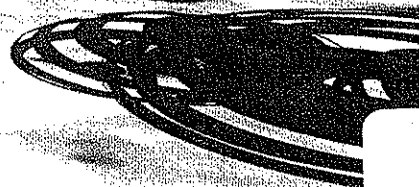
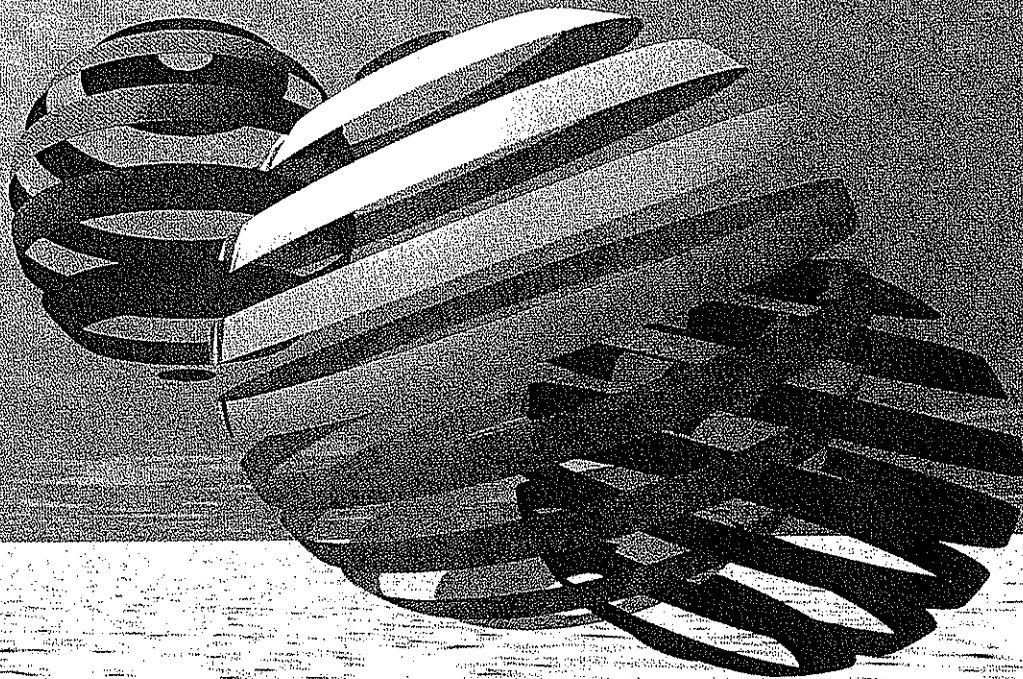
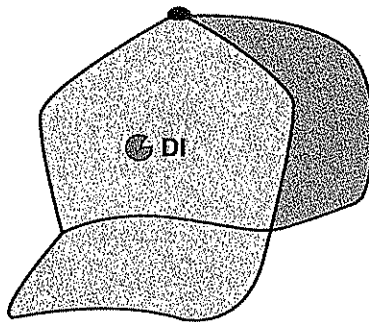


# Differentiated Instructional Management

Work Smarter, Not Harder



# MANAGING GROUPING STRATEGIES 3



JUST AS A BASEBALL COACH GIVES INFORMATION TO AN ENTIRE team, a teacher gives information to a classroom of learners. The team is brought together to receive general directions, to discuss the techniques and statistics of the opposing players. They also receive performance feedback and pep talks.

Wearing a baseball hat, a teacher can act as the coach of his or her classroom. Students can be brought together when they need to receive directions, learn new skills, or practice before a test.

Just as players sometimes work alone to practice their batting skills, students may work alone to gain more confidence with a specific skill. Players and students may also work in small groups or with a partner based on their current needs.

One crucial and complex management task in the differentiated classroom involves making grouping decisions. Since instruction is student centered, the savvy differentiator continuously considers the most beneficial grouping scenarios.

