

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Students have a range of abilities and different learning needs. Differentiated instruction is matching instruction to meet the different needs of students in a given classroom. Differentiated instruction gives students a range of ways to access curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Just as important, differentiated instruction provides students a variety of ways to demonstrate and express what they have learned.

Some classrooms may include students with disabilities who have individual educational plans (IEP) or 504 plans that document specific accommodations to address the student's needs. Accommodations do not change the content of the curriculum. Accommodations are changes to how the curriculum is presented or how a student is able to respond to demonstrate what they have learned. Oftentimes, accommodations required for one student may benefit other students in a classroom.

Although the range of instructional needs within one classroom can be large, teachers may be able to adjust activities for the whole class to incorporate the various learning needs of students. This section identifies a variety of strategies to facilitate teachers' ability to meet the range of instructional needs of students in their classrooms. Many teachers will recognize these strategies and realize they have been using them in their classrooms without thinking of them as differentiated instruction.

The strategies below are from the Differentiated Instruction document adapted from the Center on Human Policy's Disability Studies for Teachers.

Role-Playing, Skits, and Mock Debates

- Differentiate the roles so that all can participate. Make sure that there are different kinds of roles (speaking and non-speaking) and activities with different levels of complexity (creating the set, making on-the-spot costumes, holding up cue cards).
- For some of these activities, some or all students may need worksheets to organize their thoughts before performing.
- Certain roles may be broken up so that more than one student can perform them. For example, instead of one-on-one debates, students can debate issues in pairs or teams.
- To help students get motivated, allow them to make and wear costumes and make scenery.
- If students have problems remembering lines or reading from a script, allow them to improvise.

Reading

- Students might be assigned to read complex materials in pairs or small groups.

- Have students read the documents in small pieces—assign small groups one paragraph to read and then paraphrase for others in the class.
- Enlarge the text for students with low vision.
- Students might be paired with a partner to read materials out loud.
- Have students “turn and talk” after reading each paragraph. Have them share their interpretations of the material.
- Let students use highlight pens to review copies of historical documents and other materials.
- Read the material along with students by making a copy for the overhead projector.
- Pre-teach difficult vocabulary (documents may contain words that will be new to many students).
- Encourage students to use dictionaries and the Internet to research unfamiliar words or concepts.
- Have some students read the documents on tape so others can listen to them, if necessary.
- Encourage students to take notes as they read. After reading a sentence or two, tell them to write comments about the meaning of the text in the margin.

Group Discussions

- Before breaking a class into small groups, the teacher can lead a discussion identifying the central points in the lesson or readings. Students can be prompted to conduct their discussion around these points.
- Prior to small group discussions, the teacher can model different discussion strategies (e.g., questioning, active listening).
- Encourage students to adopt different roles within the groups (e.g., recorder, discussion leader).
- Give groups a short list of questions to address during their discussion.
- If some students do not speak or have limited speech, the group can conduct some of the discussion non-verbally. Students can draw some of their thoughts on butcher paper, for instance. Or students can record their responses on paper and the individual needing communication support can point to the ideas they find most interesting.

Writing

- Students may need a scribe to complete short in-class essays.
- Have students engage in a cooperative writing assignment, everyone adds one

sentence to a paragraph.

- Give students options for writing; allow them to use pencil/paper, computer, or even a typewriter.
- For certain writing requirements, teachers might give students a template or model to follow.
- Students can be paired to complete in-class writing assignments.
- Give pencil grips or markers to students who cannot hold a pencil easily.
- Allow students to draw pictures or use magazine photos instead of written words.
- Have students tell instead of show—let them verbalize thoughts instead of writing them.
- Give students more time to work; share the writing assignment with them ahead of time or give them a head start by writing the first few sentences for them.

General

- For certain lessons, students can be asked to design their own standards and criteria for assessment.
- Develop learning contracts with students who may want to do more complex or slightly different work on a given topic.
- For Internet exercises, some students might need to be given specific directions for searching the web (e.g., web addresses or search engines).
- For extra credit, students might be encouraged to conduct web searches; interview community experts; or examine literature and reference material for information related to the lessons.
- Give students choices during all lessons (e.g., work alone or with a partner, sit at your desk or on the floor, read the document or listen to it on tape).
- Give students many ways to understand the content of the documents—they might paraphrase what they read, act it out, or interview each other to learn how different people interpret the words.
- Give students background information before asking them to work with a document. If students are learning about P.T. Barnum, for instance, encourage them to read his biography.

Adapted from “Differentiated Instruction.” Center on Human Policy, Syracuse University, 2004.

Can be duplicated for classroom and other educational purposes.