

Differentiated Assessment



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“Assessment informs practice, and we take action.”

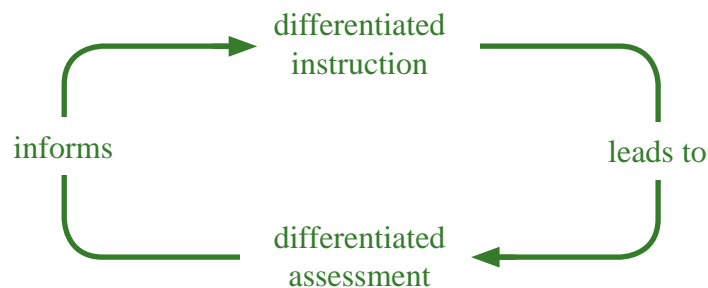
– Rick Wormeli in *Fair Isn't Always Equal: Assessing and Grading in the Differentiated Classroom*.¹

In a differentiated classroom, assessment is a rich ongoing source of information to help plan meaningful learning activities, establish organizational and grouping structures and mold the classroom environment. Assessment supports the learning process by helping teachers identify and begin to address student strengths and needs. It is ongoing and responsive, changing over the course of a unit in response to student growth and development. It serves multiple purposes—assessment for instructional planning, assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning.

Differentiated classrooms, therefore, require what Wiggins and McTighe (2005) describe as a “photo album” approach to assessment, as opposed to a “snapshot” approach. An assessment photo album relates to instruction through the following two reciprocal processes.

- **Differentiated assessment informs differentiated instruction.**
Differentiated assessment provides information about each student’s readiness, strengths and needs in relation to particular outcomes or activities. This information shapes your planning.
- **Differentiated instruction leads to differentiated assessment.**
In a differentiated classroom, students work toward learning outcomes at different paces and in different ways. As a result, you will need assessment tools and strategies that accommodate diversity while still usefully measuring learning outcomes.

Differentiated assessment means selecting tools and strategies to provide each student with the best opportunity to demonstrate his or her learning. As you get to know your students, and as student differences emerge, assessment naturally becomes more differentiated, because its purpose is to meet students where they are and to coach them to the next step. In this way, assessment and instruction continue to support and inform each other.



1. From *Fair Isn't Always Equal: Assessing and Grading in the Differentiated Classroom* (p. 30) by Rick Wormeli, copyright ©2006, with permission of Stenhouse Publishers.

Moving toward differentiated assessment

Like differentiated instruction, differentiated assessment is based on the reality that the needs of students cannot all be met in the same way. Successfully meeting student needs involves using your understanding of each student to guide your selection of a reasonable range of assessment tools and strategies. The goal is not to have an individualized assessment plan for each student, but to have a manageable class assessment plan that is flexible enough to accommodate a range of student needs.

The following scenarios illustrate sample ways of moving toward differentiated assessment practices in different contexts.

Supporting students with learning difficulties

A student with learning disabilities has a goal in his individualized program plan (IPP) that points toward the use of particular assessment tools and strategies. The teacher sees the potential of these practices for some of the other students in the classroom, who do not have a diagnosed learning disability but appear to have some similar learning needs. The teacher uses similar assessment methods with these students.

Rethinking grading practices

A teacher is rethinking his grading and reporting practices. He sees that he has been using a one-size-fits-all approach that does not consider individual student readiness, interests or learning preferences. He redesigns his grading and reporting practices to include some student choice, different supports for different students as required, opportunities for students to better their performance on major assessment tasks, and some flexibility in the timing of major assessment tasks.

Assessment-for-learning practices

A teacher adopts a number of assessment-for-learning strategies and realizes two things. First, assessment-for-learning practices (such as the use of exit slips to determine students' level of understanding after an activity) help identify student strengths and needs and, therefore, support differentiated instruction and assessment. Second, some assessment-for-learning strategies (such as having students keep growth portfolios, learning logs and reflective journals) are, by their nature, already differentiated assessment since these strategies provide students with choice and a broader scope for how they can respond.