Many questions must be answered during the planning process for grouping:

- Which preassessment tool will be the most effective in guiding grouping decisions? Will it be administered to the total group, individuals, partners, or small groups?
- What is the most beneficial instructional approach to reach the student with the needed information?
- What is the best way to arrange the room for group instruction for each activity? How will the room be designed for materials and transitions?
- Who needs to be in each group?
- How much time must be allotted for group work?

When students need to actively process information, dividing the class into small groups according to their needs can be a highly effective strategy. The groups need specific direction with appropriate monitoring to engage productively.

As the teacher becomes a coach, facilitator, or guide on the side, students engage in various types of group and independent work. The student must have clear directions, have all necessary materials, and understand the purpose of the assignment. When learners know how to carry out activities with little or no adult supervision, the teacher is free to assess and monitor other students or provide direct instruction for groups or individuals.

Teachers who are taking their first steps into differentiated instruction are advised to become familiar with the playbook of various grouping scenarios and the occasions when each is most effective in enhancing instruction. This will ensure that the most appropriate approach to grouping can be selected and adapted for the students' needs during specific periods of study.

# MANAGING FLEXIBLE GROUPING

## What Is Flexible Grouping?

Flexible grouping gives students opportunities to learn information in a total class, alone, with a partner, or with a small group. The teacher selects the grouping strategy or scenario that will provide the best learning experience for each participant in an activity based on the assessment data.

After determining the need for a partner or small group activity, the teacher decides if students are grouped according to knowledge base, ability, or interest. Other alternatives include random groupings, peer-to-peer tutoring, multiage teams, or cooperative learning situations.

Grouping scenarios are fluid because students move in and out of the groups as needed based on continuous assessment. For example, if several observations reveal that a student is excelling on the beginning level of a skill, the learner moves to a group that is working on more challenging tasks.

## What Are the Instructional Benefits of Flexible Grouping?

- Flexible grouping decisions are made with ongoing assessments to meet the identified academic, social, and emotional needs of each learner.
- The teacher can zero in on the specific needs of each group to maximize learning for every student.
- Groups may be created with common interests and abilities. This allows students to feed off of each other's experiences and excitement. They are more likely to contribute when they do not feel overshadowed by classmates.
- When individuals engage in a variety of grouping designs, they learn to work independently and cooperatively with a variety of personalities.
- Groups are formed to strengthen strengths and/or weaknesses.

## Teacher's Role

- Familiarize yourself with each grouping option and its benefits in order to make the most efficient and advantageous planning decisions possible.
- Preassess in order to identify each learner's needs and create appropriate groups.
- Plan instruction with a blending of activities that engage learners in a total group, alone, with a partner, or in a small group scenario.
- Be alert! Move individuals as needed into groups tailored for their needs.
- Avoid grouping ruts. Vary the grouping designs by making teacher-assigned and student-choice arrangements.

### *Demystifying Flexible Grouping*

All students need to know what to expect in their classroom. If students are not familiar with flexible grouping, they need to understand the rationale for using it. Use an analogy such as the following to introduce flexible grouping:

The baseball coach is using a practice session to improve individual and group skills. Two players are working on pitching and hitting the ball while other players practice passing the ball. One player is perfecting his catching skills. The remaining players are running and sliding into bases. During another special practice session, all players engage in a scrimmage game.

In the same way, in our classroom, we work on skills individually and in small groups. Our scrimmage will take place when we have a practice session for a major test.

### Student's Role

- Follow the guidelines and directions for the team work and assignments.
- Be an active, productive participant in all group tasks to gain information and increase brain power from each experience.
- Communicate! Listen to ideas respectfully and contribute to group discussions.
- Ask questions for clarification as needed.
- Move in and out of groups promptly when directed without disturbing classmates.



#### **FIVE (STAR) MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR FLEXIBLE GROUPING**

1. Identify the most effective grouping design for the learners. Decide how many students to place in each group from an analysis of the assessment data during the planning phase.

