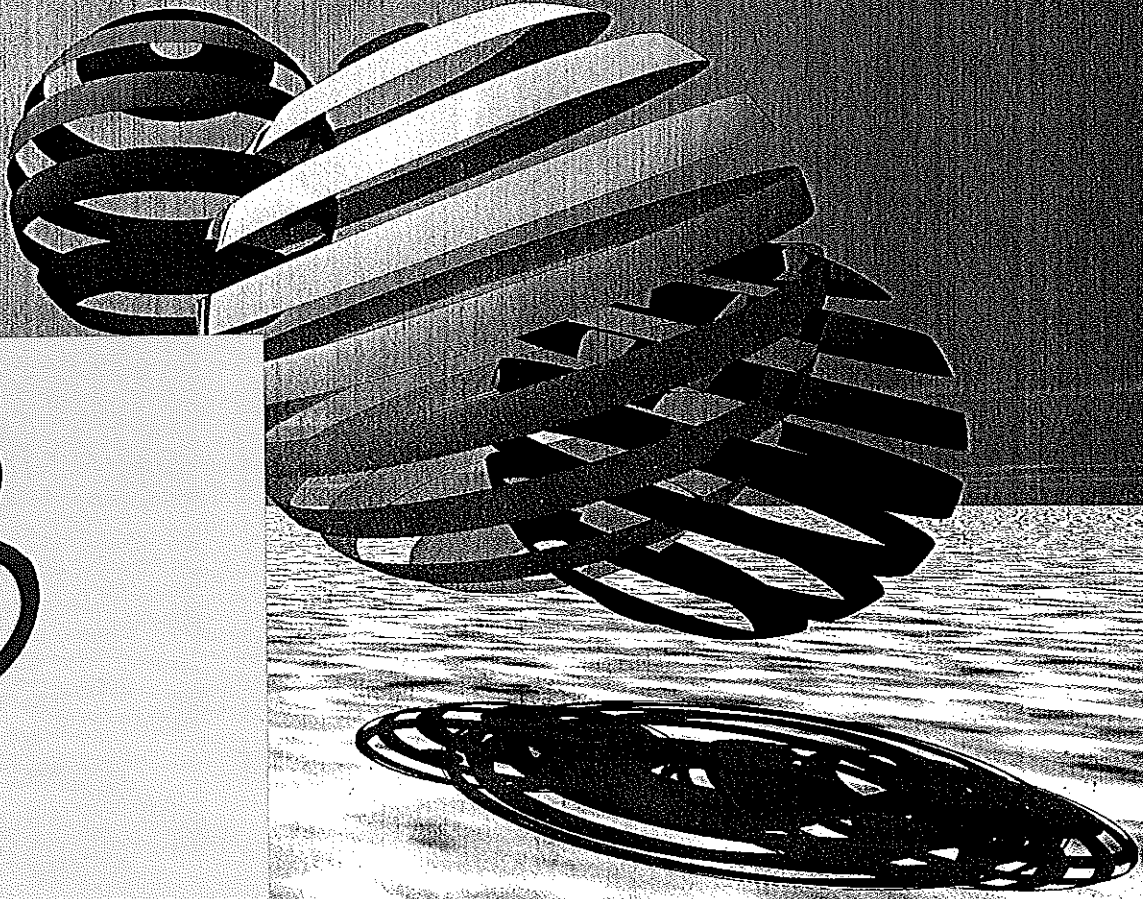


# Differentiated Instructional Management

Work Smarter, Not Harder



B

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# 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 PREASSESSMENT

### What Is Preassessment?

Preassessment is a formal or informal test administered to pinpoint what the learner knows about an upcoming standard, skill, topic, or concept. The teacher analyzes the data to identify the student's background knowledge, prior experiences, abilities, interests, and attitudes in relation to the new learning.

The most useful preassessment data is gathered one to two weeks before planning. This gives the teacher time to analyze the learner's strengths and needs for the upcoming study. This close examination is crucial because the results are used to strategically plan each lesson for individuals in a differentiated classroom. When students' strengths and weaknesses are addressed in a plan, the teacher is working smarter, not harder.

