

Differentiation Strategies for Young Learners

1. Background (Knowledge, Culture, Experiences)

Young learners come with different life experiences and cultural knowledge.

Strategies

- **Activate prior knowledge**
 - Use KWL charts (Know–Want to know–Learned)
 - Ask simple discussion questions before the lesson.
- **Use visuals and real objects**
 - Photos, flashcards, realia, short videos.
- **Localize content**
 - Connect lessons to **students' school, family, or city.**
- **Story sharing**
 - Let students talk about their own experiences related to the topic.
- **Choice of examples**
 - Use culturally familiar foods, games, or places.

Example

Lesson topic: Food

Students can talk about **their favorite local foods** instead of unfamiliar Western foods.

2. Readiness (Skill Level)

Students may be at **different academic or language levels.**

Strategies

- **Tiered tasks**
 - Same topic but different difficulty levels.

Example:

Level	Task
Beginner	Match pictures and words
Intermediate	Write simple sentences
Advanced	Write a short paragraph

- **Sentence frames**
 - Provide scaffolding such as:
 - “I like ___ because ___.”
- **Small group support**
 - Teacher works with struggling students while others work independently.
- **Flexible grouping**
 - Sometimes mix levels, sometimes group by level.

3. Language Proficiency

Students may have **very different English abilities.**

Strategies

- **Visual support**
 - Pictures, gestures, demonstrations.
- **Simplified instructions**
 - Short sentences and clear modeling.
- **Language scaffolds**
 - Word banks
 - Sentence starters
 - Dialogue models.
- **Partner support**
 - Pair a stronger student with a developing learner.
- **Multimodal responses**
 - Allow drawing, pointing, or acting instead of only speaking.

4. Learning Speed

Some students finish quickly while others need more time.

Strategies

- **Anchor activities**
 - Extra tasks ready for early finishers:
 - reading corner
 - vocabulary games
 - drawing activities.
- **Chunk instructions**
 - Break tasks into smaller steps.
- **Extended time**
 - Allow slower students more time to complete tasks.
- **Learning stations**
 - Different activities around the room students rotate through.
- **Self-paced tasks**
 - Worksheets with optional challenge questions.

5. Interests

Young learners are more motivated when lessons connect to their interests.

Strategies

- **Choice**
 - Let students choose topics or activities.

Example:

- Draw your favorite animal
- Write about your favorite game
- Describe your favorite food
- **Project-based learning**
 - Students create posters or presentations on topics they like.
- **Gamification**
 - Turn activities into games or challenges.
- **Interest surveys**
 - Ask students about hobbies, music, sports, or games.
- **Themed lessons**
 - Use themes students enjoy (dinosaurs, space, superheroes).