Examples:

**Base Group:** A group of students who sit at the same table or near each other move their seats together to form a cluster or place their desks together to work.

**Gender:** Some groups work better when they are composed of all girls or all boys.

**Previous Relationships:** After working together on several activities, members usually bond as a team. They get along socially and respect each other. They learn to use each other's individual strengths and talents to reach the group's goal.

**Student Selection:** Students choose classmates they can work with to get the job done. *Example:* Choosing an energizing partner.

**Teacher Selection:** The teacher places students together based on their needs. *Example:* Creating a cooperative learning group or a project team.

2. Observe group dynamics. If the members of a group get along socially, they are more likely to be successful in completing the assignment.
3. If group members do not want to work with a student, try this prescription: Hold a private conference with the learner to identify and discuss the reasons for the personal rejections. Develop a plan for improvement.

4. Move a learner to a more beneficial group when assessments, including observations, indicate that his or her needs have changed. For example, if one student is struggling with the skill being practiced in a group, this student needs to move to a new scenario in order to learn the skill.
5. Select reflection activities for groups and individuals to give feedback and learning summaries.



## Examples of Flexible Grouping

### *Example A: Fast-Forwarding*

Assessment data has shown that a small group of students has mastered the information being learned. During the independent work time, these students are given an alternative assignment to research a part of the topic of their interests.

### *Example B: Ready for Grade Level*

A student has been meeting and doing the assignments with the readiness group. He understands the concept and now is given the assignments with the grade level groups.

### *Example C: Rewinding*

From a checkpoint during the learning, it is evident that a group of the students still do not understand the information being taught. Specific assignments are given during independent work time to address the gap. Also the teacher brings this group together for in-depth explanation during a time when the other students are working on an independent assignment.

# MANAGING STUDENTS WORKING ALONE

## What Is Working Alone?

Working alone refers to a student who independently completes an activity or task. The student works in an assigned seat, a designated area, or a comfortable, self-selected place.

The teacher periodically monitors and assists the learner. If the teacher is engaged in direct instruction with a group, another adult or study buddy may serve as the teacher. If no assistant is available, the student is told how and when to interact with the teacher or other classmates.

A student who is working independently needs to be within the teacher's vision. Avoid placing a student in a totally secluded place that is unsupervised.

## What Are the Instructional Benefits of Students Working Alone?

- Intrapersonal learners need quiet work periods. It takes time for them to think. They yearn for alone time to conceptualize and problem solve.
- Some students prefer to work with others but occasionally need assignments to complete independently. Working and learning alone is a life skill that everyone needs for success.
- When students work alone, they are able to show what they know, how they process information, and what they can accomplish on their own.
- When a student is successful during independent assignments, the time on task increases.
- The learner is able to work at his or her own pace.

## Teacher's Role

- Give an individual assignment when a specific, unique need is identified.
- Use activities and assignments the student can complete with little or no assistance.
- Make materials and resources accessible to complete the task.
- Explicitly state how the student is to be held accountable for completing the assignment. It may be accomplished by simply making a statement similar to the following:
  - "Make a journal entry of your learning."
  - "Show me your work in our mini-conference."
  - "Complete the rubric form."
  - "Place completed work in the 'IN' basket for grading when you finish."
  - "Place your peer review in your portfolio."
  - "Check your work using the answer key. Correct it and place in your portfolio."
- Be sure the student understands the purpose of the assignment and each direction. Clear rules, rituals, and routines need to be established. See Figure 3.1 on page 90.