### What Are the Instructional Benefits of Using Preassessment?

- An effective preassessment reveals the student's knowledge base related to the upcoming topic or skill and identifies the entry point for instruction.
- Preassessment data pinpoints the learner's knowledge on standards concepts, and objectives.
- It reveals specific needs for reteaching, grade-level instruction, or enrichment.
- The teacher can make informed grouping decisions when a preassessment reveals a wide range of understanding in the classroom.
- Preassessment results guide the teacher in selecting or designing the most appropriate instructional strategies to accommodate identified individual and group needs.

### Teacher's Role

- Preassess students one or two weeks before the new unit or study begins.
- Use the data to identify the entry points for instruction and to make grouping decisions accordingly.
- Plan lessons and activities for individuals and small groups based on their current knowledge levels.
- Use the preassessment session as a promo for the upcoming topic or skill.
- Develop a repertoire of formal and informal preassessment tools, and let the data needed determine which tool to use in a given situation. For example, if an informal assessment unveils needed information, use it instead of a time-consuming, formal assessment.

### *Demystifying Preassessment*

Introduce the term *preassessment* by discussing lessons needed to learn a sport. Here is a metaphor you can adapt for the word's debut:

The coach preassesses each person's skills so that he or she can set up the practice session. Individuals who routinely play the game begin with more advanced skills and information. People who are playing for the first time begin with the basics.

Explain that you use preassessments in the same way to identify each student's knowledge of an upcoming topic or skill. Remind students to honor the strengths of others and to respect their weaknesses or needs. Emphasize the importance of students doing their best and being honest on each preassessment because the information helps you plan and organize lessons that "make strengths stronger" or "zap the gaps."

### Student's Role

- Show what you know and what you do not know so you can learn more.
- Search your memory bank to reveal any experiences you have had to link to the lesson.
- Share your personal knowledge and experiences related to the topic on the assessment. Express any concerns and questions you have.
- Realize that a negative experience you had with a topic or skill in the past can be replaced with a positive experience. Always remember that it is never too late to learn.
- Identify areas of interest you would like to explore during the upcoming study.



### FIVE (STAR) MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR PREASSESSMENTS

1. Explain to students how preassessment data guide planning for their unique needs. Emphasize the value of the results, so they will use their best responses for the questions. Use upbeat, positive comments so students do not become stressed out about the "test." Negative thoughts interfere with thinking.
2. Preassess for an upcoming topic at least one or two weeks before the unit begins so the gathered data can be used to plan for the specific needs of this group of students.
3. Introduce and demonstrate a preassessment tool the first two to three times it is used or until students know how to use it.
4. Use a variety of formal and informal preassessment tools. Add each completed assessment to the class assessment toolkit to use in later sessions to gather data for planning a future unit.
5. Engage the students in the data analysis and planning.



### Examples of Preassessments

#### *Example A: Using a Teacher-Made Pretest*

Develop a pretest similar to the following to discover what students know about an upcoming topic.

- List five things you know about \_\_\_\_\_.
- What experiences have you had with \_\_\_\_\_?
- Illustrate \_\_\_\_\_ on the back of your paper.
- Write one or two paragraphs that describe \_\_\_\_\_ to a friend.
- Tell me what you would like to learn about \_\_\_\_\_.

Administer the test one or two weeks prior to the beginning of the introduction to the material. Gather the data and analyze it to plan differentiated instruction for the upcoming unit. Use the same test as a posttest.

### ***Example B: Color-Coding the Facts***

Provide a list of key content facts such as the major characters, events, dates, and places from the upcoming unit or topic. Ask students to color-code each entry based on their level of understanding.

Green dot: *I know it!*

Black dot: *I know a little about it.*

Blue dot: *I don't know anything about it.*

### ***Example C: Getting in Shape***

Announce the next unit using an exciting advertisement such as a jingle or ad.

Explain to students that this preassessment activity is designed to actively engage them in a self-assessment and lets them help you plan instruction for the upcoming topic or skill by "Getting in Shape."

- Display three large outlines of the following shapes with a descriptor key.

Example:

circle = I know a lot about it.

square = I know a little about it.

triangle = I don't know anything about it.

