

Differentiated Instruction



Best Practices for Including Students with Disabilities

All students learn at different rates, have a wide array of prior knowledge of concepts, and require a variety of levels of teacher support. Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a teacher's proactive response to learner needs. This framework for effective teaching dates back to the one-room schoolhouse, and is used by teachers to meet a vast range of diverse student needs.

What it is:

- It is proactive.
- It is based on quality, not quantity.
- It is rooted in assessment.
- It is taking multiple approaches to content, process, product and environment.
- It is student-centered.
- It is a blend of whole class, group and individual instruction.

What it isn't:

- It is not individualized instruction.
- It is not chaotic.
- It is not just homogeneous grouping.
- It is not making minor adjustments to lessons.
- It is not just for struggling students.

Adapted from Tomlinson, C. (2017)

Providing students with choices and options about their learning and assessment while using flexible grouping with authentic lessons is the cornerstone of differentiation. With this approach, students take more responsibility for their own learning and have higher levels of engagement in the classroom with fewer discipline problems. There are many ways to differentiate. DI is based on teachers' knowledge of individual learners, shaped by a flexible approach towards the teaching and learning process. Differentiation follows some core principles, as shown in the graphic below.

General Principles of Differentiation

Supportive Learning Environment

- Cooperation
- Community
- Flexibility
- Variability

Quality Curriculum

- Academic Achievement Standards or
- Alternate Achievement Academic Standards (Access Points)

Ongoing Assessment & Adjustment

- Pre-Assessment
- Formative
- Summative
- Variety of formats

Responsive Instruction

- Choice
- Self-directed learners
- Cooperative
- Respectful

Facilitated Routines

- Clear expectations
- Flexible groups*
- Student accountability
- Organization

Teachers Can Differentiate Through

Environment

Where students learn best

Product

How learning is shown

Process

How content is learned

Content

What content is learned

According to Students'

Interest

What sparks curiosity

Readiness

What students are ready to do

Learning Profile

What student differences are

Adapted from Carol Ann Tomlinson, University of Virginia

Sample Strategies for Differentiation

Try one of these strategies for differentiated instruction in your classroom.

Use a Jigsaw Strategy

In small 'Home Groups' each student reads a different section of text. Students re-arrange into 'Expert Groups' and discuss the same text section. All return to 'Home Groups' to share points from 'Expert Group' discussion.

Ways to differentiate with Jigsaw:

- Provide headphones and auditory text.
- Conduct vocabulary instruction prior to reading.
- Vary note-taking formats (e.g., column notes, word webs, fact-opinion, mind maps).
- Break up a long text, or use a series of related texts to compare or contrast.

Assign Open-Ended Projects

Create a list of projects, letting students choose one that lets them best demonstrate their knowledge.

Ways to differentiate with Open-Ended Projects:

- Create a rubric to establish consistency in grading across multiple projects.
- Provide high and low-tech tools.
- Encourage a variety of formats (posters, digital presentations, video clips, demonstrations).
- Encourage students to suggest projects.

Offer Flexible Seating

Set the stage for optimal learning by providing choice and a variety of furniture and flexible arrangements for individual and group work.

Ways to differentiate with Flexible Seating:

- Allow students to work in small groups or individually.
- Create quiet spaces with fewer distractions.
- Provide seating choices (soft seating, a variety of chair styles, exercise balls).

Use Task Cards

Identify tasks and questions typically found on worksheets or in textbooks. Create cards that each contain a single task or question. Set up stations and group students to rotate through them.

Ways to differentiate with Task Cards:

- Individualize feedback.
- Address knowledge gaps when needed.
- Include a variety of levels of tasks or questions.
- Assign cards matched to student needs.

Explore additional strategies for differentiation: Graphic Organizers, Scaffolded Content, Tiered Assessments, Menus, Learning Contracts, Tic-Tac-Toe, Interest Centers, Small Group Instruction