<b>Figure 3.1</b>		
<i>What if . . .</i>	<i>Options for the student</i>	<i>Suggestions for the teacher</i>
I have a question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise your hand.</li> <li>• Place the question on a sticky note and place it in an assigned area.</li> <li>• Ask a study buddy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish rules and procedures for the student to ask questions during independent activities.</li> <li>• Realize that when a student asks too many questions, the individual did not receive clear, appropriate directions; seeks attention; or the assignment was too difficult.</li> </ul>
I need some supplies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the supplies are located in an area that is open to students, quietly go and obtain the needed supplies.</li> <li>• If not, then you have to ask the teacher for permission.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have needed supplies accessible and available for students.</li> <li>• Designate some closet, basket, or shelf areas with supplies available to learners.</li> </ul>
My pencil point breaks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain a pencil from a container of sharpened, extra pencils.</li> <li>• Borrow one from a neighbor or the teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect pencils from parents and neighbors.</li> <li>• Place containers of sharpened pencils around the room so a pencil is easily available.</li> </ul>
I need to go to the bathroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a hall pass.</li> <li>• Obtain the bathroom tag or necklace prepared for class passes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish bathroom rules and procedures. Be consistent and persistent with everyone.</li> </ul>
I do not know how to work a piece of equipment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask appropriate questions or request a demonstration.</li> <li>• Ask for help from a peer, then the teacher.</li> <li>• Move to another assignment or spot to complete another task until the teacher is available.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that students are taught and practice with adult supervision before given an independent assignment on a new piece of equipment.</li> <li>• Assign a knowledgeable student to be in charge to assist others.</li> </ul>
I know a classmate needs help.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help by asking probing questions to pinpoint the problem.</li> <li>• Show and tell your step-by-step thinking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish guidelines stating when assistance can be given.</li> <li>• Explain and model how to assist others.</li> <li>• Realize that some students are better assistants.</li> </ul>

<b>Figure 3.1</b>		
<i>What if . . .</i>	<i>Options for the student</i>	<i>Suggestions for the teacher</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remember, students who have an "aha" moment often are the best tutors because they know the steps and can exhibit their excitement.</li> </ul>
I finished my assignment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check over your work.</li> <li>Move on to the next task. Return manipulatives or materials to their home or designated area.</li> <li>Complete a self-assessment activity.</li> <li>Find something to do on your own that will not distract others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have alternative activities for students who have finished their work and are waiting for others to complete their work.</li> <li>Teach students to review their answers.</li> <li>Provide ways for students to check and correct their own papers immediately after completion.</li> </ul>
I complete a task using manipulatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clean up the materials and return them to their proper places.</li> <li>Then move on to your next assignment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a significant spot for each manipulative.</li> <li>Make cleaning up and returning the material to the designated spot a part of the assignment.</li> </ul>

### *Demystifying Working Alone*

Use a lecturette similar to the following to explain the purpose of working alone:

There are going to be times in your life when you have to work alone. When you work independently, you learn to stay on task, to have patience, and to complete assignments with little or no assistance. Consider the time an athlete spends working alone to perfect skills. For example, Michael Jordan practiced alone making four to five hundred hoop shots every day.

### **Student's Role**

- Make sure that you understand the direction or guidelines before you begin. Ask appropriate questions, if necessary.
- Know where you can work.
- Gather the materials you need before you begin the activity.
- Stay on task! Do not disturb others or allow others to distract you.
- Check your work when you complete the assigned task.



### **FIVE (STAR) MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR WORKING ALONE**

1. Use an individual assignment to address an identified need. The task should be designed to reinforce, practice, extend, or assess the learning.
2. Be sure the student understands the purpose of the assignment and directions to complete the tasks with little or no assistance.
3. Establish parameters that include
  - Options for places to work such as a rug, floor, table, or desk
  - Movement to other work areas
  - Obtaining the materials and resources necessary to complete the task
  - Talking to a study buddy
  - How and when to seek answers to questions
4. Teach the student how to check and correct the work.
5. Place the student engaging in independent tasks near the area where the teacher is working with other students. Proximity gives the teacher opportunities to use a signal such as "thumbs up" to encourage and support the learner.



