



Differentiated Instruction Quick Guide

Differentiated instruction includes the efforts teachers make to respond to the diverse needs of learners in their classrooms. There are at least four broad categories of differentiation based upon student readiness, interests, or learning profiles: **content**, **process**, **product**, and **learning environment**.

Content	Examples
WHAT the student needs to learn or HOW the student will get access to the information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• using reading materials at varying readability levels• putting text materials on tape• using spelling or vocabulary lists at students' readiness levels• presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means• using reading buddies• meeting with small groups to reteach an idea or skill for struggling learners or extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners
Process	Examples
ACTIVITIES in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• using tiered activities through which all learners work with the same important understandings and skills but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity• providing interest centers that encourage students to explore subsets of the class topic of particular interest to them• developing personal agendas (i.e., task lists written by the teacher and containing both in-common work for the whole class and work that addresses individual needs of learners) to be completed either during specified agenda time or as students complete other work early• offering manipulatives or other hands-on supports for students who need them• varying the length of time students may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a struggling learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth



Products	Examples
<p>CULMINATING PROJECTS that ask students to REHEARSE, APPLY, and EXTEND what they have learned in a unit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • giving students options of how to express required learning (e.g., write a letter or develop a mural with labels) • using rubrics that match and extend students' varied skills levels • allowing students to work alone or in small groups on their products • encouraging students to create their own product assignments as long as they contain required elements

Learning Environment	Examples
<p>the way the classroom WORKS and FEELS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring there are places in the room to work quietly and without distraction as well as places that invite student collaboration • providing materials that reflect a variety of cultures and home settings • setting clear guidelines for independent work that matches individual needs • developing routines that allow students to get help when teachers are busy with other students and cannot help immediately • helping students understand that some learners need to move around to learn while others do better sitting quietly

Possible Differentiated Instruction Strategies		
Compacting	Learning contracts	Tiered assignments
Group investigation	Literature/study circles	Tiered products
Independent study	Small group instruction	Varied journal prompts
Interest groups	Supplementary materials	Varied organizers
Jigsaw	Task cards	Varied tasks

Excerpted from: Tomlinson, C. A. (August, 2000). Differentiation of instruction in the elementary grades. *ERIC Digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.