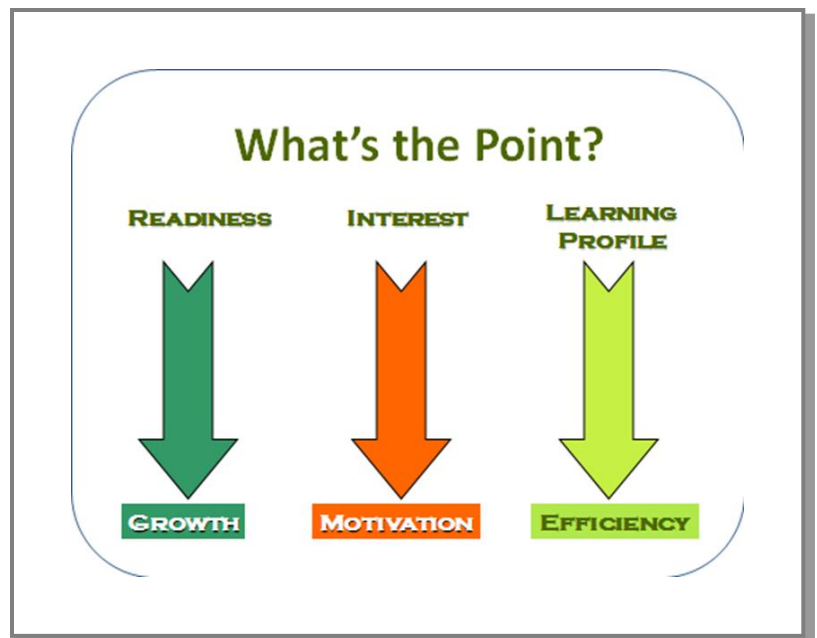


## Differentiation for Readiness

Student readiness for learning on a particular day with a particular topic is influenced by many factors. Some of these are:

- Prior knowledge or general experience, including the degree of previous school success in this topic or discipline
- Knowledge, understanding, and skill in topic prerequisites
- Existing misunderstandings held about the topic or discipline
- General communication, thinking, reasoning, and other skills
- Developmental stage (physical, cognitive, or affective)
- Current and past physical and mental health
- Interest in and attitude toward school, subject, topic, or teacher
- Learning profile match or mismatch of the task with student preferences



Student readiness is not a fixed factor. Sometimes a student who typically struggles in a subject may have a surprisingly great amount of background knowledge in a specific topic. In this case, the student may be ready for more advanced work than usually expected. On the other hand, students who are usually quite advanced may be missing some

prerequisites in a topic or may be distracted by other issues in their lives. In this case, they may need a more scaffolded experience to be successful.

When differentiating for readiness, teachers try hard to look at a student's readiness for specific content, processes, or products, rather than making decisions based solely on measures of general ability or aptitude, or on school-assigned labels, such as special education or gifted. According to Carol Ann Tomlinson, "It is fairer and more accurate to look at readiness for a particular endeavor instead of using one skill to make a judgment about general ability" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 53).

### What Does Differentiation for Readiness Look and Sound Like?

Teachers deal with readiness differences via several paths: tiered tasks and small-group instruction are two of the most common. **Tiered tasks** are those tasks that are designed at different levels of depth or complexity to match students' next steps for learning needs. Tiered tasks may be assigned by the teacher, which is most common, or chosen by the students after they have had some instruction in how to choose well and why they might wish to do so.

**Small-group instruction** occurs when, based on formal or informal assessment data, it is clear that a student or group of students has a particular need for direct instruction or small-group support at a specific level that would not be appropriate for the whole class.

### Using the Tiering Strategy

The following classroom examples are of teachers using the **tiering strategy** in their classroom. Column A is what you might hear the teacher say, and column B explains why this is an example of differentiation for readiness. Column C provides a possible common KUD.