## **Examples of the Effective Use of Working Alone**

### ***Example A: Agenda Assignment***

A student receives an independent agenda assignment with three tasks to complete. The learner works at his or her own pace, selecting the order of the activities and moving freely to stations or areas to complete the tasks. The student selects two completed work samples to place in his or her portfolio or folder. One selection is checked and corrected. It is then placed in an assigned tray for teacher viewing.

### ***Example B: Project Assignment***

A learner has an ongoing, independent project assignment. The student completes a Web search on the computer to gather research for the selected topic. The topic information is gathered. During the next two independent work sessions, the student works at a desk reading, taking notes, and compiling valuable facts for the project.

### ***Example C: Personalized Assignment***

Analysis of a student's pretest data on a standard in the current study reveals a specific need. The learner works with materials to fill a gap or enhance learning. The student returns the materials to the storage space. The student makes oral or written reflection statements and makes a journal entry about the learning experience.

## MANAGING SMALL GROUPS

### What Is a Small Group?

The meaning of the term *small group* probably appears to be obvious, but the word *small* is a relative term. A teacher who has a large class may consider 15 students as a small group, so there is a need for clarification here.

In a differentiated classroom, the most effective student-directed groups are composed of three or four members. The teacher-directed group is determined by the number of students who need to hear or work with the information. When the term *small group* is used in this resource, we are referring to the three- or four-person configuration.

### What Are the Instructional Benefits of Using Small Groups?

- Because small groups are formed for cooperative activities or for learners to work on common tasks, students can engage in different, simultaneously occurring activities specifically designed for their needs.
- The teacher can introduce, review, or guide the practice of skills needed by more than one learner.
- Students who need support, immediate feedback, and encouragement are more easily monitored.
- When engaged in group work, learners are actively engaged in processing information for understanding and retention. Pathways to memory are created as they share, hear, and mentally manipulate the information during interactive activities.
- Each learner is given the opportunity to work, communicate, brainstorm, and be creative as a team member. Making decisions with others—learning how and when to compromise for consensus—is a valuable skill necessary to be successful in nearly all aspects of life.

### Teacher's Role

- Use the assessment data to decide when the students need to be a part of a group to learn the standards and content in the most effective way.
- Strategically plan assignments that build a knowledge base and create curiosity: present a focus activity, provide an anticipatory set, or introduce small group activities.

*Find \_\_\_\_\_ facts related to \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Use the experiment to explore \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Discover the mysteries surrounding \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Find out why we need to know about \_\_\_\_\_.*

- Establish appropriate, beneficial roles that accommodate group needs and showcase individual talents. Introduce one way to select a group leader, recorder, reporter, and other necessary roles. Explain the purpose and responsibility of each role assignment. Continue to use this technique until students are comfortable

with the different roles. When students understand two or three ways of selecting team members to fulfill the different roles, let each group choose the technique for assigning roles.

Examples:

Use a spinner

Draw names

Ask for a volunteer

Use alphabetical order

Use birthdates

Take turns

- Provide groups with a clear purpose, expectations, and directions for the activity.

Example:

1. Name your group.
  2. Review the assignment to be sure everyone understands the goal.
  3. Discuss the best way to carry out the assignment.
  4. Obtain needed materials and resources.
  5. Establish individual roles.
  6. Complete the assignment.
  7. Share, reflect, and celebrate!
- Teach students how to transition in and out of groups efficiently and effectively or quickly and quietly (Q and Q).
  - Allow enough time for each step of the process, presentation of the learning, and reflection. During the reflection period, individual members share cognitive and social aspects of the learning that occurred during the group work. Emphasize the steps in the process more than the product produced.

### *Demystifying Small Groups*

By sharing responsibility, small groups can accomplish missions that individuals or partner teams might find overwhelming. Point out to your students that the average person is a member of many decision-making teams or committees in a lifetime, some of which involve problem solving as a group while others assign a different task to each member in order to achieve a common goal.

