

Differing Student Abilities

Many schools place students of differing abilities in heterogeneous or mainstream classes, while others group students together in homogeneous classes according to their abilities. Within a heterogeneous class there is sure to be a wide range of student abilities and learning styles. This disparity can affect the realization of short- and long-term goals and can even sometimes disrupt the most carefully planned classroom session.

Most lesson plans are designed for the average student. But what can the teacher do to best serve the needs of every student in the class?

1. Employ a variety of teaching styles.

The teacher should use various teaching styles to address the different strengths or competencies of all students in the class. The teacher should present material to appeal to students who learn visually, aurally, kinesthetically and/or tactilely. For example, students studying the Torah blessings may read the prayer (visual); they may listen to a chanted rendition of the blessings on a cassette tape and sing along (aural); they may reenact the motions or actions of the prayer, such as being called up to the *bimah* (kinesthetic); or they may do an art project about the prayer, such as, make a blessing card (tactile). After all, true learning requires seeing, hearing, *and* doing.

2. Set up learning stations.

The creation of learning stations with a different assignment at each is a good way to allow students to progress at their own pace. Examples of assignments are:

- reading or chanting into a tape recorder.
- reading to one another.
- completing a written exercise in the text or workbook.
- solving a crossword puzzle or word search.
- answering a conceptual question about the prayer.
- matching questions with answers.
- completing a worksheet.
- writing a creative piece such as a poem or rap song about the prayer.
- working independently with [Ulpan Alef](#), the four-page conversational Hebrew folders (see page 53 in this guide).

Such independent study allows the teacher to circulate in the classroom or to listen to individual students read. A teacher's aide or high school tutor can help supervise and explain the assignments at each station.

3. Group students with mixed abilities.

Suggest to your teachers that they group students with a mix of abilities to allow the faster learner to be a resource for the slower learner. The give and take of such small-group study often sweeps the participants up in the learning and fosters a sense of responsibility to the group. Such cooperative or collaborative learning is useful for preparing a reading exercise; completing a directed grammar exercise; concretizing the theme of a prayer, for example, by referring to a *humash* or a map of Israel for information; debating the meaning of a prayer; and practicing the “choreography” of a prayer such as when to bow, stand up, or rise up on our toes.



4. Provide enrichment for fast learners.

The student who learns new material quickly risks becoming bored and frustrated if not further challenged. To this end, the teacher should:

- Use open-ended, divergent questions whenever possible, or assign an activity that requires original thinking; for example, the student selects key English words in a prayer of praise or thanks and explains how these words contribute to the theme of the prayer.
- Assign additional independent work in the workbook that accompanies the text.
- Use other workbooks such as the [Ten-Minute Hebrew Reader](#), the [Torah Skills Workbook for the New Siddur Program](#), or [Derech Chochmah](#).
- Direct students to complete extra worksheets.
- Supplement [Hineni](#) with the [Ulpan Alef](#) conversational language folders, or with simple storybooks from Israel.
- Allow students access to a tape recorder for reading or chanting prayers.
- Have the fast-learning students help those who need extra practice, for example, with reading aloud or completing exercises in the text.

5. Provide support for slower learners.

The student who is not linguistically proficient also needs support. To this end, the teacher should:

- Set a minimum level for everyone in the class (say, reading a prayer exercise) and offer an additional level of extra-credit work (say, reading the passage *and* translating key phrases) for those who choose to do more.
- Allow students a 10-minute period at a listening center with [My Hebrew Tutor](#), the cassette recording of the primer for the *New Siddur Program*; or have your teacher record key prayers for students to follow along or repeat.
- Have students practice decoding on the computer with [Shalom Uvrachah Interactive—the multimedia CD-ROM for Shalom Uvrachah—The New Hebrew Primer](#).
- Assign a buddy to each student for telephone practice at home.
- Assign fewer lines of Hebrew writing for a slower student than the rest of the class is completing.
- Offer a slower student reading supervision.
- Arrange one-on-one tutoring with a teacher, aide, or high-school student.
- Allow more time for test taking, or find alternate ways to test students' knowledge, such as having them do a creative art project or draw a picture to illustrate the theme of a prayer.

Encourage your teachers to recognize and address the special needs of individual students. Whenever possible they should try to individualize their programs to fit the needs of *all* students—to take into account diverse learning styles and different abilities and to strive for the emotional well-being of each member of the Hebrew class.