Facilitating metacognition

A teacher is pursuing one of Alberta's Teacher Quality Standards: "... [teachers] help students develop the ability to diagnose their own learning needs and to assess their progress toward learning goals." He has reviewed the programs of study for the subjects he teaches and identifies metacognition, including goal setting, choice, self-assessment and reflection, as an important underpinning of the curriculum. He realizes that using a more personalized assessment practice is an important way to encourage his students to reflect on their learning processes and needs.

You can use assessment-before-learning, (sometimes called pre-assessment or diagnostic assessment), to help plan effective instruction at the start of a new term or unit. Instructional decisions can be improved by having early information about student:

- readiness
- interests
- learning preferences
- background knowledge
- existing understandings.

Consider the two scenarios below.

- A teacher is preparing for a new term. Several of her students have portfolios created over the last year, several others have learner profiles, and one has an individualized program plan (IPP). The teacher reviews all of this information and develops a preliminary instruction plan for the first unit of study. She also creates a pre-assessment plan to gather information from the remaining students in the class. This plan might include an interest inventory and doing a short survey to identify preferred learning preferences.
- A teacher has his science class complete a pre-test for the next unit in order to fine-tune his planning for the opening learning activities.

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Learner profiles and pre-testing are two types of assessment you can use for instructional planning.

Learner profiles

Learner profiles can help you to understand and track your students' unique learning journeys. As a student progresses through the grades, a wealth of information can be amassed about his or her achievements, interests, learning preferences and general strengths and needs. Much of this information does not need to be rediscovered each year.

You can use a variety of strategies to assemble student profiles, such as:

- reviewing profiles and files of student work
- conferencing with each student
- conferencing with parents
- administering interest, learning preferences and other inventories
- consulting with previous teachers.

You can use the contents of individual learner profiles to create various types of class profiles and to plan for differentiated instruction. For more information on creating and using learner and class profiles, see *Chapter 3: Developing Learner Profiles*.

Pre-testing

Pre-testing is a way to determine ahead of time what understandings and levels of readiness students have regarding a particular topic. Pre-tests are generally administered well before a topic is introduced, to help you answer the following types of questions.

- How much prior knowledge or experience do students have?
- What level of achievement and readiness do students have?
- Are any students missing the skills or understandings they need to learn this material?
- Will students need help to overcome any misconceptions about this topic?

The information gathered from pre-tests can help you make decisions and differentiate instruction in the following areas:

- pacing of instruction for the whole class or for small groups
- how much time to spend on review
- how to schedule assessment of achievement
- flexible grouping of students
- tiering assignments
- acceleration.

In addition to supporting differentiated instruction, pre-testing can itself be differentiated, since it can enable students of various abilities and with varied experience to best show some of what they know. For example, one student may not know the details or have the vocabulary but might understand some key concepts in the subject. Another may have a lot of general knowledge, but also have significant misconceptions. Use a range of question types, from knowledge and recall to evaluation and even speculation, to allow a range of students' understanding to emerge. Open-ended questions, such as "Write what you know about..." also can allow more students to respond.

Assessment *for* learning seeks to gather information to meet not only an assessment purpose, but also an instructional purpose. The instructional purposes of assessment *for* learning include:

- to help students connect different learning experiences (e.g., the "cubing" strategy can help students use their prior knowledge to look at a topic from different points-of-view; in this strategy an 8-sided cube has a different perspective or type of task printed on each face and a student chooses one or more of these prompts to complete a task)
- to engage students in learning or create a context for learning (e.g., the "jot-pair-share" strategy can help create conversations between students about a topic as they jot down the main idea of a presentation, share what they wrote with a partner and then with whole class)

- to remind students of essential skills or knowledge (e.g., asking “How does the design of the structure you have built affect its strength?” reminds students that, although they have enjoyed decorating their structures, the main expectation is that they will understand the principles of strength in structures)
- to provide immediate feedback and model strategies that help students to improve their own learning (e.g., using an “exit slip” strategy encourages students to habitually ask themselves questions like, “What have I learned?,” “What am I learning?” or “What could I learn next?” and write their responses to these questions and give them to the teacher as they leave the classroom at the end of the class).

Assessment *for* learning

Assessment *for* learning (also called formative assessment) can include pre-assessments (which in addition to supporting planning also can motivate students and activate prior understandings and knowledge), ongoing assessment and other strategies. Ongoing assessment strategies quickly gather information from all students in the class. Other assessment *for* learning strategies are focused on articulating the learning of individual students, both for the teacher’s and student’s benefit. These strategies are differentiated by nature because they deal with the unique qualities of each student.