The following analogies may be helpful in explaining the benefits of two major forms of group collaboration:

In some groups, each member is assigned a different task in order to complete a large job. In a committee that is planning a large party on short notice, for example, one member may be responsible for choosing and purchasing decorations, another member may be responsible for hiring a band or DJ, a third member may be responsible for designing and printing fliers to advertise the party.

Small groups may brainstorm to solve a problem. Members of the president's cabinet, for instance, gather together periodically to discuss the pros and cons of laws the president is considering. Each member has a different specialty and unique viewpoint to offer. This helps the president consider all sides of an issue and determine the best course of action before making a decision.

Emphasize that each member has a different practical, analytical, or creative viewpoint to share with the group and that quality decision making and problem solving relies on respecting and thoughtfully considering each individual's contributions.

### Student's Role

- Be a productive team member who contributes to the common goal.
- Stay on task to learn as much as you can from the experience.
- Carry out your role and assignments productively.
- Respect, assist, and encourage team members.
- Assess each step of the assignment to know what you are learning and how to improve.



#### **FIVE (STAR) MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR TEACHER-DIRECTED SMALL GROUPS**

1. Name the purposes of the day's learning. Hook students into wanting to learn! Present directions and explanations in language they understand.
2. Teach the content in varied ways, keeping each mind engaged and meeting the needs of the members of the group.
3. Provide immediate feedback. Assess continuously to know what the learners need next.
4. Avoid having more than three groups with you in a class period. We make this suggestion because it is difficult to plan and manage activities for more than three groups. When the teacher is engaged with too many groups, busy work assignments are often added to keep the students occupied. Plan to meet with different groups on different days.
5. Before leaving the group area:
  - Give an independent practice assignment as a follow-up activity.
  - Celebrate successes!
  - Lead a discussion to review the day's learning.
  - Ask students to state what they want to learn next.
  - Introduce highlights of the next small group meeting.

Design an effective combination of the various types of grouping, so both independent cognitive and social needs are met. The following activities in Figure 3.2 are suggestions for varying grouping scenarios for differentiation.





### **FIVE (STAR) MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR STUDENT-FOCUSED SMALL GROUPS**

1. Remember, group members must get along socially to complete an assignment successfully. Teach, model, and discuss the skills needed to be a productive team member.
2. Vary group formations to meet student needs and to add novelty to learning. Avoid creating groups with more than four students. If the group needs to make a decision, use an odd number of members so it will be easy for them to come to a consensus.
3. Establish clear, specific directions for the assignment with roles and duties for the group members so each student has a specific task. Assignments should require little teacher oversight and be customized for each group to suit the specific member needs, such as the following:
  - To review and practice essential information related to the skill or topic
  - To provide personalized, meaningful experiences
  - To build speed and accuracy
  - To move to mastery and automaticity
  - To apply information in a new way
4. In order to be a better facilitator and monitor during small group activities, try the following tips:
  - Be visible and stay in close proximity with students.
  - Keep moving among groups and avoid forming a walking pattern.
  - Use nonverbal body language to emphasize messages.
  - Position yourself on the opposite side of the group or behind it, when a student is addressing the group. A student usually addresses comments to the teacher. When adults stand at a distance, students speak to them.
  - Be careful about making promises to students that may be difficult to keep, such as, "I'll be there in a minute." In a differentiated classroom, you never know when a greater need will appear.
5. Avoid giving group grades. Assess learning during independent tasks. Group activities are best used for brainstorming sessions, producing products, making presentations, discussion time, reading, or practicing skills.



