**Differentiated Instructional Strategies:**

**Readiness / Ability**

Teachers can use a variety of assessments to determine a student's ability or readiness. Also, to learn new concepts students may be generally working below or above grade level or they may simply be missing necessary prerequisite skills.

However, readiness is constantly changing and as readiness changes it is important that students be permitted to move between different groups (see flexible grouping).  Activities for each group are often differentiated by complexity. Students whose understanding is below grade level will work at tasks inherently less complex than those attempted by more advanced students. Those students whose reading level is below grade level will benefit by reading with a buddy or listening to stories/instructions using a tape recorder so that they receive information verbally.

Varying the level of questioning (and consequent thinking skills) and compacting the curriculum and are useful strategies for accommodating differences in ability or readiness.

**Adjusting Questions**

During large group discussion activities, teachers direct the higher level questions to the students who can handle them and adjust questions accordingly for student with greater needs. All students are answering important questions that require them to think but the questions are targeted towards the student’s ability or readiness level.

An easy tool for accomplishing this is to put posters on the classroom walls with key words that identify the varying levels of thinking. For example I used to put 6 posters on my walls (based on Bloom's taxonomy) one for Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. These were useful cues for me when conducting class discussions and useful for my students when they were required to develop their own research questions. Different students may be referred to different posters at certain times depending on ability, readiness or assignment requirements.

With written quizzes the teacher may assign specific questions for each group of students. They all answer the same number of questions but the complexity required varies from group to group. However, the option to go beyond minimal requirements can be available for any or all students who demonstrate that they require an additional challenge for their level.

**Compacting Curriculum**

Compacting the curriculum means assessing a student’s knowledge, skills and attitudes and providing alternative activities for the student who has already mastered curriculum content.  This can be achieved by pre-testing basic concepts or using performance assessment methods. Students who demonstrate that they do not require instruction move on to tiered problem solving activities while others receive instruction.

**Tiered Assignments**

Tiered activities are a series of related tasks of varying complexity. All of these activities relate to essential understanding and key skills that students need to acquire.  Teachers assign the activities as alternative ways of reaching the same goals taking into account individual student needs.

**Acceleration/Deceleration**

Accelerating or decelerating the pace that students move through curriculum is another method of differentiating instruction.  Students demonstrating a high level of competence can work through the curriculum at a faster pace. Students experiencing difficulties may need adjusted activities that allow for a slower pace in order to experience success.

**Flexible Grouping**

As student performance will vary it is important to permit movement between groups.  Student’s readiness varies depending on personal talents and interests, so we must remain open to the concept that ***a student may be below grade level in one subject at the same time as being above grade level in another subject.***

Flexible grouping allows students to be appropriately challenged and avoids labeling a student's readiness as static. Students should not be kept in a static group for any particular subjects, as their learning will probably accelerate from time to time.

Even highly talented students can benefit from flexible grouping. Often they benefit from work with intellectual peers, while occasionally in another group they can experience being a leader. In either case peer-teaching is a valuable strategy for group-work.

**Peer Teaching**

Occasionally a student may have personal needs that require one-on-one instruction that go beyond the needs of his or her peers. After receiving this extra instruction the student could be designated as the "resident expert" for that concept or skill and can get valuable practice by being given the opportunity to re-teach the concept to peers. In these circumstances both students benefit.

**Learning Profiles/Styles**

Another filter for assigning students to tasks is by [learning style](http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/styles.html), such as adjusting preferred environment (quiet, lower lighting, formal/casual seating etc.) or learning modality: auditory (learns best by hearing information) visual (learns best through seeing information in charts or pictures)  or kinesthetic preferences (learns best by using concrete examples, or may need to move around while learning) or through personal interests. Since student motivation is also a unique element in learning, understanding individual learning styles and interests will permit teachers to apply appropriate strategies for [developing intrinsic motivational techniques](http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/motivation.html).

**Student Interest**

Interest surveys are often used for determining student interest. Brainstorming for subtopics within a curriculum concept and using semantic webbing to explore interesting facets of the concept is another effective tool. This is also an effective way of teaching students how to focus on a manageable subtopic. [Mindmanager](http://www.mindman.com) / ([http://Mindjet.com](http://mindjet.com)) and [Inspiration](http://www.strategictransitions.com/index.html) are two very useful software applications that can facilitate the teacher in guiding students through exploring a concept and focusing on manageable and personally interesting subtopics.

**Reading Buddies**

This strategy is particularly useful for younger students and/or students with reading difficulties. Children get additional practice and experience reading away from the teacher as they develop fluency and comprehension.   It is important that students read with a specific purpose in mind and then have an opportunity to discuss what was read.  It is not necessary for reading buddies to always be at the same reading level. Students with varying word recognition, word analysis and comprehension skills can help each other be more successful. Adjusted follow up tasks are also assigned based on readiness level.

**Independent Study Projects**

Independent Study is a research project where students learn how to develop the skills for independent learning. The degree of help and structure will vary between students and depend on their ability to manage ideas, time and productivity. A modification of the independent study is the buddy-study.

**Buddy-Studies**

A buddy-study permits two or three students to work together on a project. The expectation is that all may share the research and analysis/organization of information but each student must complete an individual product to demonstrate learning that has taken place and be accountable for their own planning, time management and individual accomplishment

**Learning Contracts**

A learning contract is a written agreement between teacher and student that will result in students working independently. The contract helps students to set daily and weekly work goals and develop management skills. It also helps the teacher to keep track of each student’s progress. The actual assignments will vary according to specific student needs.

**Learning Centers**

Learning Centers have been used by teachers for a long time and may contain both differentiated and compulsory activities. However a learning centre is not necessarily differentiated unless the activities are varied by complexity taking in to account different student ability and readiness. It is important that students understand what is expected of them at the learning centre and are encouraged to manage their use of time. The degree of structure that is provided will vary according to student independent work habits. At the end of each week students should be able to account for their use of time.

**Carol Anne Tomlinson’s book The Differentiated Classroom** and ASCD’s videotape kit Differentiating Instruction (VT 7600) list the following additional strategy for differentiating learning in a mixed ability classroom.

**Anchoring Activities**

This may be a list of activities that a student can do to at any time when they have completed present assignments or it can be assigned for a short period at the beginning of each class as students organize themselves and prepare for work. These activities may relate to specific needs or enrichment opportunities, including problems to solve or journals to write. They could also be part of a long-term project that a student is working on. These activities may provide the teacher with time to provide specific help and small group instruction to students requiring additional help to get started.  Students can work at different paces but always have productive work they can do. Some time ago these activities may have been called seat-work, and should not be confused with busy-work. ***These activities must be worthy of a student’s time and appropriate to their learning needs.***