

Tiering Required Tasks

If your teaching position is like mine, then your school district requires that you teach certain genres in reading and specific kinds of writing such as persuasive and informative essays. Tiering reading texts when teaching a genre is easy as long as your school district does not insist that you use one text for all students. Here, you would choose texts within a genre, such as realistic fiction, that match students' instructional reading levels. (See pages 33-43 for suggestions on estimating students' instructional reading levels.) Independent reading is a crucial required task, for it provides opportunities for students to practice and apply what they've learned during instructional reading.

Developing tasks that students can succeed at means that you are also building students' self-confidence, motivation, and the inner voice that says, *I can do this!* Brian and his classmates deepened my understanding of the need to match texts and tasks to students, because when these students experienced success with reading, writing, and analyzing texts in their special class, they became engaged learners who wanted to repeat these successes (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). What discouraged these students was returning to learning at their frustration levels in other subjects. Tiering reading tasks and texts means that students read books and complete assignments that are within their learning reach; Vygotsky called this the zone of proximal development (1978). I call it the teaching and learning zone. In the teaching and learning zone, students can move forward with the support of their teacher and/or a peer expert. Here's what matching texts and tasks to students means. If a seventh grader reads instructionally at third grade, that seventh grader should apply grade-level skills and high-level reading strategies to the easier text. All students, no matter what their instructional reading levels, should engage in the high-level, analytical thinking expected for their grade using materials they can read. To improve as a reader and to enlarge reading vocabulary, students need to learn at their instructional levels, think at high levels, and complete a great deal of independent practice reading (Anderson et al., 1988; Ambruster et al., 2001; Block & Mangieri, 2002; Block & Reed, 2003; Buehl, 2001; Gambrell, 2007; Guthrie et al., 1999; Krashen, 1993; Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Reuzel et al., 1991; Snow et al., 1998). Because tiering invites teachers to adjust assignments and reading materials, you might see this as adding more to your workload. There will be times that you'll feel this is asking too much and your own frustration levels will escalate. My teaching experiences help me relate to these feelings. However, I'm hoping that you'll put these feelings aside as you explore suggestions for tiering both required and choice tasks because I have included the support you need to succeed.

Benefits of Tiering

improved self-confidence

to enlarge vocabulary
learn at inst. level
think at high level
complete a great deal of independent reading