<b>Figure 3.2</b>				
<i>Group</i>	<i>Total Group</i>	<i>Alone</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Small Group</i>
When	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic introductions <input type="checkbox"/> Procedures modeling <input type="checkbox"/> Skill demonstrations <input type="checkbox"/> Focus activities <input type="checkbox"/> Background information <input type="checkbox"/> Drill and practice <input type="checkbox"/> Directions and procedures <input type="checkbox"/> Wrap-up session <input type="checkbox"/> Lecturettes <input type="checkbox"/> Guided practice <input type="checkbox"/> Media clips <input type="checkbox"/> Computer <input type="checkbox"/> Performances <input type="checkbox"/> Reports <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrations of learning <input type="checkbox"/> Reflections	<input type="checkbox"/> Contracts <input type="checkbox"/> Agendas <input type="checkbox"/> Menus <input type="checkbox"/> Choice boards <input type="checkbox"/> Journals <input type="checkbox"/> Diaries <input type="checkbox"/> Logs <input type="checkbox"/> Practice/drill <input type="checkbox"/> Information processing <input type="checkbox"/> Question responses <input type="checkbox"/> Manipulative use <input type="checkbox"/> Note taking <input type="checkbox"/> Reviews <input type="checkbox"/> Reflections <input type="checkbox"/> Computer work <input type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> Performances <input type="checkbox"/> Assessments	<input type="checkbox"/> Manipulatives <input type="checkbox"/> Reviews <input type="checkbox"/> Practice/drill <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative learning <input type="checkbox"/> Performances <input type="checkbox"/> Listening and speaking activities <input type="checkbox"/> Sharing information <input type="checkbox"/> Answering questions <input type="checkbox"/> Checking work <input type="checkbox"/> Games <input type="checkbox"/> Puzzles <input type="checkbox"/> Computer activities <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving <input type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> Study buddies <input type="checkbox"/> Revising/editing <input type="checkbox"/> Double-entry journaling <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect	<input type="checkbox"/> Text talk <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation circles <input type="checkbox"/> Literary circles <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative learning <input type="checkbox"/> Consensus building <input type="checkbox"/> Applying information <input type="checkbox"/> Practice/drill <input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorming <input type="checkbox"/> Performing <input type="checkbox"/> Discussing and explaining a process <input type="checkbox"/> Reflecting on learning <input type="checkbox"/> Reviewing information <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving <input type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> Presenting <input type="checkbox"/> Previewing books or materials <input type="checkbox"/> Publishing <input type="checkbox"/> Using manipulatives
Where	<input type="checkbox"/> Desks <input type="checkbox"/> Rugs <input type="checkbox"/> Labs <input type="checkbox"/> Media center <input type="checkbox"/> Gymnasium <input type="checkbox"/> Tables <input type="checkbox"/> Outside <input type="checkbox"/> Standing cluster <input type="checkbox"/> Commons areas <input type="checkbox"/> Bleachers	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning zones <input type="checkbox"/> Center <input type="checkbox"/> Station <input type="checkbox"/> Lab <input type="checkbox"/> Desk <input type="checkbox"/> Floor <input type="checkbox"/> Rug <input type="checkbox"/> Chair <input type="checkbox"/> Glider <input type="checkbox"/> Rocking chair <input type="checkbox"/> Study carrel <input type="checkbox"/> Loft	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning zones <input type="checkbox"/> Centers <input type="checkbox"/> Stations <input type="checkbox"/> Labs <input type="checkbox"/> Chosen space <input type="checkbox"/> Floor <input type="checkbox"/> Chairs <input type="checkbox"/> Desks <input type="checkbox"/> Table <input type="checkbox"/> Sitting side by side <input type="checkbox"/> Standing <input type="checkbox"/> Sitting back to back to work. Facing each other to share and discuss.	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning zones <input type="checkbox"/> Centers <input type="checkbox"/> Stations <input type="checkbox"/> Labs <input type="checkbox"/> Grouped tables and/or chairs <input type="checkbox"/> Clustered desks <input type="checkbox"/> Floor <input type="checkbox"/> Standing cluster <input type="checkbox"/> Outside

# MANAGING ABILITY GROUPS

## What Is an Ability Group?

Everyone has personal talents and weaknesses that they bring to the game. An ability group is formed with students who have similar capabilities for working with a standard, skill, or procedure. Each individual's achievement scores, IQ test results, academic performance, and/or daily work are used as indicators of what a student is capable of learning. The experiences provide opportunities for a homogeneous group of students to work with materials and activities within their ability range, giving players with varying skills the opportunity to go into the game and show what they can do. When players or students are working to the best of their ability and there is no cap on their potential, they become proud, hardworking performers always working to improve their ability to be a better team member.

