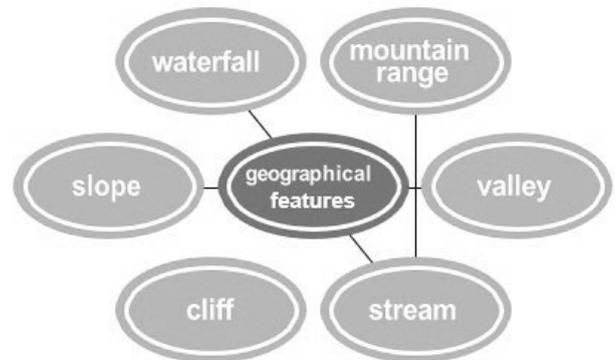


TEACHING MIXED-ABILITY CLASSES

Introduction

All classes have students of different abilities and with a range of different learning needs. The teacher's challenge is to engage the more advanced students at the same time as helping those who are finding lessons more difficult. Here are some practical tips to create a more inclusive classroom.



Group dynamics

Begin the whole class together with a lead-in activity to provide a sense of community and a foundation for the levelled tasks that will follow. Lead-in activities preview, present and practise language in a way that lends itself perfectly to whole-class, multi-level instruction. At the end of a lesson, always bring the class back together and assign a whole-class activity.

Group, pair and individual work

Vary the way students work in the class to address different levels and needs. Organise students to work in pairs, small groups and teams. It is less stressful for weaker students to work with other classmates because they have more time to think about tasks, and students can help and learn from each other.

In some schools, it may be possible to divide classes into two groups according to ability. The two groups can be given the same work to complete, or they can work on differentiated material.

Games and activities, such as brainstorming vocabulary, help to increase collaboration in the mixed-ability classroom. For example, ask students to work together to produce spidergrams as a way to help them remember topic vocabulary.

No matter what the level of the student, they all get better results through collaboration than they would have got by working on their own.

Pair work is usually successful in the mixed-ability classroom because it is easy to control and there is greater student participation. Depending on the task, decide how you organise your students into pairs: students with a similar level can work together at their own pace, or a stronger student can pair with a weaker student and help to support them. There are plenty of opportunities for pair work throughout *Optimise*.

Individual work allows for variations in speed and level. By giving a time limit rather than a quantity-of-work limit (e.g. 'Do as much as you can in three minutes.' instead of, 'Do exercise 3. '), students are able to work at their own pace.

TEACHING MIXED-ABILITY CLASSES

Specific strategies for dealing with below-level students

• General classroom organisation

Make sure weaker students don't sit at the back, where it's more difficult for you to make eye contact with them.

Give clear instructions and check students have understood the task before they begin. For more complex tasks, ask stronger students to do an example of the task to check understanding.

• Reading

Ask weaker students easier questions, alternating with harder questions for stronger students.

Simplify multiple-choice tasks by reducing the number of options. Then gradually increase to exam level.

• Grammar and Vocabulary

Simplify gap-fill tasks by introducing optional answers, so students can identify the correct answer rather than having to produce it.

Be selective in your error correction and praise students for what they have managed to do, regardless of what others have produced.

Use homework to address weaknesses and consolidate classwork by using the mixed-ability Grammar and Vocabulary worksheets on the Teacher's Resource Centre.

• Listening

Pause the audio regularly to check understanding and explain if anything remains unclear. For more difficult texts, provide audioscripts after the first two listenings.

• Speaking

Provide useful phrases and model answers for less-able students to use as a basis for their answers.

• Writing

Additional model answers can assist students with their writing tasks. For students who need more support, provide a gapped or jumbled model answer for them to complete or put in order instead of asking them to write a text from scratch.

Mixed-ability features in *Optimise*

The **Mixed-ability** features in the *Optimise* Teacher's Book help to engage different groups of students using the same class material as the starting point, but with multi-level instruction. This way, you avoid increased preparation time, and the student group can still work together for most of the class.

As well as the Mixed-ability features in the *Optimise* Teacher's Book, the **Optional extension** and **Fast finishers** boxes also offer teachers a range of suggestions for ways to differentiate activities for stronger students.



TEACHING MIXED-ABILITY CLASSES

Mixed ability

Pair up weaker students and give them the option of only reading two sections and working together to answer the questions. Challenge more advanced students who finish early by asking them to write three questions about the text. These can then be given to another early finisher to answer and then passed back to the original student for marking.



Fast finishers

Write these definitions on the board and ask students to find the words or phrases in the text in Exercise 3.

two children born at the same time to the same mother
be friends with someone
to have the same interests or opinions

Answers:

twins
get on with someone
have a lot in common

Optional extension

Before students give each other advice on how to improve their email, you could go over some key points on how to give effective feedback.

Only positive feedback: students only make suggestions about what their partner might add to or develop in his/her email. Feedback should give students a clear idea of how to improve.

Give a reader response: encouraging students to say what they expect to read in the email.

Limit feedback: A few main ideas is enough; three or four specific, clear ideas at the most.

The *Optimise* Teacher's Resource Centre provides additional Grammar and Vocabulary worksheets in addition to the Unit and Progress tests, all available at two levels (Standard and Higher).

The *Optimise* Test Generator also allows teachers to custom-build their own tests according to their students' needs.

Encourage students to use the Online Workbook. Students get immediate feedback on their work and they can do the tasks as many times as necessary in order to get them correct. It's perfect for students of all abilities.

