

Flexible Grouping


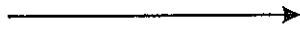
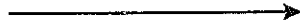
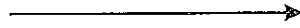

Students can be grouped throughout the year in various ways for various types of assignments. They can be grouped to represent *heterogeneous* readiness levels, learning styles, or interests, or they can be grouped by *homogeneous* readiness levels, learning styles, or interests depending on the goals and objectives of the lesson. Flexible grouping helps teachers avoid "tracking" students at certain levels or learning styles. Students can get to know more of their peers if they are required or inspired to become involved in group work with everyone in the class at some point during the year.

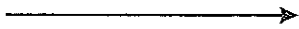


Differentiation Framework for Flexible Groups

This "Equalizer" from Carol Ann Tomlinson's (1995) *How to Differentiate Instruction in the Mixed-Ability Classroom*, is best utilized in this manner: (1) pretest students' understanding of a concept or skill, (2) teach or review the concept or skill, (3) assess student learning, and then (4) give assignments based on students' level of mastery. Students who need more time on the concept should be taught through activities on the far left, students who have mastered the information partially, should be taught through assignments in the middle column and students who have completely mastered the concepts should be taught through assignments from the far right. Below is my interpretation of "The Equalizer" (Northey, 2004).

Please note: This material is found
in the "Handbook on Differentiated
Instruction for Middle and High Schools"
by Sheryn Spencer Northey ISBN
1-930556-93-4

This particular section is a selection
for Depth + Complexity because it gives
concrete examples of making content
more challenging and engaging

<i>1. Information, Ideas, Materials, Applications</i>		
<p>Foundational Activities are structured to help students master basic information about a concept or topic.</p>		<p>Transformational Activities are structured to use the basic concepts or information about a topic in order to analyze, evaluate, or synthesize it in terms of other concepts and information.</p>
<i>2. Representations, Ideas, Applications, Materials</i>		
<p>Concrete Activities are structured so that students learn through the senses.</p>		<p>Abstract Activities are created so that students can understand concepts without use of the senses.</p>
<i>3. Resources, Research, Issues, Problems, Skills, Goals</i>		
<p>Simple Activities are structured to include single concepts or ideas presented in as few words and steps as possible. Real world examples should be included to help make the information easier to understand.</p>		<p>Complex Activities should include complex concepts and information requiring learners to independently discriminate between necessary and unnecessary information, determine fact versus opinion, make inferences and draw conclusions, and use induction and deduction.</p>
<i>4. Directions, Problems, Application, Solutions, Approaches, Disciplinary Connections</i>		
<p>Single Facet Activities should teach one concept until mastered.</p>		<p>Multiple Facets Activities should include information imbedded in real world issues that have many interdisciplinary connections and parts.</p>
<i>5. Application, Insight, Transfer</i>		
<p>Small Leap Activities should require students to take one idea at a time.</p>		<p>Great Leap Activities can require students to draw conclusions, make decisions, and engage in divergent thinking.</p>

<i>6. Solutions, Decisions, Approaches</i>		
More Structured Activities should be highly structured and convergent.	 Activities can be more open, but with parameters and a mix of convergent and divergent thinking.	More Open Activities can allow students to make decisions about product and process and answers can be divergent.
<i>7. Planning, Designing, Monitoring</i>		
Less Independence Activities may require more teacher assistance.	 Activities can be more complex if the teacher can provide some help.	Greater Independence Activities should be structured so that students may work with very little teacher help.
<i>8. Pace of Study, Pace of thought</i>		
Slow Allow more time for fewer concepts.	 Allow an average amount of time to master an average amount of information.	Quick Count on students to master information with one explanation and a few practices or applications.

(Northey, 2004)

Generic Strategies for Teaching *Math, Reading, and Writing Skills* Using "The Equalizer" to Flexibly Group Secondary Students

Take the following steps: (1) Pretest math, reading or writing skill (2) Teach a math, reading or writing skill or concept, (3) Assess student mastery of that skill or concept, and (4) Assign students activities using the specific content you are teaching. What follows are some generic activities I designed using Tomlinson's Equalizer.