Ability groups often are composed of learners who are at risk, on grade level, or in the gifted and talented group. Some districts use these levels for homogeneous grouping or tracking within classrooms or schools.

## What Are the Instructional Benefits of Using Ability Groups?

- When grouped according to ability, students are on the same instructional level, so the teacher can plan the appropriate pace with challenging strategies and activities that focus on a skill needed by the group.
- Students usually receive direct instruction. It is often easier to plan for students who have a common weakness or need.
- The learners develop a bond as they work on the same skill or procedure.
- Learners who work at a slower pace are not threatened with frustration and failure. High achievers are not bored or "checked out" during lessons.
- The activities are on the student's ability level, so they are more likely to grow in their learning and experience success.

## Teacher's Role

- Analyze and compile the assessment data to identify specific, common needs to establish the groups.
- Strategically plan activities for the standard(s) on the group's ability level.
- Plan activities to target individual needs incorporating the learner's strengths.
- Provide opportunities for students using a variety of learning strategies.
- Use flexible grouping so students can move to the group that best meets their needs.

## *Demystifying Ability Groups*

Explain to students that ability groups are used when they need to work on their level with a specific standard, skill, or topic. Compare ability groups to the levels in swimming classes: beginning, intermediate, and advanced.

When people take swimming classes, some are placed in beginning classes because they need to become accustomed to being in the water. They must learn the basics, such as breathing techniques and arm and leg strokes, needed to survive. Swimmers are placed in the intermediate level when they know and demonstrate that they can use the fundamental skills.

Some individuals may remain in the beginner's class for longer than others because it takes longer to learn the skills. Swimmers are placed in the advanced level because they have the physical and mental ability to use highly developed skills.

Individuals who did not advance in swimming may excel in other sports or hobbies. Engage students in a discussion of their experiences with working on varying levels of difficulty.

### Student's Role

- Work to learn as much information as possible.
- Show what you know.
- Ask appropriate questions.
- Show respect for each team member.
- Complete your independent assignments and tasks.



#### **FIVE (STAR) MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR MANAGING ABILITY GROUPS**

1. Assess! Assess! Use formal and informal assessment data to identify ability levels.
2. Address group and individual needs while using flexible grouping.
3. Teach the groups in varied ways, giving individuals numerous opportunities to learn information.
4. Provide practice, discussion, and processing time.
5. Place students in ability groups when you want to "zap gaps" for the student and challenge the high-end learner.



### Examples of Ability Grouping

#### *Example A: Skill Groups*

Skill groups for an academic area are created according to the results of a preassessment. Students may need an introduction to the basic information, the grade-level lesson, or an extension of the skill. The specific needs of each group are addressed through direct instruction and specific assignments to advance learning on each level.

***Example B: Reading Groups***

A teacher and his or her students compile reading materials that reinforce a unit on the Revolutionary War. The teacher then divides the reading materials into four stacks (Red, Blue, Yellow, and Green) according to the level of difficulty. Before the lesson begins, the teacher assigns students to groups based on reading ability level and allows the Red Group to choose books from the Red stack, the Blue Group to choose books from the Blue stack, and so on. Each student learns because he or she is capable of reading the assigned material.

***Example C: Academically Gifted Groups***

A special class is designed to reach the students according to their ability level. For example, students who are identified as academically gifted and talented meet twice a week for problem solving, educational field trips, and challenging research activities.