

Tiered Assignments

In a differentiated classroom, a teacher uses varied levels of tasks to ensure that students explore ideas and use skills at a level that builds on what they already know and encourages growth.

While students work at varied degrees of difficulty on their tasks, they all explore the same essential ideas and work at different levels of thought. Groups eventually come together to share and learn from each other.

Tiered assignments should be:

- Different work, not simply more or less work
- Equally active
- Equally interesting and engaging
- Fair in terms of work expectations and time needed
- Requiring the use of key concepts, skills, or ideas

Basic Tiered Activity Example: Completing a Character Map

Tier 1. (Low)

Describe:

- How the character looks
- What the character says
- How the character thinks or acts
- The most important thing to know about the character

Tier 2. (Middle)

Describe:

- What the character says or does
- What the character really means to say or do
- What goals does the character have
- What the character would mostly like us to know about him or her
- What changes the character went through

Tier 3. (High)

Describe:

- Clues the author gives us about the character
- Why the author gives these clues
- The author's bottom line about this character

Tiered Activities

Tiering can be based on challenge level, complexity, resources, outcome, process, or product. (Heacox, 2002)

1. Tiering by Challenge Level:

Use Bloom's taxonomy as a guide to develop tasks at various challenge levels.

Example:

Elementary activities for book talk presentations.

Lower levels of Blooms:

- List story elements (*knowledge*)
- Book summary (*comprehension*)
- Support a conclusion about a character with evidence from the book (*application*)

Higher levels of Blooms:

- Discuss the theme or author's purpose for writing the book (*analysis*)
- Create a new ending for the story (*synthesis*)
- Critique the author's writing and support your opinion (*evaluation*)

2. Tiering by Complexity:

When you tier by complexity, you provide varied tasks that address a student's level of readiness, from introductory levels to more abstract, less concrete, advanced work. Be careful to provide advanced work to the higher level student, rather than just more work.

Example:

After whole group class reading of a current events issue in the *Time for Kids* magazine such as global warming, students complete a related activity differentiated by complexity.

Tier one: Students are asked to write a public service announcement using jingles, slogans, or art to convey why global warming is a problem and what people can do to prevent it.

Tier two: Students conduct a survey of peer awareness and understanding of global warming. They design a limited number of questions and decide how to report their results such as with charts or in a newscast.

Tier three: Students debate the issue about the seriousness of global warming, each side expressing a different viewpoint. They must provide credible evidence to support their opinions and arguments.

3. Tiering by Resources:

Use materials at various reading levels and complexity to tier by resources. Students using tiered resources may be engaged in the same activity, (such as find five examples of contributions made by Native Americans), or they may be working on a different, but related activity. (such as one group researching plants of the desert, while another researches animals of the desert).

4. Tiering by Outcome:

Students all use the same materials, but what they do with the materials is different.

Example: Pattern block Math

Tier one: Identify all the ways you can group your pattern blocks.

Tier two: Identify all the different patterns you can make with your pattern blocks.

Tier three: Create a bar graph to show all the different kinds of pattern blocks in your bag.

5. Tiering by Process:

Students work on the same outcomes, but use a different process to get there.

Example: What are the characteristics of a hero?

Tier one: Make a chart of specific heroes and what they did to make them become a hero.

Tier two: Choose two or three heroes and compare them in a Venn diagram.

Tier three: List personal characteristics exhibited by heroes and rank them from most to least important.

6. Tiering by Product:

Groups are formed based on learning preference, using Gardner's multiple intelligences.

Example: For a unit on the solar system, Study of rotation and revolution of the earth.

Tier one: Create a flip book, diagram, or model showing the rotation of the earth around the sun (visual-spatial)

Tier two: Position and move three people to demonstrate the concept of revolution and rotation of the earth with respect to the moon and sun. (bodily-kinesthetic)

Tier three: Make a timeline of a year detailing the position of the New Hampshire with respect to the sun. (logical-mathematical)

References:

Heacox, D. (2002). *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

Tomlinson, C. (1999). *The Differentiated Classroom, Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, (ASCD).

Tiered Activity Resources:

For more ideas and specific tiered activities that you can use in your classroom, check out the following resources, available in the PACE department at Derry Village School:

Coil, C. (2004). *Standards-Based Activities and Assessments for the Differentiated Classroom*. Pieces of Learning.

Davidson, K. and T. Decker. (2006). *Bloom's and Beyond: Higher Level Questions and Activities for the Creative Classroom*. Pieces of Learning.

Heacox, D. (2002). *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

Tomlinson, C. (2003). *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, (ASCD).

Witherell, N. and M. McMackin. (2002). *Graphic Organizers and Activities for Differentiated Instruction in Reading*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

The following web sites can provide further information and examples.

Best Practices: Instructional Strategies and Techniques

http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/bestpractice/tiered/index.html

Tiered Lesson Plans

<http://www.manhattan.k12.ca.us/staff/pware/diff/>

Tiered Curriculum Project

http://www.doe.state.in.us/exceptional/gt/tiered_curriculum/welcome.html

