



## WHAT IS DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION?

At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of **teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom.**

Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.

# TEACHERS CAN DIFFERENTIATE AT LEAST FOUR CLASSROOM ELEMENTS BASED ON STUDENT READINESS, INTEREST, OR LEARNING PROFILE:

- 1. CONTENT** – what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information;
- 2. PROCESS** – activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content;
- 3. PRODUCTS** – culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit;
- 4. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT** – the way the classroom works and feels.

**DIFFERENTIATED  
INSTRUCTION**

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/what-differentiated-instruction>

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ON DISABILITIES

# DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

## 1. CONTENT

Examples of differentiating content at the elementary level include the following:

- Using reading materials at varying readability levels;
- Putting text materials on tape;
- Using spelling or vocabulary lists at readiness levels of students;
- Presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means;
- Using reading buddies; and
- Meeting with small groups to re-teach an idea or skill for struggling learners, or to extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners.

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## 2. PROCESS

Examples of differentiating process or activities at the elementary level include the following:

- 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 (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; and
- Varying the length of time a student 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.

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## 3. PRODUCTS

Examples of differentiating products at the elementary level include the following:

- Giving students options of how to express required learning (e.g., create a puppet show, 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; and
- Encouraging students to create their own product assignments as long as the assignments contain required elements.

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## 4. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Examples of differentiating learning environment at the elementary level include:

- Making sure 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 out 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 them immediately; and
- Helping students understand that some learners need to move around to learn, while others do better sitting quietly

(Tomlinson, 1995, 1999; Winebrenner, 1992, 1996).

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