

Deep Dive: Differentiated Homework

Differentiated instruction in education has been a practice which schools and educators have been embracing since the 1960s. The concept of differentiated instruction was born from the want and need to cater for large numbers of students in single classes so they could all individually learn effectively. In practice, teachers offer students different avenues to learning so they can all progress and learn, within this teachers will have different expectations for students' individual needs providing them with their own personalised instruction.

What is differentiated homework?

Differentiated homework is an extension of differentiated instruction outside of the classroom. When working in mixed ability classes and following the method of differentiated instruction, for homework to extend students' learning outside of school - the content also needs to be differentiated accordingly. This will further students' progression and provide them with effective personalised learning. One-size fits all teaching doesn't work, and the same applies for homework - in fact, it's even less effective than having a blanket approach for lesson plans as (if you're following conventional teaching methods) there's no teacher to provide guidance if students are assigned homework which they struggle to complete.

Execution

Personalising homework for each student is inevitably going to be time consuming and because of this, it isn't feasible. When looking at how to differentiate homework, grouping students based on similar abilities or learning styles will make planning differentiated homework easier and will follow the same process as when you are lesson planning. Additionally, taking input from your students will help to steer their learning in the right direction and make the task of setting homework less strenuous on you.

Take differentiated instruction into consideration

Homework is an extension of knowledge learnt during class time. In order for homework to work and help students progress in their studies, they need to be able to complete it and in order for this to happen, it has to be matched to their ability. Therefore, when planning your differentiated instruction lessons, think of homework as a separate extension for each instruction. Different directions and tasks will need to be assigned for different ability groups in order for them to learn effectively.

Clear communication

When differentiating homework you need to be clear in how you communicate the tasks students are expected to complete. Having multiple tasks to choose from can get confusing for students. If they aren't clear about which task they're meant to be completing for homework, it could result in students completing homework that is either above or below their capability which will be counterproductive to their progression.

Creating groups in class can be an easy way to get around this, and labelling homework in conjunction with these group names to assign differentiation. Alternatively, if there aren't set abilities in your class, clearly labelling the different tasks and displaying a list of names which correspond to each task is a simple way around it. When naming groups and tasks, be wary of how public these names are; generic or vague names are best and those that give indication toward the level of difficulty should be avoided.

Teach students how to choose well

Teaching students to think independently and become autonomous learners is part of our duty as educators - we can help to develop these transferable skills by teaching students the power of making choices that will benefit their learning. Differentiated homework need not always be assigned to students, instead, it can be left for the class to



decide which tasks would be most beneficial to them. Display the different tasks and ask students to complete the one they feel will be of the greatest help to them. This will help you to save time allocating tasks to specific students but also encourage autonomy in your class.

Give students good choices

Ultimately, the success of students' differentiated learning comes down to the content they are being delivered. In order for your differentiated homework to provide students with effective learning and to help them progress, students need to achieve their best, and the content needs to be good quality. The effort you put into creating standard homework tasks should be replicated in each variation of differentiated homework you offer your students to ensure they are getting the intended results from them. This includes ensuring your homework has a clear purpose, is efficient, that students take ownership, it appeals to them aesthetically and information is clear.

Don't overwork yourself

Creating multiple different pieces of homework to support differentiation can be a lot of work on top of your already demanding workload. However, integrating this into your original planning will help to make the task more manageable. It's important to remember that not all tasks lend themselves to differentiation, so not every piece of homework needs variations. Additionally, remember that not every task needs new content created - you will already have an abundance of tasks and resources readily available to you that you can use.

Benefits of Differentiated Homework

- There is no single way in which homework can be differentiated which means it can be personalised for your individual students and classes. Having the ability to differentiate home-learning based on amount, skill area, purpose and difficulty means that students are getting work assigned to them which will assist in them being successful in their studies.
- Delivering differentiated and personalised homework tasks can help to improve completion rates of homework. Common reasons for students not completing homework is due to it being too difficult or them simply not being engaged in the task. Differentiating work based on ability and learning styles makes tasks more appealing to students, making their desire to complete work increase and completion rates to rise.
- With large and mixed ability classes becoming ever more the norm within UK secondary schools, differentiating homework alongside instruction is the best and most effective way to cater to the varying needs of students in your classroom.
- Differentiation promotes an inclusive and personalised classroom. Students' learning styles are catered to, mixed ability classes are able to progress at their own rate and SEN pupils are involved in home-learning so that students can all learn effectively.

Differentiated Homework and Show My Homework

Differentiation is at the core of teaching and learning today, and as a result, should be reflected in homework. The process of setting differentiated homework can be overwhelming and time-consuming which is why Show My Homework has its own Differentiated Homework feature.

Show My Homework acts as a school's centralised point for homework whereby teachers upload their own homework content into cleanly formatted templates which students then have access to 24/7 with any supporting documents or links attached. In order to further support differentiation and personalised content, Show My Homework have developed a feature that easily allows teachers to assign differentiated homework to classes through the setting of separate 'trays'.

By making the setting of differentiated homework this simple, teachers are more inclined to choose this style of homework task, and as a result, students will receive home-learning that will help them progress most effectively.