- Make a list of the most important facts in the upcoming unit.
- State a fact from the list.
- Tell students to stand in front of the shape that represents their knowledge of each fact as it is read.
- Gather data to plan the new study by using a chart similar to the following to record where students stand. Students may number each fact on a card and record a response for each one by drawing the selected shape.

**Figure 5.1**

<i>Fact</i>	<i>Circle</i> <i>I know a lot</i> <i>about it!</i>	<i>Square</i> <i>I know a little</i> <i>about it!</i>	<i>Triangle</i> <i>I don't know anything</i> <i>about it.</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			

<b>Figure 2.7</b>	
WHAT are you going to teach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the standards, concepts, skills, or information.</li> <li>• Select the unit or topic.</li> <li>• Select assessment tools to use during and after the activity. The results serve as a guide for instruction.</li> </ul>
WHO needs it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the preassessment data to identify the students who need               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A specific segment of instruction</li> <li>○ More or less instruction</li> <li>○ To use an extension or enrichment activity</li> <li>○ To work alone</li> <li>○ To work with others</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Decide how to assess during learning and evaluate progress to identify immediate needs.</li> <li>• Assess at the end of the learning to identify students who have needs that can be addressed in the upcoming plans.</li> </ul>
WHEN are you going to teach it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the best time to schedule instruction for the activity.</li> <li>• Decide when to teach each part of the lesson. Establish the order for each instructional segment.</li> <li>• Identify the best time to take an individual or small group aside for a special assignment or direct instruction.</li> <li>• Integrate the new learning in various areas of the curriculum, if possible.</li> <li>• Be aware of the need to revamp or readjust during instruction.</li> </ul>
WHERE will the student(s) work productively?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the best learning scenario for the student using the TAPS acronym: T = Total group    A = Alone    P = Partner S = Small group</li> <li>• Identify the best area for the student to work such as a Learning zone    Center    Station    Lab</li> <li>• Identify the best place for the student to complete the tasks: At a table    On a desk    In a chair    On a rug</li> </ul>
HOW will the activity engage the student?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide if the student learns best engaging in a student-focused activity or a teacher-directed activity.</li> <li>• Select the most effective group design for the student: Multiage    Knowledge base    Ability Interests    Random    Cooperative team Peer tutoring</li> <li>• Identify the type of assignment for the activity: Homework    Anchor task    Choice board Agenda    Contract    Project</li> </ul>

**Figure 5.5**

## Informal Assessment Tools

<i>Bodily/Kinesthetic</i>	<i>Visual/Spatial</i>	<i>Verbal/Linguistic</i>
<p><b><i>Make a motion!</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a signal</li> <li>• Use a hand signal</li> <li>• Use a nonverbal reaction</li> <li>• Wave a mini flag or sign</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Show it!</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use response cards</li> <li>• Respond on individual dry-erase boards</li> <li>• Use color-coded signals such as Popsicle sticks, signs, or disks</li> <li>• Create specific design</li> <li>• Design a model</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Respond orally</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use short answer</li> <li>• Give your point of view</li> <li>• Record your answer</li> <li>• Tell a friend</li> <li>• Brainstorm responses</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Act it out!</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be a human replica</li> <li>• Simulate</li> <li>• Demonstrate</li> <li>• Use a manipulative</li> <li>• Use a prop</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Draw it!</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A picture</li> <li>• A mural</li> <li>• A mini poster</li> <li>• Symbols</li> <li>• A caricature</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Report it!</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To the teacher</li> <li>• To a peer</li> <li>• To a volunteer</li> <li>• In a video</li> <li>• On a blog</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Show feelings/emotions</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With a body signal</li> <li>• Likert arm</li> <li>• Thumb it</li> <li>• Using facial expressions</li> <li>• Role-play</li> <li>• Response cards</li> <li>• Miming</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Create it!</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A replica</li> <li>• A display</li> <li>• A mini poster</li> <li>• A timeline</li> <li>• A diorama</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Write it</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a journal entry</li> <li>• On a chart</li> <li>• As notes</li> <li>• In a list</li> <li>• In a different genre</li> </ul>