

# How Can Teachers Differentiate Activities In Various Content Areas?

## Content (What Students Learn)

### In the classroom, teachers may:

Use examples (mentor texts) at varying writing levels.

Ex.- 7<sup>th</sup> graders must write a paragraph about the Civil War. Show the students both “Sample A” and “Sample B”. Present the less complex example first, then the more complex. Allow students to choose on which sample to base their writing. –BOTH examples would earn an A according to the scoring rubric.

Meet with small groups to re-teach an idea or skill for struggling learners, or to extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners. (Conferencing)

Ex. – In 4<sup>th</sup> grade students are writing a paragraph about the counties in NJ. Meet with the “lower level group” to discuss paragraph structure using the information they have found. Meet with the “higher level group” to discuss comparing and contrasting counties.

Use spelling or vocabulary lists at readiness levels of students.

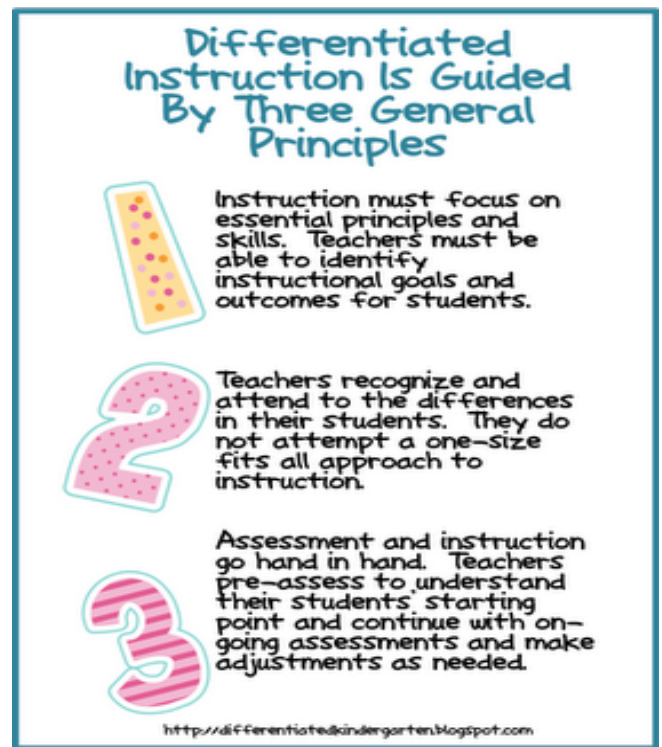
Ex.-In technology class, some students must know 20 vocabulary words, while others are only asked to know 10. A gifted student might be given more technical or higher level vocabulary to learn. On the quiz, all students would earn an A, based on what you asked them to learn.

Present ideas/directions through both auditory and visual means.

Ex. –Write the directions on the board, and then read them to the class. Then, model for students how the end result could look.

Expect different mastery levels for different students.

Ex. –Student A may need to know 92% of the science vocabulary to earn an A. Student B may need to know 80% of the same vocabulary to earn the same grade. Student C may have higher level or more specific vocabulary to learn. \*\*Usually used in lower elementary grades.



# Process (How Students Learn)

## In the classroom, teachers may:

### Use tiered (leveled) activities by giving students “choices.”

--All learners work with the same important understandings and skills, but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity.

Ex. --In music class, students are learning to identify instruments while listening to a song. Students can choose to write a paragraph by A-describing the instruments used in a song. (lower level) or B-Compare and contrast the instruments used in this style of music vs. the style studied yesterday. (higher level) BOTH choices would earn an A because they met the objective of the lesson (naming instruments).

### Use different types of graphic organizers for different learners.

Ex.- In health class, students brainstorm a story about the life of a germ from a sneeze until it causes an illness. Student A uses a story flow chart. Student B uses a B-M-E chart. Student C (highest level) uses a formal outline. ALL serve the purpose and meet the lesson objective.

### Provide interest centers that encourage students to explore subsets of the class topic of particular interest to them.

Ex.- In physical education class, students are learning about basketball. Students can choose whether to practice layups, foul shots, or defense.

Ex.- In science class, students are learning about the planets. There is one article on each planet. Students can choose a planet about which to read and summarize the article in a paragraph. For gifted students, the teacher could engage the student with articles of more complexity.

