Projects • Computer mentors • Think-Pair-Share by readiness, interest, learning profile • Use of collaboration, independence and cooperation • Open-ended activities • Mini-workshops to re-teach or extend skills • Jigsaw • Explorations by interest • Games to practice mastery of information and skill • Multiple level questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiered activities and labs • Tiered products • Independent studies • Multiple texts • Alternative assessments • Learning contracts • Multiple-Intelligence options • Compacting • Varying organizers • Lectures coupled with graphic organizers • Interest groups • Personal agendas • Literature Circles • Stations • Group Investigation • Teams, Games and Tournaments • Choice Boards • Think-Tac-Toe • Simulations • Problem-based learning • Graduated rubrics • Flexible reading formats • Student-centered writing formats • Tape-recorded materials

How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms, 2nd Edition, 2001

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