A: What you hear the teacher say	B: What makes this an example of differentiation for readiness	C: The KUD of this activity
<p>“For this activity, you will use your just-right book to help you answer questions about story elements.”</p>	<p>This is a very common example of differentiating student access to <b>content</b> via readiness. In this case, it is the teacher who has decided the appropriate level of book that the students will use.</p>	<p>All students are working with the following KUD related to story elements, but at an appropriate reading level:</p> <p><b>Know</b> story elements.</p> <p><b>Understand</b> that you can find the same story elements in all stories. Each element has a different role in communicating the author’s message.</p> <p><b>Be able to</b> identify story elements and describe how they work together to deliver the author’s message.</p>
<p>“You will all be solving problems involving graphing equations. Most of you will find that problems 1-5, 6-8, and 10 will help you practice what we have learned and help you grow. If you feel that you are ready for a challenge, do problems 4-12, instead.”</p>	<p>This can be classified as an example of differentiating <b>process</b> or <b>content</b> via readiness. The teacher asks the students to choose the regular or advanced set of problems, according to what they feel ready to tackle. If the teacher is concerned that students will not make a good choice of level, she should either talk to students about the importance of working just a bit beyond their current level of expertise or assign the different sets of problems to students based on her current knowledge of their readiness for the task.</p>	<p>The KUD might look something like</p> <p><b>Know</b> signs and symbols used in equations, as well as parts of a graph and their functions.</p> <p><b>Understand</b> that graphing equations can help you visualize what is happening in a problem or situation.</p> <p><b>Be able to</b> graph equations.</p>
<p>“We will all be reading about the various concepts of intelligence in psychology. Most of you will read the chapter in our text book. I am going to ask</p>	<p>This is an example of <b>content</b> differentiation for readiness. This teacher has a few students who read beyond post-secondary level and so he has decided to ask them to read a more advanced text on the same topic to help them gain</p>	<p>A possible KUD might be</p> <p><b>Know</b> current thoughts about intelligence.</p> <p><b>Understand</b> that experts disagree about what intelligence is, where it comes from, and</p>

<p>some of you to read about the same topic in a current journal article on the subject.”</p>	<p>knowledge of the topic and continue to stretch their reading comprehension skills.</p>	<p>how (and if) it is developed over time. <b>Be able to</b> explain the varied theories about intelligence in the field of psychology.</p>
<p>“Please visit the stations that you think will most help you prepare for the unit test on natural resources. Take the ‘check your readiness’ quiz if you are not sure what you need...”</p>	<p>This is an example of differentiating <b>content</b> or <b>process</b> for student readiness (depending on what the students do at the stations). Each station deals with a different concept from the chapter.  Notice that the teacher provides some guidance for students who are not sure of where they should go, via a quick self-correcting quiz.</p>	<p>A possible KUD might be <b>Know</b> natural resources in a given region and their current state of sustainability. <b>Understand</b> that natural resources influence those who live in that location. Natural resources are not infinite. <b>Be able to</b> identify natural resources and explain their importance to those living there. Identify related sustainability issues.</p>
<p>“If you need help with terms, please pick up the vocabulary packet.”</p>	<p>This is an example of the teacher providing <b>readiness supports</b>. Rather than handing the vocabulary packet to everyone, she asks students to determine whether or not they need it. Of course, if a student who needs the packet does not pick one up, she is likely to encourage him to do so—or surreptitiously deliver one to the student herself!</p>	<p>The KUD here would vary depending on the subject area.</p>

With young students, teachers may need to make most of the readiness decisions, as students may not know what would be a good fit for them. As students grow older, they should take on more responsibility for making wise decisions. If a student does not make a wise choice, then the teacher may decide to intervene with suggestions. Of course, it is the goal in a differentiated classroom to get all students to want to pick

an appropriate level of challenge *and* to provide them with the tools with which to make that choice.

## Using Small-Group Instruction

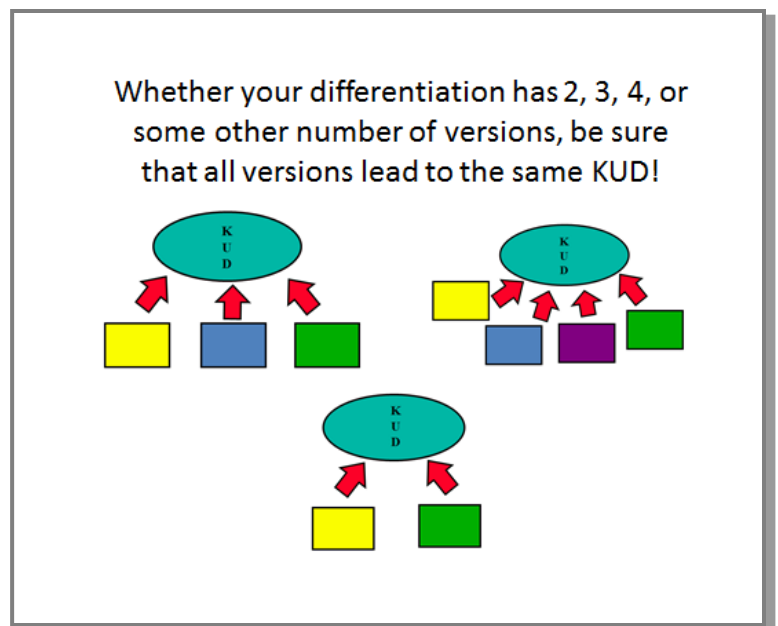
**Small-group instruction** is a good strategy whenever a group of students has a specific need that the rest of the class does not or where there is great variance in the level or amount of instruction needed. In the example below, you will see how a teacher uses small-group instruction to tailor instruction to student readiness levels. When some students work in a small group with the teacher, it is important that the students who are not in the group have productive work to do that does not require teacher assistance and that they know the routines for working alone or in small groups on their own.

