

For a lot of teachers, differentiation can mean endlessly tailored versions of different worksheets. A richer and more straightforward differentiation sets tasks that avoid the rigidity of tiering your class.

Use these 10 approaches to task differentiation to spice up your planning.

1. Concrete to abstract

Thinking in the abstract is an important element of developing originality. Gifted and talented learners need to be able to manipulate abstract ideas and to use these flexibly within and between subjects. This is not all rocket science – abstract thinking can be as simple as learners suggesting rules that they can then use to make deductions.

2. Simple to complex

It is often said that more able learners require tasks that are more complex in resources, research, issues, problems, skills, or goals than less advanced peers. However, simplification is a skill in itself and an important test of a more able child is their ability to be able to précis ideas and argument.

3. Basic to transformational

Higher order thinking is basically about making new thinking out of old – making sure that the learner is required to think for themselves, which usually involves producing something that is not the same as they were given.

4. Fewer facets to multi-facets

More able learners need to be given meaningful choices in their learning – creating questions and hypotheses to explain increasingly complex ideas, spotting patterns and testing their ideas to see if they work.

5. Smaller leaps to greater leaps

Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that require greater mental leaps in insight, application, or transfer than less advanced peers. Scaffolding-out challenge is one of the greatest dangers in task design.

6. More structured to more open

Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that are more open in regard to solutions, decisions and approaches than less advanced peers.

7. Less independence to greater independence

Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from greater independence in planning, designing, and self-monitoring than less advanced peers. But being able to learn with others – interdependence – is in many ways more important for more able learners, so in this case independence really means ownership, giving learners more control of the task, to self-direct or to be free to negotiate the meaning and scope of a task for themselves.

8. Quicker to slower

Pace is an expectation for a good lesson and there is no doubt that appropriate pace is important in creating challenge. This generally gives rise to a number of questions, some of which may be, how is momentum used in learning to expand thinking and not just to follow a linear

process and how can time or other constraints can be used to create challenge?

9. Narrower to wider

More advanced learners should be given far more opportunity to explore topics in greater depth and/or breadth. It is important to allow such students as much practice time as possible in order for them to feel comfortable with the wider issues and to be able to demonstrate mastery of a concept.

10. Move in either direction

Gifted learners need to be able to move in both directions - breadth or depth - during the learning process, and how this works is a key element of effective task design. Providing flexibility in learning through task design and the way in which we manage learning is key to effective differentiation.