

Differentiated Learning

[Current Collection of Tips](#)

- Get real. It's impossible to look at any classroom and pretend that all students are alike. Instead, focus on the differences that exist, [value the diversity](#), and **allow each student the opportunity to shine**. Teachers should be open to different approaches and strategies as long as students are able to explain their reasoning. Students want the chance to be original, resourceful, or ingenious.
- **Blend whole-class, group, and individual instruction.** It is more effective and efficient to use different strategies in different situations. When using groups, rotate students based on demonstrated knowledge, interest, and/or learning style preferences with the aim of moving all students to a higher level of achievement. Use the groups to set up learning activities that: teach new concepts, apply concepts previously learned, and also revisit skills not mastered.
- Be proactive. Embrace accountability. You as a teacher are responsible and obligated to plan a variety of ways to facilitate learning. Instruction may be differentiated in content, process, or product according to the students' readiness, interests, or learning style. Students must be able to express themselves in what they learn, how they learn it, and how they demonstrate their understanding. As you progress as a great teacher, you will **become more comfortable using multiple instructional strategies and a variety of representations** at the same time to increase the chances of reaching all students.
- Acknowledge that students have different learning styles, learn at different speeds, are at different comfort levels of thinking abstractly, and differ in abilities to make connections. **Offer choices and flexibility** in the classroom. When appropriate, set up learning centers to provide choices. Make sure the centers include varied activities such as skill practice, problem solving, manipulatives, games, working with technology such as computers or calculators, graphs and other visuals, and writing opportunities. This will provide for a more comfortable, engaging, and inviting learning environment for students with different levels of understanding and different interests.
- Never separate assessment from instruction; **rather integrate assessment into instruction by making informal assessments a way of life in your classroom.** In the classroom, focus on qualitative assessment more than quantitative assessment. It is imperative to get to know each student's achievement levels and strengths and weaknesses. Pre-assessment is a critical first step that should be used before designing any lesson. Don't assume what your students know or don't know; find out!
- **Get to know your students!** Outside of the classroom, keep up on your students' interests. Try to find time to make a basketball game or a theatre production to show that you are interested in them outside of mathematics class. In the classroom, use personal interest inventories regularly. Once you know your students' interests, you will be able to better create assignments that fit your students' interests. [Students will be more engaged in the learning if they feel it was developed around their interests.](#)
- [Use a variety of forms of assessment](#): formal tests, homework assignments, journals, discussions, and presentations. Equally important is that you follow through; **use the results of assessments to continuously plan lessons** on skills that are not yet mastered by your students.
- [Reflect](#) on lessons, projects, evaluations, and everything else that goes on in your classroom. **Focus on how you could modify lessons to better fit the students' needs and interests.**

- **Focus on the students!** It may be easier for you to lecture and assign drill and practice, but remember that your ultimate goal is to be in the best interest of your students' learning. Use more inquiry-based teaching practices and investigations.

- **Realize that teaching is evolutionary.** Great teaching doesn't happen overnight. It takes patience and consistent dedication. Focus on becoming comfortable differentiating one new lesson at a time. Your plan must include more than the content. You also will need a plan for managing time and keeping students focused. You may worry about disruptions, but in a collaborative learning environment, students will be more engaged and disruptions may decrease. Students are unique, so the same approaches aren't going to work year to year or even day to day. As teachers, we must monitor each learner, their learning, and make continuous adjustments.

- Take the time to briefly pre-teach or even re-teach to meet the needs of students before introducing new content goals. Use heterogeneous groups to facilitate a tutoring and mentoring relationship between students, but be careful not to overuse this strategy. **Hold students accountable for their own learning.** The more skilled students deepen their understanding by articulating concepts, and the less skilled have a chance to learn ideas from a different source. Sometimes a peer's words are easier to internalize and may be less intimidating than working one-on-one with the teacher.

- When differentiating your classroom, **don't leave out the gifted students.** Be cautious that you are assigning open-ended rich inquiry activities instead of more work or always using peer-tutoring and mentoring relationships. Differentiating should allow ALL students to be enriched. Differentiating is NOT adjusting the workload assigned based on ability levels or grading differently based on perceptions of students' capabilities.

- **Arrange your classroom in clusters to promote mathematical literacy.** Get your students comfortable with the norms associated with collaborative learning; it's a necessary prerequisite to differentiated instruction, and it also creates more opportunities for interaction. Imagine a teacher in a classroom of 32 students. In a 50 minute class period, she can't dedicate even two minutes to a student individually, but in groups of 4, she could dedicate more than 6 minutes to a group. Additionally, when working with one group, the other groups would be on task communicating and making progress.

- **Look for the new book *Good Questions: Great Ways to Differentiate Mathematics Instruction* available by the end of April.** To help K-8 teachers differentiate math instruction with less difficulty and greater success, this resource:
 - Underscores the rationale for differentiating math instruction.
 - Describes two universal, easy-to-implement strategies designed to overcome the problems that teachers encounter.
 - Offers almost 300 questions and tasks that teachers and coaches can adopt immediately, adapt, or use as models to create their own.
 - Includes Teaching Tips sidebars and an organizing template at the end of each chapter to help readers build new tasks and open questions.
 - Shows how to create a more inclusive classroom learning community with mathematical talk that engages participants from all levels

For additional resources on differentiated learning, including articles, visit the [Differentiated Instruction Resource Page](#).