

P-4: Differentiate your plans to fit your students

Differentiate How You Ask Students to Apply or Show Mastery of Content (the Product)

Once you have determined the ways in which your students differ by readiness, interest, or learning profile, you address these differences by individualizing your instruction to them. By varying the product you ask them to create, you can vary how students demonstrate what they've learned, including culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what was learned in a unit. The products you assign can vary based on students' readiness, interests and learning profile. For example, to vary products by:

- **Readiness:** Assign different products to different students based on their varying levels of comprehension. Use rubrics that measure and reflect students' varied skills levels
- **Interest:** Give students options of how to express required learning (e.g., write a letter, develop a mural with labels, create and sing a rap explaining a scientific process). Encourage students to create their own product assignments as long as the assignments contain required elements. If an objective states that a student will be able to identify the climax of a story, a student could choose to write a description or draw a picture.
- **Learning Profile:** One student may prefer to draw a graphic representation of three branches of government; another may prefer to give a speech explaining it.

Recognizing that there is more than one way to meet an objective, teachers often provide “menus” of products so that students can select the way in which they can exhibit mastery of the objective. Note: Giving students academic choices (see I-2) is also a key strategy of building student investment, and there is considerable overlap between these two strategies.

Here are some of the methods that can be used to vary the instructional products your assign to your students.

Strategies to Vary the Product	
Orbitals	Students conduct independent investigations generally lasting 3-6 weeks. The investigations “orbit” or revolve around some facet of the curriculum.
Alternative assessments	After completing a learning experience via the same content or process, the student may have a choice of products to show what has been learned. This differentiation creates possibilities for students who excel in different modalities over others (verbal versus visual, for example). For examples, see the Tools section.
Modified Assessments	Assessments can be modified in a variety of ways – for example by formatting the document differently (e.g. more space between questions) or by using different types of questions (matching vs. open ended) or by asking only the truly essential questions. For examples, see the Tools section.
Independent Projects	Independent projects support the needs of all students, as they can be modified on an individual basis with regard to content/skill, length, type of presentation, etc. Whether you assign an independent project to one or all of your students, it is important to clearly outline the criteria for a successful project, draft a clear timeline of expectations and provide constant feedback to students along the way. For examples, see below.

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<p>Menu of products</p>	<p>Since the hardest part about differentiated instruction is preparation, start small – with a low-investment technique like allowing students to choose from a list product options to demonstrate their knowledge of objectives.</p> <p>Example: If your objective was for students to describe the effects of the Civil War, allow students to write a ballad as a Confederate soldier or widow, write an essay or draft a skit, as long as the end product effectively described the effects of the Civil War according to your criteria.</p>
<p>Jigsaw Activity</p>	<p>The jigsaw technique allows you to tackle the same subject with all of your students while discreetly providing them the different tools they need to get there.</p> <p>To reach the learning objective with students of different literacy levels, group students based on their reading proficiency, divide a given topic into pieces (the economic, political and social impact of the Civil War, for example), and find an appropriate text for each group to learn about one of the areas of study. Students later get into heterogeneous groups to share their findings with their peers, who have read about different areas of study from source texts on their own reading levels.</p> <p>For a high school example, see below.</p>

Independent Project Examples

- Perhaps you have a student who often finishes his student practice in half the time it takes other students. You might want to work with that student to create an individual research project he can work on while others are finishing the regular assignment. For example, perhaps you have a student for whom your measurement unit is simply a waste of time. You might consider designing an independent project that would culminate with that student presenting a more sophisticated measurement concept or process to the rest of the class.
- Perhaps you have a student who has a specific deficit in his prerequisite knowledge. In this case, you might develop an independent project for this student that will address his skill development and also allow you to continue to instruct the rest of the class.
- Perhaps you want all students to work on a project, yet you recognize the need to vary the length and type of presentation depending on each student's current ability level.
- If some of your math students score a 100 percent on your fractions diagnostic test while others are clearly struggling, prepare an independent study project (one idea: compare the ratio of ads to news in different newspapers and figure out which paper is a better deal) for your advanced learners while providing direct instruction for those who need more guidance. This approach does not suggest precluding the latter group of students from hands-on learning or discouraging them from pursuing engaging projects, but it does mean tailoring instruction to move them forward.

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Jigsaw Activity: High School Example

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Mr. Watts thinks his 10th graders are ready for some independent study, but he knows they need a substantial structure in place to keep them sufficiently on-task. He decides to apply the Jigsaw method to an activity exploring the history of the Civil War. He divides his 28 students into seven groups of four intentionally distributing those who he knows will be effective leaders, those who he thinks will be exceptionally passionate about the topic and those who he assumes will need the most support. Each person in the group is allowed to select one topic: Slavery, Industrialization, Battles and Key Players. For two weeks, students will alternate working independently, working with their groups of four, and working with the other six students who share their topic. Throughout the two weeks he meets with both the four-person groups and the seven-person groups to track progress, and also meets individually with students who request assistance or with those he suspects need more guidance.

Mr. Watts presents several films to the class at large, both documentaries and dramas, and his students are required to take substantial notes on content that relates to their topic. He has set up four learning centers, one for each topic, with numerous resources for the students to access, such as first person slave accounts; biographies of key generals, politicians, and suffragists; and war maps. After two weeks of research has been conducted, each group is required to make a formal presentation of its findings. Specific requirements are detailed, but the style and type of presentation may vary. The groups are given a week of class time to create and polish their presentations.