There are a number of assessment strategies that allow all students in the class to be assessed quickly and often simultaneously, providing you with assessment information you can use immediately to adjust the difficulty, pacing and other factors in a lesson. Ongoing assessment strategies typically have a narrow focus on a single skill or concept, and are not appropriate for assessing complex understandings or integrated skills.

Assessment *for* learning strategies typically have the following characteristics.

- **Informal**—The setting does not resemble that of a test and requires no standardizing. For example, in the simplest form of ongoing assessment, teachers use focused observation to listen to and watch their students at work in order to determine if and how they are learning. In the “K-W-L” strategy, students simply add things they know or want to know to the columns of an ongoing chart labelled “what I know”, “what I want to know” and “what I learned.”
- **Focused on learning**—Students can expect that when they do not meet a goal, they will soon have an opportunity to meet it. For example, students use a “traffic light” graphic to indicate “Green—I understand this. I’m good to go.”, “Yellow—I need to go a little slower to better understand.” and “Red—Stop, I need help!” By choosing Green, Yellow or Red to represent their learning, students self-report their current level of understanding so teachers can use this information to inform upcoming instruction.

- **High response**—All students are expected to respond within a short period of time. For example, with the “response cards” strategy, the teacher asks a question and all students write a response. Simply by walking around the room the teacher can quickly see who is responding correctly and can use the opportunity to do some on-the-spot prompting and teaching for students who need it.
- **Foster metacognition**—Students self-assess and reflect on what they have learned and on how they learn. For example, students may be asked to complete an “exit slip” at the end of class. This is an opportunity for them to reflect on their own learning, record their reflections and then pass this written record to the teacher as they exit from the classroom.

What assessment *for* learning strategies you use will depend on your existing knowledge about your students, as well as the specific purpose for the assessment and where in the activity the assessment will occur; e.g., at the beginning, in the middle or at the end.

	Position in the learning activity		
	Beginning	Middle/During	End
Example of assessment purpose	To find out whether students have retained a skill learned in a previous activity.	To find out if the remainder of the learning activity should be restructured to accommodate differing learning needs.	To find out the extent to which students have overcome a misconception common to the topic.
Example of instructional purpose	To help students recall what they learned in the previous activity and to remind them of an expectation.	To help students remain engaged in the learning, and to take ownership for their own learning	To help students bring closure to the activity and to focus on a big idea.
Sample strategy	“Response cards”	“Post a point”	“Exit slip”

Planning for assessment

Planning for assessments *for* learning is part of short-range planning, as the strategies are directly related to current learning activities and outcomes. The following steps suggest a process for using assessment *for* learning strategies. In some cases, you might run through all six of these steps in a few minutes, while in others, it might take a more extended time.

1. Determine the purpose

The purpose of collecting assessment *for* learning information is to help inform decisions about how to teach next. In a differentiated classroom, the decisions that could be influenced include those identified by Dodge (2005):

- setting up groups
- pacing the activities
- framing and phrasing questions
- determining what kind of review will be required
- timing the assessments.

Before selecting an strategy, anticipate the results and consider the implications. For example:

- Will you change your plans for the learning activity if it emerges that half your students have not retained a necessary skill from the last activity?
- What will you do if all except two students have retained the skill?

Assessment *for* learning assessment results also can, under some circumstances, be repurposed to evaluate learning. For example, if students demonstrate their achievement of a learning outcome during the course of an activity, you may choose to make a record of this event as evidence of achievement.

2. Establish a focus

A busy classroom contains so much potential assessment information that even a full-time observer could not record it all. Decide what assessment information you need to help with your instructional decision making, and then select an assessment strategy that will focus on that in an efficient way. The following guidelines may be helpful.

- **Focus on learning outcomes.** Consider what students are expected to know and be able to do related to the specific learning outcome. For example, asking students the name of the interpreter from yesterday's social studies field trip does not form the basis of an assessment strategy. A question for ongoing assessment would be, "How is listening to a senior citizen interpret an historic site an example of research?"
- **Focus on sequential learning.** Identify any outcomes that act as a critical step in a sequence. In other words, students really should not proceed until they have achieved this outcome, or really need to proceed because they have achieved it. These outcomes should be the focus of an assessment *for* learning strategy.