1. Information, Ideas, Materials, Applications		
Foundational	—————→	Transformational
<p><i>Math:</i> Reteach the basic math skill using a method that helps students connect the math skill with prior knowledge or that helps them make the abstract concrete. Give students several assignment sheets that allow them to practice using the skill as many times as necessary to help them reach mastery. Retest after each assignment sheet and 24 hours later. Add on skills and retest constantly.</p>	<p><i>Math:</i> Give students simple word problems that require them to continue to practice applying the math skill they have just learned. Add other skills to word problems as appropriate. Use Exercises, Extra Practice or other sections that allow students to practice working the math problems represented by the skill.</p>	<p><i>Math:</i> Give students multi-level real world or fuzzy math problems that require them to discriminate between useful and useless information, determine appropriate mathematical operations, and evaluate the appropriateness of procedures and answers. Use "For Extension or Enrichment" activities provided by most textbooks.</p>
<p><i>Reading:</i> Reteach the reading comprehension skills by using examples that help students apply the comprehension skills to their frame of reference. Give students assignment sheets and short selections to practice the reading comprehension skills they have not mastered. Retest after practice and 24 hours until they have mastered the concept. Add on skills, practice, and retest constantly.</p>	<p><i>Reading:</i> Ask students to independently read and answer questions in the textbook or questions generated by students or the teacher.</p>	<p><i>Reading:</i> Students should begin a challenging novel study that includes having them keep a double entry journal critically reading for tone, mood, effect of author's style, symbolism, and the psychological intent of the work.</p>
<p><i>Writing:</i> Reteach the writing skill in a limited writing assignment, e.g., one paragraph at a time. Reassess the writing skill within 24 hours. Continue to add on skills.</p>	<p><i>Writing:</i> Ask students to independently plan and write compositions that demonstrate their understanding of basic writing strategies you have taught. Introduce strategies gradually.</p>	<p><i>Writing:</i> Students write complex compositions responding to complex prompts in various writing modes.</p>

2. Representations, Ideas, Applications, Materials		
Concrete	—————→	Abstract
<p><i>Math:</i> Use manipulatives, "hands-on," or kinesthetic method to teach or reteach simple mathematical concepts.</p>	<p><i>Math:</i> Use manipulatives, hands-on, or kinesthetic method as necessary to help students transition to more abstract concepts within word problems. Use textbook practice problems.</p>	<p><i>Math:</i> Require students to use abstract reasoning to solve complex word problems based on abstract uses of math. Use textbook enrichment problems and activities.</p>
<p><i>Reading:</i> Give students simple selections that have clear and easily recognizable examples of reading comprehension skills, such as comparing and contrasting, determining author's purpose, identifying words in context, and comparing and contrasting. Give student several selections to practice comprehension skills. Provide graphic organizers for more abstract skills, such as inference and author's purpose, style, and tone.</p>	<p><i>Reading:</i> Help students move toward abstraction by giving them graphic organizers to help them use comprehension skills to move toward critical analysis of information.</p>	<p><i>Reading:</i> Ask students to infer and draw conclusions as they critically read selections above grade level. Require them to identify abstract concepts such as tone, mood, symbolism, and author's purpose and style.</p>
<p><i>Writing:</i> Students use graphic organizers to help them organize their writing. Topics should be well-known to students frame of reference.</p>	<p><i>Writing:</i> Students write to prompts that are based on topics within their frame of reference.</p>	<p><i>Writing:</i> Students should write to prompts that require them to develop a tone, mood, sense of audience, purpose, and style.</p>

3. Resources, Research, Issues, Problems, Skills, Goals		
Simple	—————→	Complex
<p><i>Math:</i> Make sure students can use basic math skills (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division). Show them how to make a word problem simple by underlining key words, phrases, and numbers. Spend time allowing students to practice breaking down a problem to make is easier to solve.</p>	<p><i>Math:</i> Use a graphic method to help students identify critical elements in increasingly complex word problems. Use textbook practice problems, and challenge students to attempt to try enrichment problems and other challenging word problems.</p>	<p><i>Math:</i> Ask students to solve highly complex real world word problems. Ask students to make up their own real world math problems based on their interests. Use textbook enrichment problems as available.</p>
<p><i>Reading:</i> Assign students reading selections that are on their grade level and have simple plots so that they can build fluency and confidence in their ability to read independently.</p>	<p><i>Reading:</i> Show students how to use graphic organizers, such a story map, a conflict analysis sheet, a organizer that helps students determine tone, etc. to analyze increasingly complex selections.</p>	<p><i>Reading:</i> Require students to read selections with complex story lines, themes and styles.</p>
<p><i>Writing:</i> Have students use simple organizational patterns and syntax to express themselves. Teach them to use correct grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling (GUMS). They may need to spend some time practicing correct GUMS. Add more complex patterns as students master the simple ones.</p>	<p><i>Writing:</i> Use graphic organizers to help students plan compositions that address more complex topics. Teach them complex organizational patterns and help them move from formula to more complex organizational patterns by using peer editing and teacher feedback.</p>	<p><i>Writing:</i> Require students to vary syntax and use sophisticated diction as they fully develop their ideas. They should include sufficient details that flow smoothly through use of transitions.</p>

