

# Adapting Your Materials for Use in Mixed-ability Classrooms

**Many teachers in EFL settings are faced with the challenge of dealing with large classes of students with mixed abilities. In such settings, it can be difficult to maintain learner motivation and engagement.**

**During the session, participants will:**

- learn how to adapt their materials for use in these settings, whether they are teaching young learners, teens, or older students.
- explore techniques for conducting activities in classes of mixed-ability students, including pacing, personalizing activities, and grouping learners. The techniques will address ways to simplify tasks as well as to make activities more challenging.



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Susan Iannuzzi began her TEFL career in Cairo, where she taught and piloted materials for an international publisher, which ultimately led to a jump “behind the screen” to edit and create materials. She has authored or co-authored more than 25 course textbooks that are in use around the world in both public and private schools.

She has also conducted teacher training across the world with a special focus on materials development in Egypt, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ukraine, Moldova, Rwanda, Ecuador, and Brazil.

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# Adapting Materials for Use in Mixed-Ability Classrooms

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# Overview

- Share a framework for adapting materials
- Techniques for grouping mixed-ability students
- Apply the framework
- Discuss how to actually adapt materials



# Why classes may have mixed abilities....





# Results of mixed abilities in the classroom



# Another result of mixed-ability classes



# Adapting materials: a guiding framework

## Weaker Students

- Simplify
- Reduce output (amount of speaking or writing)
- Reduce frustration
- Build confidence
- Keep them involved

## Stronger Students

- Add challenges
- Increase output (amount of speaking or writing)
- Prevent boredom
- Maintain confidence
- Keep them involved



# Grouping matters!

- **Stronger** and **weaker** together
  - Stronger help weaker
  - Aspirational for weaker students
  - BUT... may be frustrating for both
- **Stronger together** / **weaker together**
  - Students work at own levels
  - May be easier to manage
  - BUT... may create bad feelings
- Try to use different grouping strategies.



Remember! Time is not unlimited.



# Vocabulary (primary, beginner)



## Key vocabulary

- house
- sun
- flowers
- windows
- door

At level: Teacher asks class: *Point to the flowers, etc.*

# Possible adaptations



## Weaker students

- Point to the flowers.  
*Ask: Flowers?*
- Point to the flowers and model.  
*Say: Point to the flowers.*

## Stronger students

- Point to the flowers.  
*Ask: Windows?*  
*Student: No! Flowers!*
- Increase direction complexity.  
*Say: Point to a window,  
the door, and the sun.*

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# Vocabulary (secondary / tertiary)

Preceding activity: Brainstorm vocabulary in pairs or groups.

## Vocabulary

Look at the list of sports you brainstormed. Write them in the correct list. Can you add any additional sports to the lists?

Combat Sports	Extreme Sports	Water Sports	Traditional Sports	Track & Field Sports

Taken from *Do you Speak English?* Supplementary English text created by Ukrainian English teachers with the funding of the U.S. State Department.

# Adapting for weaker students

- Assign fewer categories to brainstorm per group. Then combine groups to complete the chart.
- Do not require additional items / require one item per list.
- Give some vocabulary items and have the groups put them in the correct column.
- Give first letter of target vocabulary words to start them off.

# Adapting for stronger students

- Require the additional items.
- Write sentences using the new vocabulary.
- Rank the sports according to preference, level of danger, etc. / Write a sentences to explain your choices.
- Learn words for equipment needed to do the sports.

# Adapting reading materials



# Reading

- Students read a short text and answer the questions (at level).

## **Comprehension**

### **1. Read the text. Answer the questions.**

1. In which ways are Max and his father similar?
2. Why is Max's father handy?
3. In which ways are Max's parents similar? In which ways are they different?
4. What does Max do to help around the house?



# Adapting for weaker students



- Put answers on cards.
- Students match (in groups or on their own).
- Give paragraphs for answers.
- Split into groups to answer questions.

# Adapting for stronger students



Create inference questions.

- Is Max more like his father or mother? Why do you think so?
- Do you think Max's parents are happy with him? Why or why not?

# How do we write inference questions?

## Comprehension

### 1. Read the text. Answer the questions.

1. In which ways are Max and his father similar?
2. Why is Max's father handy?
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4. What does Max do to help around the house?



Tip!

Create inference questions by reviewing content in comprehension questions in the textbook or teacher's guide.

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# Ideas to adapt reading activities

## Weaker students

- Pre-teach hard vocabulary.
- Use visuals to explain meaning.
- Give answers on cards to match to questions.
- Split text into blocks.





# Ideas to adapt reading activities

## Stronger students

- Identify key vocabulary.
- Choose five words and write synonyms or antonyms.
- Rewrite sentences in different tense.
- Write questions for others to answer.



# Learning together in mixed-ability classes



# Writing project

The textbook says this:

**Find a photo of an interesting home on the internet.**

**Write a descriptive essay about it.**

How can we do this in groups?



# Writing project

- Your Teacher's Guide says this:

## Writing

**1. Find a photo of an interesting home on the internet. Write a descriptive essay about it. Include the following information in your essay.**

- A) Description of the home's location. What country is it in? Is it in the countryside, in the mountains, or somewhere else?
- B) Description of its appearance. What does it look like on the outside? What does it look like on the inside? If you can't see from the photo, use your imagination.
- C) Describe the furniture, appliances, and decor of the home. Again, use your imagination if necessary.
- D) Describe the type of person who lives in the house or who would live in the house. What is his or her personality like? What is his or her job?

# Leveled tasks





# Tailor the task to the students' levels

- Group students according to level.
- Students work together to create one product.
- Group is accountable.
- Teacher is a resource.



**Tip!**

Occasionally using groups during writing tasks can save a lot of time when grading. (15 groups of 4 = 15 assessments versus 60!)



# Preparation is key!

- Be clear about goals.
- Focus on needed language.
- Remember our adaption framework!



# Writing project: Weaker students



# Control the input

- Relevant language: vocabulary, grammar
- Maximize students' time on task.





# Adjust the output

- Fill in the blanks.

The house is in the \_\_\_\_\_.  
The weather is probably  
\_\_\_\_\_. There is some  
\_\_\_\_\_ on the ground. The  
house is made of \_\_\_\_\_,  
but there aren't any \_\_\_\_\_.



# Writing project: Stronger students



# Expand the input

- New vocabulary
- Inferences – grammar
- Who lives in the house?
- What is their personality like?
- What is their job?





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# Parting words

- Remember the guiding framework's goals.
- You know your class best!



# References

Mixed Ability Adaptations

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/adapting-materials-mixed-ability-classes>

Leveled Tasks

[https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource\\_files/multi-level\\_tc\\_-\\_part\\_2.pdf](https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/multi-level_tc_-_part_2.pdf)

# Thank you!

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