

Differentiation Menu by Need

Practical differentiation strategies organized by student needs: EAL, SEND, advanced learners, and time-poor lessons.

PLANNING

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English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Content Modifications

Text Adaptations

- Provide bilingual glossaries for key terms
- Use graphic organizers with visual cues
- Offer texts at multiple reading levels
- Include picture books on grade-level topics
- Create vocab cards with images and L1 translation

Language Scaffolds

- Sentence starters for written responses
- Word banks for fill-in-the-blank activities
- Translation apps for complex concepts

- Peer partnerships with bilingual students
- Recording of instructions for playback

Process Adjustments

Speaking Opportunities

- Think-pair-share before whole group
- Small group discussions before presentations
- Option to respond in L1 first, then English
- Rehearsal time for oral responses
- Visual supports during speaking tasks

Writing Support

- Graphic organizers for essay structure
- Allow drawing to show understanding
- Accept responses in L1 with English summary
- Peer editing with language focus
- Extended time for written tasks

Product Options

Alternative Assessments

- Oral presentations with visual aids
- Demonstrate understanding through art/music
- Portfolio collection over time
- Peer teaching in small groups
- Digital storytelling with images

Cultural Note: Honor students' cultural knowledge as an asset, not a deficit.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Learning Disabilities

Reading Support

- Audio versions of texts
- Larger fonts and increased spacing

- Colored overlays to reduce visual stress
- Break longer texts into chunks
- Highlight key information

Writing Accommodations

- Word prediction software
- Graphic organizers for planning
- Scribe services for complex tasks
- Speech-to-text technology
- Alternative keyboards or writing tools

Math Modifications

- Manipulatives for abstract concepts
- Calculator use when appropriate
- Graph paper for organization
- Visual fraction models
- Real-world problem contexts

Attention and Focus Needs

Environmental Changes

- Preferential seating near teacher
- Fidget tools for kinesthetic needs
- Noise-canceling headphones available
- Movement breaks every 15-20 minutes
- Clear, clutter-free workspace

Task Modifications

- Break assignments into smaller chunks
- Use timers for work periods
- Provide checklists for multi-step tasks
- Allow standing or flexible seating
- Offer choice in task order

Behavioral Supports

- Visual schedules and routines
- Self-monitoring charts

- Clear expectations with examples
- Consistent consequences and rewards
- Social stories for challenging situations

Sensory Processing Needs

Sensory Breaks

- Quiet corner with soft lighting
- Sensory bin with varied textures
- Weighted lap pads or blankets
- Noise-reducing headphones
- Movement activities (wall push-ups, jumping)

Environmental Modifications

- Adjust lighting (avoid fluorescent when possible)
- Reduce auditory distractions
- Provide alternative seating options
- Use visual schedules and cues
- Offer sensory tools (stress balls, fidgets)

Advanced Learners

Depth and Complexity

Higher-Order Thinking

- Analyze patterns and relationships
- Evaluate multiple perspectives
- Create original solutions to problems
- Synthesize information from multiple sources
- Apply learning to novel situations

Independent Study Projects

- Student-chosen research topics
- Mentorship with community experts
- Creation of teaching materials for peers
- Real-world problem-solving
- Cross-curricular investigations

Acceleration Options

Curriculum Compacting

- Pre-assessment to identify mastery
- Skip repetitive practice activities
- Move to next level concepts
- Independent learning contracts
- Flexible pacing through units

Enrichment Activities

- Leadership roles in group projects
- Peer tutoring opportunities
- Extension menus with choice
- Creative challenges and competitions
- Technology integration projects

Product Differentiation

Creative Outputs

- Multimedia presentations
- Original games or simulations
- Artistic interpretations
- Written publications (blog, magazine)
- Community presentations

Avoid: Just giving more work. Focus on depth, not quantity.

Time-Poor Lesson Strategies

5-Minute Modifications

Quick Accommodations

- Pre-made sentence stems
- Partner instead of individual work
- Visual aids already prepared
- Choice boards for activity options
- Exit tickets instead of formal assessment

Technology Shortcuts

- QR codes linking to differentiated resources
- Pre-recorded instruction videos
- Digital graphic organizers
- Voice recording for responses
- Online collaboration tools

Flexible Grouping

Instant Groups

- Playing card sorting (hearts, diamonds, clubs, spades)
- Birth month groupings
- Count off by learning style
- Clock partners (pre-assigned)
- Color-coded name tags

Task Stations

- Must-do, should-do, could-do activities
- Choice boards with varying difficulty
- Learning contracts with options
- Tiered assignments by readiness
- Interest-based activity menus

Low-Prep Differentiation

Universal Strategies

- Think-pair-share (everyone included)
- Exit tickets with three difficulty levels
- Journal responses with prompts
- Sketch-to-stretch understanding
- One-minute partner teaching

Assessment Alternatives

- Thumbs up/down understanding check
- Traffic light self-assessment (red/yellow/green)
- Quick sketch of main idea
- Tell a neighbor summary

- Question generation instead of answers

Universal Design Principles

Multiple Means of Representation

- Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic input
- Various text formats and sizes
- Real-world examples and connections
- Multiple languages when possible
- Varied complexity levels

Multiple Means of Engagement

- Choice in topics or approaches
- Cultural relevance and connections
- Appropriate challenge level
- Clear goals and expectations
- Opportunities for collaboration

Multiple Means of Expression

- Writing, speaking, drawing, building
- Technology-enhanced presentations
- Performance and demonstration
- Portfolio collections
- Peer teaching opportunities

Quick Reference Planning Template

Before the Lesson:

1. What are my learning objectives?
2. What barriers might prevent student access?
3. What supports can I prepare in advance?
4. How can I offer choice?

During the Lesson:

1. Check for understanding frequently

2. Provide wait time for processing
3. Offer additional supports as needed
4. Encourage peer collaboration

After the Lesson:

1. What worked well?
2. Who needs additional support?
3. What can I adjust for next time?
4. How did students demonstrate learning?

Remember: Start small and build your differentiation toolkit over time. One new strategy per lesson is manageable and sustainable.