



## Beginning Teacher Resource

# Differentiated Learning

Every student is unique and has a unique learning style. Differentiation requires that teachers **know their students and how they learn** so they can adapt and tailor instruction and planned learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners. Effective differentiation works on the premise that every student can do remarkable things with the appropriate guidance and support.

### What is it?

Teachers are '**differentiating**' when they:

- Demonstrate flexibility by providing several learning options or different paths to learning to achieve a level of success on the same learning task.
- Know their students well enough to provide appropriate levels of challenge for all students.

### Why do it?

- Research confirms that differentiation in the classroom is effective for all students across the spectrum of learning abilities, from **high-potential gifted education students** to students with mild to severe learning disabilities.
- Students provided with different learning options and involvement in how they can learn the material tend to take on greater responsibility for their learning.
- Students display greater **engagement** in learning. There tend to be demonstrably fewer discipline problems in classrooms with differentiated lessons.

### How does it work?

Teachers can differentiate

Content

Process

Product

Learning  
environment

According to

Readiness

Interests

Learning Profile

Student characteristics



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## Teachers can differentiate the elements: Key principles

- **Content:** what students are expected to learn.
  - **Process:** how teachers will teach and how students will explore or undertake their learning.
  - **Product:** the end product the student is required to create to demonstrate mastery of content.
  - **Learning environment:** the design and layout of the physical classroom to support effective interaction and learning.
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- **Flexibility:** many classroom elements can be used as tools, like time, materials, modes of teaching, ways of grouping students, ways of expressing learning, ways of assessing learning.
  - **Assessment (pre, ongoing and summative) and instruction:** everything must be evidence-based so everything that a student says or does is useful information to understand and craft effective instruction.
  - **Students participate in 'respectful' work:** each student needs to be involved in a challenging range of activities appropriate for students at different learning stages.
  - **Collaboration:** the teacher involves students in decision-making. Students should be encouraged to work at their own pace and take responsibility for their learning.
  - **Clarity:** the teacher focuses on clarity about what is essential for students to know, understand and do.
  - **Proximal Development:** the teacher modifies content, process and products: they find key opportunities to meet learners where they are 'at' within their zone of proximal development to propel them forward.

## Each element can be differentiated according to student characteristics:

- **Readiness:** what the student has learned and what they still need to learn - this is inextricably linked to the zone of proximal development.
- **Interests:** connecting with ideas and themes that students find inspiring, thought-provoking and relevant, motivating them to want to learn.
- **Learning profile:** a student's learning profile comprises of elements such as culture, preferred learning style (individual or as a group, within a quiet space, a dark space, a bright sound-filled room or some combination of all) and intelligence preference (visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, bodily/kinaesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist). There tend to be demonstrably fewer discipline problems in classrooms with differentiated lessons.



# Differentiated Learning

## What does differentiation look like for English as an Additional Language (EAL/D) students?

The materials or processes should be modified to give language learners greater success with the same tasks that native English speakers are also doing.

Consider modification to one or more of three areas;

### Content:

- Simplify the text.
- Provide a vocab list.
- Present the information differently.

### Process:

- Chunk information.
- Group work with EAL/D students.
- Think-pair-share.

### Product:

- Non-verbal assessment.
- Open book exam.
- Dictionary access.

## What does differentiation look like for High Potential Gifted Education (HPGE) students?

HPGE students need opportunities to analyse, evaluate, create, and reflect. These students need to learn by being challenged, by asking and investigating and by completing complex tasks.

### Modifications can be made to:

- Provide additionally challenging materials.
- Use problems without solutions.

### Process:

- Create opportunity for group work, as well as independent work.
- If work is finished early use 'free-time' as a reward.

### Product:

- Allow students to choose which type of work they create to demonstrate learning.
- Offer levels of projects.
- Assign authentic tasks that are relatable.



Take a look at the [differentiation adjustment tool](#) or [illustration of the practice video](#) for more information on how to meet the needs of HPGE students.

## What can differentiation look like in my classroom?

Take a look at some illustrations of practice demonstrating [differentiation in the primary setting](#), [differentiation in the Music curriculum](#), and [differentiation in the Mathematics curriculum](#) to get some real-world perspectives.

There are a great many [ideas for differentiation](#) you can put to work in your classroom, you just need to consider your students and think about what will work best for them.



## Ideas for differentiation

- Create learning stations that students can rotate between during lessons.
- Use task cards instead of worksheets. This can link to learning stations.
- Target different senses in different lessons to ensure all students learning profiles are met.
- Share your strengths and weaknesses and how you learn, share your strategies and encourage students to find their own.
- Utilise think-pair-share.
- Use journaling as a tool for students to unpack learning from the day.
- Ask students to reflect on their learning and set goals for learning. Use this to plan future lessons.
- Use literature circles.
- Provide free study time.
- Create a plenary learning grid to allow student choice.
- Group students with similar learning styles.
- Provide open-ended projects.
- Encourage students to pitch their project ideas, including how they will fit the assessment criteria.

### Have a question?

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### Find out more at:

[Strong Start Great Teachers/  
Differentiation](#)