### Develop personal agendas.

--Task lists written by the teacher and containing both in-common work for the whole class and work that addresses individual needs of learners.

--Can be completed either during specified agenda time, as students complete other work early, or at home for enrichment.

Ex. - In technology class, after conferring with a student who is finished early, the teacher gives the student a list of three more tasks that are advanced and on the interest level of the student.

### Offer manipulative or other hands-on supports to all students.

--Ex.- Calculator, pencil grip, counting chips, text magnifier, white board and marker, sentence strips, etc. Gifted students may use materials to promote inquiry and higher level thinking.

### Vary the length of time a student may take to complete a task.

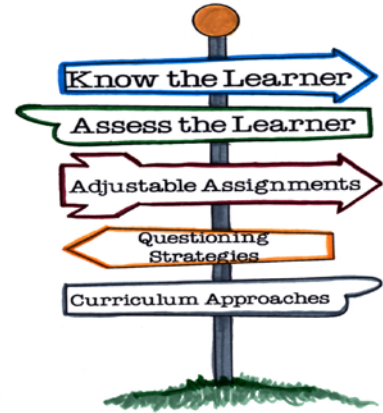
--Provide additional support for a struggling learner.

--OR encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.

# What is Differentiation?

## Product (How Students Show You What They Learned)

This is the type of differentiation commonly noticed by parents.



### In the classroom, teachers may:

**Give students options of how to express required learning.**

Ex.- To show knowledge of the water cycle in science class, students can create a puppet show, write a letter, develop a mural with labels, or write an essay. Gifted students may opt to use technology, research, and cite sources to do this.

**Use rubrics that match and extend students' varied skills levels.**

- Rubric should only measure the objective of the lessons/unit.
- Hand out the rubric BEFORE students complete the assignment. This way they will know how they will be scored and better meet your expectations.
- Don't assume that students know how to read a rubric. This is a learned skill. Go over the rubric with the class ahead of time.
- Gifted students may have a more detailed and higher level rubric, separate from the other students in the class.

**Allow students to choose to work alone or in small groups on their products.**

--If a project is an assessment, assign students roles within their groups. In each role, the objective can be demonstrated.

Ex.- In 3<sup>rd</sup> grade science students will do a project on the life cycle of a butterfly. Student A is responsible for making a diagram, Student B is responsible for a paragraph to describe this diagram, and Student C is in charge of labeling the diagram. (various levels of the same skill for different learners)

**Encourage students to create their own product assignments as long as the assignments contain required elements.**

--Use a scoring rubric that only addresses the learning objectives.  
Ex.- To reinforce a skill, students can create any type of project that shows the meaning of five vocabulary words. Students can create a song, rap, poem, essay, story, poster, drawing, etc.

# Environment (Where Students Learn)

## In the classroom, teachers may:

**Make sure there are places in the room to work quietly and without distraction, as well as places that invite student collaboration.**

--Gifted students may prefer to work independently or in small groups. Seating arrangements can accommodate for this.

Ex. --Have a quiet work center and a collaborative work center.

Ex. --Have long tables in the back of the room where partnerships can sit across from one another.

**Provide choices for places to work in the classroom.**

--Allow students to find a “writing niche” and sit anywhere in the classroom that is comfortable for them. (i.e. on the floor, against a wall, by the windows)

**Provide materials that reflect a variety of cultures and home settings.**

--Allow students to express their unique situations through writing without fear of being criticized.

**Set out clear guidelines for independent work that match individual needs.**

--At the beginning of the year, teachers will discuss the aspects of learning that are important to them.

Ex. --In technology class, teachers could explain that in a technology field, writing is important to share thoughts. They would demonstrate ways that writing can be organized, etc. for that particular field.

**Develop routines that allow students to get help when teachers are busy with other students and cannot help them immediately.**

--Gifted students may have special routines/procedures for utilizing the school library, technology, learning centers, etc. during class time.

Ex. --“Ask 3 before me” policy, hand signals for bathroom and pencil sharpening, etc.

Ex. --Provide dictionaries and thesauri in every classroom, regardless of content area. This eliminates the need for spelling anxiety while writing.

Created by K. Feyereisen

Reference:

(Tomlinson, 1995, 1999; Winebrenner, 1992, 1996).