

KEYBOARD SKILLS

Differentiation Strategies

General Principles

“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.” —Helen Keller

Organizing a class of diverse learners is a challenge, but with a positive outlook, careful planning, and a lot of flexibility, **all students** can be engaged and challenged at personally-appropriate levels. When thinking about students’ capabilities and needs, keep in mind a few fundamental ideas:

- **All students can develop** their abilities and understandings.
- Every student has a **unique learning style**.
- Success looks and sounds **different for every student**.
- Students’ **needs can change**—both intensifying and lessening.

Clearly, one learning plan or approach will not work for all students—be curious about each student. Though it is challenging and requires considerable amounts of extra work, the payoff from helping unlock a student’s ability is one of the great gifts we can receive as educators!

At one time or another, *all* students need extra help and attention. Even when students don’t show obvious signs of delay or misunderstanding they may benefit from extra reinforcement and differentiated modalities for processing information. When creating multiple levels of challenge for an activity or song, look for opportunities to allow students to choose their own level. Rather than feeling pigeonholed or labeled, students will be more successful and engaged when they can self-select extra support as needed; they will often identify that they are struggling and happily accept a scaffold or simplification. Of course, there are instances when students need a direct intervention without as much say in the matter. As often as possible, present simplified versions as temporary interventions and find ways to entice students to move forward. Communicate your belief in their growth potential and demonstrate

a willingness to help them advance as quickly as possible. It is a great teaching day when we can motivate students to work harder than they thought they could and achieve more than they imagined was possible!

“Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn’t mean he lacks vision.” – Stevie Wonder

Making Repertoire Levels

Variables for Simplifying or Adding Complexity

To teach a mixed-level class the same repertoire, consider how the below musical elements can be added to and subtracted from any song or exercise.

Musical Elements to Add and Subtract

Articulation
Dynamics
Octave
Ornamentation
Right Hand
Left Hand

By changing these specific elements, it will still be possible to rehearse in unison since the rhythms and pitches remain the same.

Adding (or Removing) Accompaniments

For any given melody, create a variety of accompaniments that students can choose from and learn based on their playing ability. This will keep your advanced students challenged and add a musically satisfying quality for all students during ensemble performances.

Accompaniments

Sustained Pitches for Left or Right Hand
Single-note Bass Line
Alberti Bass
Independent Textures
Simple Chordal Accompaniments

Very advanced students can, of course, play both parts with two hands. Consider how your provided accompaniments can provide opportunities for students to accompany other students who are learning the melody line.

Additional Variables

Though it will not be possible for group playing, these other elements can serve as added strategies for challenging advanced students.

Additional Variables

Key
Meter
Rhythm Variation
Pedals

Below are some examples using “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” to show many of the strategies mentioned, as well as others, for varying the level of difficulty.

Right Hand Only



Left Hand Only



Both Hands: Unison



Both Hands: Broken Melodic Line



Ledger Lines



Rhythmic Variations



Easy Single-Note Accompaniment

Meter Variations



Alberti Bass



Simple Chordal Accompaniment



While some melodies are simple and need to be differentiated to make them more challenging, others need to be simplified in order to involve all students. Here is an example of a melody differentiation, presented as “Challenges”:

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Move on to the next challenge when you can play all the notes in a steady tempo. Make sure you can do it well more than once!

The Magic Flute

Mozart

Challenge 1:



Challenge 2:



Challenge 3:



PDF The Magic Flute Differentiation

Keyboard Note Recognition

Depending on the needs of the child, you can print and place removable decals directly on the keys of the keyboard. Print either letter names, finger numbers, or notes on the staff on each decal to suit the needs of each learner. Keep in mind that, for some students, teaching by finger number can impede their ability or motivation to learn to associate note names with each key or to read the notes on the staff.



Writing on removable tape, on sticky flags, or with dry-erase markers directly on the keys are three other easy in-the-moment solutions. Use these removable supports instead of long-lasting stickers to suit the needs of varying classes that may use the instruments throughout the day.





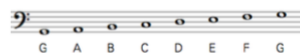
Differentiating Tasks

There are so many skills needed to read and play a song on the keyboard. The list is extensive and includes big concepts like the following:

Additional Variables

Note Recognition on the Staff
Note Recognition on the Keyboard
Finger Recognition
Rhythm Reading
Pitch Reading
Two-Hand Coordination

Consider these, and others, as you design differentiated tasks for various kinds of learners. You can distribute music with multiple tasks written out, or create separate sheets for each level of difficulty. Below are two examples that use multiple challenge levels and ideas for the types of graphics that can be added for extra support.



Row, Row, Row Your Boat

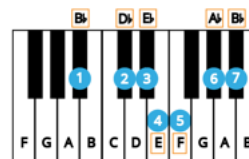
Challenge 1: Label the notes in the bass clef.

Challenge 2: Learn to play the first 8 measures fluently.

Challenge 3: Work out how to play this when both hands start on G!



PDF Row, Row, Row Your Boat Differentiation

Blue Monk

Challenge 1: Label the notes in the bass clef. (Remember the flats!)

Challenge 2: Learn to play the bass line in your left hand.

Challenge 3: Play hands together—improvise in your right hand while playing the bass line in your left!

Challenge 4: Build the major chords

Challenge 5: Work out playing the walking bass line using the notes of the chords!

**PDF Blue Monk Differentiation**