



PLANNING FOR SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

When teaching in small groups, there are a handful of different ways to approach planning instruction. In this document you will find descriptions of each, and examples for how each approach might fit into lesson plans.

The key to successful small group instruction is to be flexible with the use of these different options. Each type of small group instruction can have a place during a week, or over the course of a unit. There is no perfect formula to follow when planning small group instruction; it will depend on the teacher, their students, and how they learn best. If you are looking for a place to start, you can find a small group lesson planning template [here](#). For support in differentiating instruction, check out [this resource](#). Below you will find two examples for how a teacher might utilize each type of instruction, and switch between them seamlessly.

Same lesson, same way	Same lesson, different ways	Different lessons, different ways
Teaching the same lesson in the same way to each small group allows students to access material in a smaller and more intimate setting with the teacher. This allows for more frequent participation and practice, and more individualized attention from the teacher. While it may feel repetitive or time consuming at first, the benefits outweigh the effort.	Students learn in many different ways, and often need different supports in order to successfully access material. It is often beneficial to teach the same lesson with differentiated elements to help meet all students' needs. <i>For example, some students may benefit from using manipulatives, while other students may need a bit more scaffolding to access content.</i>	Sometimes students are in entirely different places with their learning and mastery of skills. In these instances, teachers can utilize small groups to adjust the pace and meet students where they are to ensure that all students are able to master the material.

Below are two examples of how a teacher might utilize all three types and switch back and forth between them seamlessly.

Example 1: Primary math - Ms. Swift introduced a new math concept to her second grade class - double digit addition. Below is how the first two weeks of the unit played out.

Day	Approach	How
Days 1 & 2	Same lesson, same way	Ms. Swift first split her class into three groups to introduce the new concept of double digit addition. She delivered the same introduction and hook to all three groups, and used the same activity to help students connect their prior knowledge to this new concept. She then used the same examples in all three groups to model the process, and all students worked through the same problems during guided practice and independent practice. After she had taught all three groups, she had students complete an exit ticket.
Days 3 & 4	Same lesson, different ways	From that exit ticket, Ms. Swift identified which students were comfortable with double digit addition and which students needed extra practice. Based on the exit tickets she split her class into two groups. Group 1 students demonstrated understanding of the concepts taught, while group 2 students showed a need for extra practice with the process. During the next two days, she continued with the next lessons, but differentiated based on the needs of each group.



		<p><i>In group 1, she had students work through problems and explain the process in their own words. She gave extra practice and asked students to do most of the talking.</i></p> <p><i>For group 2, who needed a little extra help, she remodeled the process for double digit addition, and used an acronym to help students remember the steps. She then walked through each step, gradually releasing students to solve the problems on their own.</i></p>
Day 5	Quiz	<p>Students took a quiz based on what they had learned so far.</p> <p>Ms. Swift analyzed the quiz results, and noticed that a handful of students had mastered the basic process of double digit addition and were ready to move onto the next concept of double digit addition with regrouping. There were also students who were still struggling with the process.</p>
Days 6 & 7	Different lesson, different ways	<p>Based on the quiz results, Ms. Swift regrouped her students. With one group she began teaching the new concept of double digit addition with regrouping. With the other group she scaffolded the process of two digit addition and provided additional support for students. She had students use manipulatives and to help visualize what they were doing, and also provided a graphic organizer for them to use.</p>
Day 8	Quiz	<p>Students took a quiz based on what they had learned so far. The quiz was differentiated, as one group had learned regrouping and the other had not.</p> <p>When Ms. Swift analyzed the results, she found that the students in group 2 had mastered the basic double digit addition process and were now ready to learn regrouping. Since group 1 had already been taught regrouping, she planned to challenge them a bit with three digit addition to allow group 2 to catch up, and then will bring the groups back together and utilize group 1 students to help group 2 students master regrouping.</p>

Example 2: Middle school English language arts – Mr. Kelly’s seventh grade class started a new novel study. Below is how the different types of small group instruction occurs throughout the novel study.

Day	Approach	How
Day 1	Whole group instruction	On the first day of the new novel study, Mr. Kelly taught a lesson on the background and significance of the novel. He introduced the historical context to the whole group, and then split students into triads to discuss a handful of questions. At the end of class, he revealed the novel to students.
Day 2	Same lesson, same way	Mr. Kelly divided his class into four groups of six students. In each group he provided students with a biography of the author. After a discussion, he asked students to make a few predictions based on the background and historical context they now had.
Day 3	Same lesson, same way	In each group, he introduced key vocabulary students would need to understand, and discussed two central themes that would carry throughout the novel. He then began reading chapter 1 aloud with students, and assigned the remainder of chapter 1 and all of chapter 2 for homework.



Days 4-7	Same lesson, different ways	Over the next few days, Mr. Kelly led a discussion on the early chapters of the novel in small groups. He had students in all groups discuss the characters, setting and the key events in each chapter, and had key points of analysis that he wanted each group to reach, but the pace of the lessons was dependent on where students took the discussions. He prepared different guided questions for students to answer, and assignments were also differentiated. He made sure that all students had read through chapter 10, and that each group had a solid understanding of the key themes of the novel that were starting to develop.
Day 8	Quiz	Students took a quiz on their current understanding of the characters in the novel. Mr. Kelly analyzed student answers on the quiz and noticed that some students were successfully comparing, contrasting and analyzing the characters in the novel with little support. He also noted that other students were going to need scaffolds put in place to help their analysis.
Days 9 - 15	Different lesson, different ways	Based on the quiz results, Mr. Kelly regrouped his students. Over the course of the next few weeks each group read the remainder of the novel. Mr. Kelly led each group through discussions on the central themes and events. Depending on the day, each group tended to be on a different chapter. While he guided each group to use grade-level appropriate skills to analyze the text, he supported each group differently and tailored his lesson plans to meet their needs. He utilized different close reading techniques with students, and differentiated the questions for discussion, based on the analysis skills with which each group needed the most help.
Day 16	Same lesson, same way	Once all groups had finished the novel, Mr. Kelly re-centered the discussion on the central themes he needed all students to understand, and had students work with their individual group to summarize the novel. At the end of class he introduced the analysis project that would be the culmination of the novel study, and outlined the process and outcomes he expected. While all groups got to the end of the novel differently, he was confident that all students were prepared to be successful on this project.