3. Select and use the strategy

Consider the following guidelines when choosing an assessment strategy.

- **Choose a strategy that aligns with the purpose and focus for collecting the information.** Ensure that the strategy actually assesses what you are aiming to assess.
- **Pick a strategy that students enjoy.** Students often enjoy informal ongoing assessment strategies because they are quick, engaging and low risk. Varying strategies adds to the novelty and enjoyment.
- **Determine when the information is needed.** If the information is needed right away, then the strategy must provide student responses that you can use immediately, such as the “response cards” strategy used with one-word answers. If the information is needed for an upcoming learning activity, and if a more complex response is required from students, use the “exit slip” strategy or another strategy that allows you to read and interpret student responses after the activity.
- **Decide how much time can be afforded.** Assessment strategies do take time, and it is important to allow enough time to make them effective. Completing an “exit slip” may well take five minutes, and so the learning activity must wrap up in time to make it possible.
- **Decide how students could demonstrate understanding.** Many strategies can be used to tap into either knowledge or application, depending on the questions that are asked of students. For example, asking students to answer questions about a new concept demonstrates knowledge, but giving them an opportunity to apply the knowledge by solving a problem or creating an example provides richer information.
- **Vary the strategies used.** An ongoing assessment strategy should help each student quickly bring his or her understanding to the forefront, so that it is apparent to the student and to you. The means by which students demonstrate their understanding should not be an obstacle. For example, a student who has weak writing skills may not be able to quickly demonstrate his or her understanding by writing a response. To minimize this effect, rotate through assessment strategies that vary the way in which students respond.

4. Record the results

The high response nature of many assessment *for* learning strategies means that they generate information that tends to be rapid fire. Responses come quickly and from many or all students. This sudden splash of information has to be captured if it is to be used. However, the information gathered may have a short shelf life, in that it is used to make an immediate instructional decision and is then no longer useful. As a result, you may often simply capture and

hold the information in your working memory for the few seconds it takes to make an instructional decision. At other times, you may decide to retain the information, for any of the following reasons:

- to add to a formative assessment record; e.g., to help document a student’s progress
- to plan differentiation strategies for upcoming learning activities; e.g., to set up groups
- to improve instruction for future students; e.g., to make a “note to self” about what to do differently next time you present these learning activities.

The most common formats for records of assessment *for* learning are notes, tallies and checklists.

5. Interpret the results and take action

Formative assessment is valuable only to the extent that the information is used. In this final step, go back to your original purpose and adjust your teaching based on the results you received.

The following vignette illustrates how a teacher uses a step-by-step process, ending in the interpreting of results and the plan for action.

Step 1—It’s the end of a mathematics activity focused on multiplying values that have exponents. Ms. E would like to know if students are ready to move on to further work with exponents. She wants to check for understanding.

Step 2—Ms. E thinks that most students understand the concept but anticipates that possibly six or seven students still have some confusion. If this turns out to be true, Ms. E has decided that she will provide an in-class tutorial if there are five or more students who need more instruction, but will work one-on-one for 30-minute blocks at lunchtime if there are four or less students who need additional teaching.

Step 3—Ms. E selects the “exit slip” strategy that asks students to demonstrate their understanding and also to reflect on it. They will write down the solution to a problem, show their work, explain the thinking behind their answer in three to four sentences, and also note what they find hard or easy about this type of problem.

Step 4—Students take the last 10 minutes of class to complete their exit slips and give the cards to Ms. E as they leave. At lunchtime, she sifts through the cards and identifies four students who are still unsure of this concept. She uses a checklist to record her findings.

Step 5—On the cards of these students, Ms. E writes an invitation to make an appointment with her for extra coaching some time over the next week.

Individual assessment

In addition to strategies that allow a whole-class response, assessment *for* learning can occur through various strategies focused on the learning of individual students. Students can use this individualized information to reflect on their own progress, to understand themselves better as learners, to set goals, to make plans, to make choices and to prepare to demonstrate their achievement. Consider the following elements for individualizing assessment to support student learning.