A: What you hear the teacher say	B: What makes this an example of differentiation for readiness	C: The KUD of this activity
<p>“Please see the board for this week’s scheduled teacher talk time. If your name is listed, you must attend the mini-lesson. The topic of the session is also listed, so if you think the session would be helpful, you are welcome to attend.”</p>	<p>This could be an example of readiness differentiation of <b>content</b>, <b>process</b>, or <b>product</b>, depending on what the small-group lesson includes and what the rest of the class is doing while the teacher works with a small group. For example, if this is a world language teacher who has noticed that some students are having difficulty memorizing vocabulary using flash cards, she might decide to do a session on a variety of other ways to memorize vocabulary.</p>	<p>In the world language example, a KUD might be</p> <p><b>Know</b> a variety of techniques to memorize vocabulary.</p> <p><b>Understand</b> that there are many ways to improve your memorization of vocabulary. Some will work better than others for you. The more ways you have at your disposal, the more likely you are to be successful.</p> <p><b>Be able to</b> memorize vocabulary successfully.</p>

## Using Small-Group Instruction with Struggling Students

Many teachers already pull together small groups who are having difficulty with a topic. These are some examples of what you might hear a teacher say in that small-group instruction situation:

- “You mentioned on your pre-assessment that you were worried about the upcoming poetry unit. Let me show you the connection between song lyrics and poetry. You will see that you already know a lot about what we will study in this unit.”
- “Let’s review the order of operations before starting our work on factoring...”
- “Let’s practice using our home row keys before we start work on our final project.”
- “Let’s use the molecule kits to help us better visualize the structure of the elements.”
- “Let’s work on pronunciation skills so your skit will be more understandable to your audience.”



## Using Small-Group Instruction with Students Who Are Ready for an Extra Challenge

Teachers in a differentiated classroom also watch for opportunities to conduct small-group instruction with students who have mastered the knowledge, understanding, and skill for this particular lesson or learning experience. This ensures that, when

needed, these students also have access to **content, processes, and products** that are appropriately challenging for them.

- “You already know how to tell time, so let’s look at how to do elapsed time using the 24-hour clock they use in Europe.”
- “Because you showed me on your pretest that you are already familiar with the organization and content of the periodic table, I will introduce you to other versions that scientists have come up with that can help you see the relationships among the elements in different ways.”
- “Because you already know how to use the PowerPoint tools that I will be teaching to the rest of the class, I want to teach you about some design principles that might help you refine the look of your PowerPoint presentations.”
- “You three already know the notes of the treble and bass clefs, so now we will learn about the alto and the tenor clefs.”
- “I noticed that you three are getting pretty good at knowing when to start a new paragraph when writing. So today, we are going to learn some transition words and phrases that will make the change to another paragraph seem smooth.”

*The best differentiation occurs when we have formal or informal data indicating specific needs of a student or group of students and then use that information to design appropriate work to help them move ahead.*

## Using Data to Design Readiness Differentiation

Notice that many of the teachers in the above examples used formative assessment data to determine who belonged in the small-group sessions. The best differentiation occurs when we have formal or informal data indicating specific needs of a student or

group of students and then use that information to design appropriate work to help them move ahead. Having assessment data at hand can also help a teacher justify to students and parents why some students get different work than others.

When designing differentiation for readiness, ensure that, in general, all versions of the task lead to the same KUDs, especially the Understands. Occasionally it will be necessary to vary the knowledge and skills if there is evidence that students have either already attained that knowledge and skills or need prerequisite practice prior to working with the target knowledge and skills. Regardless of their current readiness level, however, students need access to the big ideas of the unit, even if they come to understand those ideas at different levels of depth or complexity.

*Differentiation for readiness is designed to maximize student growth. Students cannot grow if what they are asked to learn is way too easy or way too hard.*