

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a teaching approach that involves adapting lessons, activities, and assessments to **meet the diverse learning needs, abilities, and interests** of all students in a classroom.

In other words, teachers modify **content** (what students learn), **process** (how they learn), and **product** (how they show their learning) to ensure that every learner, whether **below, average, or above average**, can succeed and make progress.

Teachers can **differentiate** the following grammar lesson while maintaining the same learning **OUTCOMES**. At the end of the lesson, students can apply past simple and past continuous tenses to accurately describe past events in written sentences and coherent conversations.

Example: **Grammar (Past Simple and Past Continuous): G.9 Unit 1**

1. Content (What students learn)

- **Below-average learners:**

Focus on recognizing and using the form of each tense (e.g., “**was/were + verb-ing**,” “**verb + -ed**”).

Example: Identify which sentences are past simple or past continuous.

Ex: “He **was playing** football.” / “He **played** football.”

- **Average learners:**

Practice using both tenses together in short contexts.

Ex: “He was playing video games when his friend called.”

- **Above-average learners:**

Explore complex sentence structures and storytelling using both tenses together.

Ex: Write a short paragraph about an interrupted action using past simple and past continuous.

2. Process (How students learn)

- **Below-average:**

Use visuals, timelines, and guided sentence-building activities.

Example: Match pictures with sentences or fill in blanks with given verbs.

- **Average:**

Work in pairs to complete short dialogues or sequencing tasks.

Example: Put sentences in order to make a logical story using both tenses.

- **Above-average:**

Create original stories or role-plays that naturally use both tenses.

Example: “Describe what you were doing yesterday when something unexpected happened.”

3. Product (How students show their learning)

- **Below-average:** Complete a worksheet with **fill-in-the-blanks**.

- **Average:** Write a few **connected sentences** about a past event.

- **Above-average:** Write a **short narrative** combining both tenses correctly.

In differentiated instruction, the **learning environment** is the fourth key element (along with content, process, and product). It focuses on **how the classroom is set up and how learning feels for students physically, emotionally, and socially.**

Teachers can differentiate the environment when teaching past simple and past continuous tenses:

4. Environment (Where and with whom students learn)

Below-average learners:

- Provide a supportive and **low-stress setting**.
- * **Group** them with encouraging peers.
- Use learning corners or stations with visual aids (timelines, verb charts, sentence cards).
- Allow movement-based learning e.g., walking to a “Past Simple” or “Past Continuous” poster to match examples.

Average learners:

- Arrange **pair** or small-group seating to promote **peer support** and communication.
- Encourage collaborative practice (dialogues or sequencing stories together).
- Create a positive error-tolerant atmosphere.

Above-average learners:

- Provide flexible seating or a “challenge zone” where learners can **work independently** or mentor others.
- Encourage student-led mini-activities, such as asking them to lead a short storytelling activity.
- Offer extension materials (e.g., mystery pictures, creative writing prompts) in a “Fast Finishers” corner.

Differentiated Environment Summary:

- Visual aids and timelines support **below**-average learners.
- Pair and group collaboration for **average** learners.
- Flexible or leadership roles for **above**-average learners.

Assessment / Product:

Below-average: Correct use of each tense in isolated sentences.

Average: Accurate use of both tenses in short paragraphs.

Above-average: Fluent and creative storytelling showing clear understanding of both tenses.

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NB: Effective teachers know when and how much to **differentiate** depending on:

- Lesson outcomes
- Students' needs and levels
- Available time and resources

Teachers don't have to differentiate in every lesson, but they should **regularly plan** and **adjust instruction** to ensure all students are appropriately **challenged** and **supported**.