- **Metacognition**—Assessment strategies that focus on metacognition encourage students to think about their own learning preferences and processes and to transfer new understandings and skills. They also encourage students to discuss and demonstrate their learning with peers, parents and teachers.
- **Strategic questioning**—Questions are at the heart of most assessments, and so your ability to ask good questions is critical. Black et al. (2004) note that questions should “raise issues about which the teacher needs information or about which the students need to think” (p. 13). Black et al. (2004) also stress the importance of allowing students time to answer questions, explaining that increased wait time gives students the time they need to think and shows that the teacher believes everyone will have an answer.
- **Varied assessment activities**—Students can demonstrate their learning by writing, making, doing and saying; within these four modalities there are many possibilities for different kinds of expression and production. Varying assessment tasks will provide you and your students with a more accurate picture of student learning.
- **Student choice**—Providing students with options for assessment is an important way to increase their motivation, self-awareness and responsibility for their own learning. For more information on providing choice, see *Chapter 5: Differentiated Learning Experiences*.
- **Feedback**—Providing informative, corrective and timely feedback is an important way of supporting and guiding student development. To be most effective, feedback should refer back to learning outcomes, be specific and descriptive, and encourage self-correcting strategies.

What this can look like

Many strategies for individual assessment, such as learning logs and conferences, are differentiated by nature, because they are flexible enough to deal with the unique qualities of each student. Individual assessment strategies might include the following.

- Group or individual conferencing sessions in which students discuss their learning with the teacher.
- Peer-assessment and self-assessment tasks, including rubrics.
- Learning logs and journals.
- Small questions focusing on knowledge or a skill. For example, a unit or course reaches a point where it is critical for students to know the meaning of the term “The Renaissance”, and so the teacher creates a question to check students’ current ability to define it.
- Big questions focusing on an essential understanding. For example, it may be critical for further progress that students understand how Renaissance Europe formed the basis for the worldview of the western world, and so the teacher frames a question to check students’ current understanding of this idea.
- A variety of options for student products, projects and learning tasks.
 - *Writing*—point form, outline, graphic organizer, sentence, paragraph, structured passage
 - *Making*—sketch, visual portrayal, model
 - *Doing*—performance, demonstration of skill, routine, procedure, decision making, problem solving
 - *Saying*—discussing, debating, conferencing, skit, role-play
- Varied assessment activities that use multiple intelligences as a framework; for example, asking students to:
 - discover and manipulate materials (bodily-kinesthetic)
 - present an oral story illustrating new information in context (verbal-linguistic)
 - introduce new terms in a graphic organizer (logical-mathematical)
 - complete a freewrite on a topic (verbal-linguistic)
 - turn to a partner and discuss (interpersonal)
 - draw a diagram to make the information memorable (visual)
 - write journal entries from a particular point of view (intrapersonal)
 - role-play a possible scenario (bodily-kinesthetic)
 - write a children’s book about the topic (verbal-linguistic).

- “Tic Tac Toe” strategy—A number of individual assessment activities are displayed on a grid pattern, one task per box. Students select activities along a row, column or diagonal. The teacher ensures that each combination contains the variety of assessment activities needed to provide an accurate picture of student learning.

Assessment of learning

Assessment *of* learning (sometimes called summative assessment) is the process of collecting and interpreting information to judge student achievement against predetermined criteria for the purposes of grading and reporting. Assessment *of* learning occurs at benchmark points in learning, such as the end of a unit or chunk of learning.

Consider the following examples of differentiating assessment *of* learning.

- Some students in a class choose to demonstrate their learning by writing a report, while others choose to create a poster, and still others choose an oral presentation.
- A teacher provides text-to-speech software and a digital version of the test to a student who has significant difficulty reading the questions in a social studies test.
- A teacher discards some marks collected early in the semester for a student who got off to a bad start but subsequently made strong progress.