4. Directions, Problems, Application, Solutions, Approaches, Disciplinary Connections		
Single Facet	—————→	Multiple Facets
<i>Math:</i> Teach one math skill at a time. Use a spiraling curriculum in which skills are constantly reintroduced and retested.	<i>Math:</i> Teach math skills that occur naturally together so that students can see the relationships more clearly.	<i>Math:</i> Ask students to note the relationships between math skills in order to form or solve multi-faceted real world word problems.
<i>Reading:</i> Teach discrete reading comprehension skills. Use short and easy reading selections, such as picture books to teach students a single reading skill. Use spiraling to add skills, reteach old skills and retest skills.	<i>Reading:</i> Ask students to independently use several reading comprehension skills as they analyze a selection on grade level.	<i>Reading:</i> Give students challenging selections that require them to apply reading comprehension strategies and critical reading strategies that help them evaluate that selection based on determined criteria.
<i>Writing:</i> Choose one writing technique or skill and give students feedback on their execution of that technique or skill in a short writing assignment.	<i>Writing:</i> Ask students to use multiple writing techniques and skills and use peer editing and teacher feedback to evaluate their use of those techniques or skills in a composition.	<i>Writing:</i> Require students to use a wide variety of sophisticated writing techniques and skills to develop a composition that is above grade level. They should be able to use appropriate terms to describe writing techniques and GUMS.

5. Application, Insight, Transfer		
Small Leap	—————→	Great Leap
<p><i>Math:</i> Emphasize mastery of single skills and concepts and take small steps when adding new ones. Make sure through assessment that students are transferring skills to application of those skills in word problems.</p>	<p><i>Math:</i> Give students as much practice as necessary in applying discrete math skills to real world math problems. Use textbook practice problems until mastery.</p>	<p><i>Math:</i> Plan activities that require students to apply discrete math skills to solve open-ended and fuzzy real world math problems. Use textbook enrichment and extension problems.</p>
<p><i>Reading:</i> Emphasize mastery of single skills and concepts and take small steps when adding new ones. Make sure through assessment that students are transferring skills to the application of those skills to reading for understanding.</p>	<p><i>Reading:</i> Ask students to read selection from their textbook or in grade level novels. Plan activities that require students to apply the discrete reading comprehension skills. Assess for understanding at a deep level.</p>	<p><i>Reading:</i> Use classics or other rigorous reading practice that stretch students toward high levels of insight into author's use of style to develop a psychological intent.</p>
<p><i>Writing:</i> Monitor small pieces of writing for application of discrete writing skills and GUMS.</p>	<p><i>Writing:</i> Use prompts that ask students to use prior knowledge in order to practice applying discrete writing skills. Use peer editing and teacher feedback.</p>	<p><i>Writing:</i> Use prompts that require students to show sophisticated insight and skill in developing compositions that demonstrate understanding of audience, style and organization for various purposes.</p>

6. Solutions, Decisions, Approaches		
More Structured	—————→	More Open
<i>Math:</i> Present information that is highly structured and convergent. Do not require students to determine process or product. Use assignment sheets and teacher input.	<i>Math:</i> Use structured activities, including assignment sheets that students can do on their own. Include examples, modeling, and opportunities to practice that help students move toward more open kinds of word problems.	<i>Math:</i> Use problem-based learning activities that require students to determine the following: what is the problem, what math skills are required to solve it, and what are appropriate answers?
<i>Reading:</i> Use assignment sheets and short selections to structure student learning. Use structured seminar (i.e., teacher controlled) to help students learn to write questions that move toward higher order thinking.	<i>Reading:</i> Use textbook selections and ask students to write answers to questions in textbook or write their own questions for seminar learning. Allow students to take some responsibility for leading seminars.	<i>Reading:</i> Use problem-based learning to require students to use high-level thinking skills such as synthesis and evaluation to respond to literature.
<i>Writing:</i> Use structured organizers and formula to help students learn basic skills. Use structured skill development exercises that transfer to real writing.	<i>Writing:</i> Help students use graphic organizers and formula to move toward more open methods of planning and composing.	<i>Writing:</i> Use creative writing, such as scenario writing to practice organizing and using details to reflect a style, purpose and awareness of audience.
7. Planning, Designing, Monitoring		
Less Independence	—————→	Greater Independence
<i>Math, Reading, and Writing:</i> Make sure the teacher is available to give direct instruction and feedback. Do not make students wait too long to get help.	<i>Math, Reading, and Writing:</i> Students should be able to work on their own with less help from the teacher if the assignment is designed well. Expect students to need teacher input if assignments require students to move to more complex, abstract, or open-ended concepts and skills.	<i>Math, Reading, and Writing:</i> Students can work on their own, but the teacher should be available to consult with them to prompt them toward higher levels of thinking and reacting.

8. Pace of study, Pace of thought		
Slow	—————→	Quick
<p><i>Math, Reading, and Writing:</i> Plan on students taking more time to learn limited concepts and skills (i.e., aptitude is the amount of time it takes to learn something).</p>	<p><i>Math, Reading, and Writing:</i> Students should take an average amount of time to master concepts and skills. These are the students for whom pacing guides are planned.</p>	<p><i>Math, Reading, and Writing:</i> These students will be bored and frustrated if pacing is not geared to their ability to quickly grasp concepts and skills. After concepts or skills are presented, be prepared to offer engaging, and challenging opportunities to practice using new skills and concepts. Minimize reviewing.</p>