Differentiating the selection and use of assessment information

Differentiating assessment involves rethinking the standard practice of having all students do the same assessment tasks at the same time, regardless of their individual learning needs or the learning they have already demonstrated. Rather, in this new paradigm, teachers customize the selection and use of assessment information to reflect each student’s highest level of achievement. For example, you might:

- review the evidence you have collected for each student and select a sample that best represents each student’s achievement
- discard outlying information that conflicts with consistent evidence, as well as information from early assessments that has clearly been superseded by more recent information
- collect only as much information as needed regarding a student’s achievement of a learning outcome; if you already have evidence to support the highest reasonable claim that can be made about a student’s achievement, there is no need for the student to complete more assessment tasks related to this outcome

- postpone further assessment of a student if it is clear that further instruction related to a learning outcome is needed
- use a certain assessment activity as a formative assessment for one student and as a summative assessment for another student
- involve students in the collection, interpretation and communication of their own assessment *of* learning information whenever possible.

Consider the following examples of how teachers can differentiate the selection and use of assessment *of* learning information.

Example 1: A student has not had sufficient practice to achieve to her full potential related to the learning outcomes being addressed in an assessment activity; however, she is ready to use the activity as a practice assessment. The teacher will use the activity as an assessment *for* learning for this student and as an assessment *of* learning for the other students.

Example 2: A teacher uses a checklist to accumulate a record of the times he observes his students demonstrating the learning outcome “develop and justify own opinions and points of view” during discussion. The record for two students is as follows.

	Sep 14	Sep 21	Sep 28	Oct 5	Oct 12	Oct 19
Student A				✓	✓	✓
Student B	✓		✓			✓

The teacher concludes that Student A has reached consistent achievement of the learning outcome, and that Student B’s achievement is inconsistent. By observing on more than one day, the teacher is able to see individual patterns of learning.

Example 3: A teacher uses scoring rubrics and rating scales as a means of identifying evaluation criteria and communicating achievement to students and their parents. He also uses rubrics and rating scales to provide specific feedback to help individual students improve their performance and understand where they are in the achievement of learning outcomes.

Example 4: A student’s ability to problem solve in mathematics is quite strong; however, his ability to perform mental arithmetic is weak. The teacher lifts the requirement to use mental arithmetic when assessing problem solving, permitting the student to use a calculator. This allows the student to better demonstrate his or her problem-solving skills.

Assessing differentiated products

When assessment is differentiated only by product, the learning outcome remains the same for all students and a single rubric can be used to assess all forms of the product. It is often practical to design rubrics solely around the learning outcomes being addressed and not include criteria that are specific to any of the products. This practice helps students to focus not so much on the product itself (although this is always worthy of care and effort) but on the learning that is supposed to be demonstrated through that product. Rubrics can focus on a single learning outcome and related criteria or on a combination of different learning outcomes and criteria.

Careful analysis of learning outcomes will help you determine how much potential there is for differentiation by product. For example, a Grade 8 English language arts learning outcome on writing narratives from other points of view clearly indicates the type of product to be used (namely writing narratives) and, although the type of narrative can vary, there is not a lot of leeway to vary the type of product. In contrast, the learning outcome “compare and contrast the different perspectives provided by first and third person narration” has potential for differentiated products; e.g., students could present their comparison and contrast through writing, graphic organizers, dramatic presentations or other means.

For example:

Grade 8 social studies students are demonstrating that they can create a social message. The teacher develops a rubric that focuses on the communication learning outcome (shown in the partial rubric below.) Regardless of the type of product that students choose, such as a poster, an infomercial or a dramatic presentation, their achievement in terms of communication will be determined using the same rubric.

	Oral, written or visual literacy presents in a way that is engaging and purposeful
Wow!	presents in a way that is persuasive and engaging and has a purpose that is consistently clear
Yes	presents in a way that is credible and interesting and has a purpose that is evident
Yes, But	presents in a way that is logical and has a stated purpose
Not Yet	presents in a way that is vague and/or confusing and/or does not show purpose

Assessing differentiated topics

Sometimes you may have the opportunity to differentiate by topic, based on student interest. Assessment of content that has been differentiated by interest generally does not require different rubrics.

For example:

A teacher in a Grade 6 English language arts class creates opportunity for students to choose any topic of interest to demonstrate their learning of the outcome to “make connections between own life and characters and ideas in oral, print and other media texts.”

Providing supports and scaffolds

In some cases, students need specific supports or scaffolding to demonstrate their learning. These supports allow students to demonstrate their best learning. Sometimes very minor supports, are all that is necessary to allow a student to be successful. Supports and scaffolds are considered to be part of differentiated assessment because they are matched intentionally with identified learning needs for a given student.

For example:

A teacher provides a student with extra time to complete a test, thereby relieving the student of some stress and making it possible for him or her to be successful.

Grading and reporting in a differentiated classroom

Grading is a measure of achievement and, in a differentiated classroom, it is important that understandings of what grading means are clear in relation to curriculum standards and the learning needs of students.

To grade effectively in a differentiated classroom you should:

- be selective; not everything that students do should be graded
- base grading on clear, specific criteria
- identify the indicators of student success, describe the criteria by which that success will be evaluated, and measure it accordingly
- use evidence that is directly linked to the learning outcome being evaluated and disregard other factors; e.g., if students are being evaluated on their understanding of a mathematical concept, factors such as neatness of the work should not reduce or inflate a student’s grade
- identify and reduce factors that could prevent students from demonstrating their learning, such as difficulty with reading or slow written production; use strategies such as providing students with second chances to demonstrate their learning, or focusing on scores students earn later in a learning sequence so they have ample opportunities to practise

- consider what can motivate or, sometimes more importantly, impair motivation for learning; facilitate motivation to learn by supporting students in assuming responsibility for their own growth, ensuring tasks are clear and aligned with learning outcomes, and providing ongoing feedback and appropriate learning opportunities that are interesting, relevant and suitable for students' readiness and abilities.

Although assessment *of* learning focuses exclusively on student achievement relative to grade or course level expectations, your reporting also can include important information about students' work habits, progress during the course, strengths and needs, attitudes, the way they learn best, and/or suggestions for how they can improve their achievement. These aspects should not be combined or averaged into a score, but rather reported as separate, important elements. Consider strategies for reporting these aspects such as separate comments, attachments to the report card, separate communications, checklists or student-parent-teacher conferences.

Managing differentiated assessment

Consider the following tips to help you make meaningful, manageable decisions about how to differentiate assessment.

- **Be realistic.** Assessing differentiated content, process or product places demands on you as the teacher. In general, content differentiation tends to put the highest demand on teachers' understanding of the subject matter. Process differentiation tends to put the highest demand on teachers' classroom management skills. Product differentiation tends to put the most demand on teachers' planning skills because they will need to have choices laid out, materials available and general rubrics ready.
- **Create opportunities for students to experience a variety of ways to demonstrate their learning.** Varied experiences give student differences more of an opportunity to come to light. For example, by intentionally rotating students through tasks that focus on different multiple intelligences, you create opportunities for students to demonstrate their strengths and interests, while also revealing areas of need.

- **Consider what types and variety of assessment tools and strategies are best suited to the learning outcomes being addressed.**

Student achievement of some learning outcomes can only be effectively assessed in a limited number of ways while others may lend themselves to a more diverse range of assessment methods. For example, the mathematics learning outcome, “Describe, orally and in writing, whether or not a number is rational” probably has less potential for differentiated assessment than the learning outcome, “Solve problems, using rational numbers in meaningful contexts.”

- **Ensure students are equipped to deal with the choices they are offered.** In order to make sound choices for demonstrating their learning, students need:

- a repertoire of products or strategies from which to choose
- the critical thinking skills to identify, weigh and choose options
- knowledge of themselves as learners
- the maturity to choose the option that will let them best show what they have learned, not simply the option they think will be quickest.

- **Add to student repertoires of products and strategies.** Explicitly teach and then provide structured opportunities to demonstrate their learning in different ways. Include opportunities and tools for self-reflection and self-assessment.
- **Consider your own comfort level with various strategies and tools.** For example, when introducing a new assessment strategy, you may want to use it with the whole class, rather than attempting to deal with more than one strategy at once.
- **Address both strengths and challenges.** Sometimes helping a student to become well-rounded is in the student’s best interest. As a result, you may ask students to work in a way that is not their preferred way in order to stretch themselves. At other times, you may decide that students should demonstrate their learning in the way that is most comfortable for them. For example, a student who would not choose to work independently might benefit from completing independent tasks on occasion. At another time, you may decide that it is important to collect the best evidence you can to support the highest claim you can reasonably make about a student’s achievement and, therefore, you allow the student to use a graphic organizer rather than a formal essay to present an overview of a topic.