Rick Wormeli

Rick offers a wealth of experience having worked as a middle grades teacher, human growth & development teacher, and staff development educator. He is also an educational consultant to National Public Radio, USA Today, and the Smithsonian Institute. Rick has presented at the White House, has appeared on Good Morning America, and has worked with school districts all across the country.

Published works:
The following is a list of selected titles and resources authored by Rick Wormeli:

Teacher Resources
- Meet Me in the Middle: Becoming and Accomplished Middle Level Teacher
- Day One and Beyond: Practical Ideas for New Middle Level Teachers
- Fair Isn’t Always Equal: Assessment and Grading in the Differentiated Classroom
- Summarization in Any Subject
- Because You Teach
- Assessment: Perspectives & Practicalities Seminar on CD-ROM

Differentiated Grading: Why Fair Isn’t Always Equal Seminar on CD-ROM
- At Work in the Differentiated Classroom (me and my classroom are the topic of tape #1)
- Differentiation from Planning to Practice

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E-8 Tiering Assignments & Assessments (Gr. 4-12 • All)
Samples of Tiered Tasks

Grade Level Task:
- Draw and correctly label the plot profile of a novel.

Advanced Level Tasks:
- Draw and correctly label the general plot profile for a particular genre of books.
- Draw and correctly label the plot profile of a novel and explain how the insertion or deletion of a particular character or conflict will impact the profile's line, then judge whether or not this change would improve the quality of the story.

Samples of Tiered Tasks

Early Readiness Level Tasks:
- Draw and correctly label the plot profile of a short story.
- Draw and correctly label the plot profile of a single scene.
- Given a plot profile of a novel, correctly label its parts.
- Given a plot profile with mistakes in its labeling, correct the labels.

Is it Fair?

The teacher gives one student a graphic organizer in order to aid his understanding of text. He does not give the organizer to the rest of the class – they don't seem to need it. The class and the student do well on the unit test. Is the grade fair for everyone involved?

Common Definition – Tiering is when we adjust the following to maximize learning:
- Readiness
- Interest
- Learning Profile

Rick’s Preferred Definition:
When we changing the level of complexity or required readiness of a task or unit of study in order to meet the developmental needs of the students involved (Similar to Tomlinson’s “Ratcheting”)

Two Significant Questions When Tiering

What will you accept as evidence of mastery?

What will you accept as evidence of near mastery?

What is Mastery?

“Tim was so learned, that he could name a horse in nine languages; so ignorant, that he bought a cow to ride on.”

Ben Franklin, 1750, Poor Richard’s Almanac
"Understanding involves the appropriate application of concepts and principles to questions or problems posed."
-- Howard Gardner, 1991

"Real comprehension of a notion or a theory -- implies the reinvention of this theory by the student...True understanding manifests itself by spontaneous applications." -- Jean Piaget

From the Center for Media Literacy in New Mexico --
"If we are literate in our subject, we can:
access (understand and find meaning in),
analyze,
evaluate,
and create
the subject or medium."

From Understanding By Design
(Wiggins, McTighe)

The Six Facets of True Understanding:
Explanation
Interpretation
Application
Perspective
Empathy
Self-knowledge

Tiering for Complexity
Uses Gradations
Introductory Level Understanding:
Student walks through the classroom door while wearing a heavy coat. Snow is piled on his shoulders, and he exclaims, "Brrrrr!" From depiction, we can infer that it is cold outside.

Sophisticated level of understanding:
Ask students to analyze more abstract inferences about government propaganda made by Remarque in his wonderful book, All Quiet on the Western Front.

- Determine the surface area of a cube.
- Determine the surface area of a rectangular prism (a rectangular box).
- Determine the amount of wrapping paper needed for another rectangular box, keeping in mind the need to have regular places of overlapping paper so you can tape down the corners neatly.
- Determine the amount of paint needed to paint an entire Chicago skyscraper, if one can of paint covers 46 square feet, and without painting the windows, doorways, or external air vents.

- Define vocabulary terms.
- Compare vocabulary terms.
- Use the vocabulary terms correctly.
- Use the vocabulary terms strategically to obtain a particular result.

- Identify characteristics of Ancient Sumer.
- Explore the intertwined nature between religion and government in Sumer.
- Explain the rise and fall of city-states in Mesopotamia.
- Trace modern structures/ideas back to their roots in the birthplace of civilization, the Fertile Crescent.

- Identify parts of a cell.
- Explain systems within a cell and what functions they perform.
- Explain how a cell is part of a larger system of cells that form a tissue.
- Demonstrate how a cell replicates itself.
- Identify what can go wrong in mitosis.
- List what we know about how cells determine what kind of cell they will become.
- Explain how knowledge of cells helps us understand other physiology.
1. Multiply fractions.
2. Multiply mixed numbers.
3. Multiply mixed numbers and whole numbers.
4. Critique the solutions of five students' work as they multiply mixed numbers.
5. Multiply mixed numbers and decimals.
6. Divide fractions.
7. Divide mixed numbers.
8. Divide mixed numbers and whole numbers.
9. Given similar problems completed by anonymous students, identify any errors they've made and how you would re-teach them how to do the problems correctly.

Working Definition of Mastery
(Wormell)

Students have mastered content when they demonstrate a thorough understanding as evidenced by doing something substantive with the content beyond merely echoing it. Anyone can repeat information; it's the masterful student who can break content into its component pieces, explain it and alternative perspectives regarding it cogently to others, and use it purposefully in new situations.

"The student will compare the United States Constitution system in 1789 with forms of democracy that developed in ancient Greece and Rome, in England, and in the American colonies and states in the 18th century."

-- Virginia, Grade 12, United States and Virginia Government

"The student will investigate and understand the characteristics of electricity. Key concepts include: the nature of electricity (voltage, ampere, resistance, conductors, and insulators), circuits (open/closed, parallel/series), magnetism and magnetic fields, static electricity, historical contributions in understanding electricity."

-- Virginia, Grade 4, Science

Anchor activities refer to two types of learner management experiences:

- "Sponge" activities that soak up down time, such as when students finish early, the class is waiting for the next activity, or the class is cleaning up or distributing papers/supplies

- A main activity everyone is doing from which the teacher pulls students for mini-lessons

Anchor Lesson Design
Anchor Activities Advice

- Use activities with multiple steps to engage students
- Require a product—increases urgency and accountability
- Train students what to do when the teacher is not available
- Start small: Half the class and half the class, work toward more groups, smaller in size
- Use a double t-chart to provide feedback
- Occasionally, videotape and provided feedback

Double-T Charts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[eye]</th>
<th>[ear]</th>
<th>[heart]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Char.'s of success we'd see</td>
<td>Char.'s of success we'd hear</td>
<td>Char.'s of success we'd feel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anchor Activities Advice, continued

- Task cards may help
- Use and train students in attention signals
- "Fish Bowl"
- Scaffold
- Examples and Non-examples
- 20-45 minutes in length for secondary students, 10-20 minutes for primary and early elementary students
- Train students in how to disengage from one activity and move back into another one successfully

Sample Anchor Activities

**History:**
Read pages 45-52 on the Industrial Revolution. Identify the five policies/ideas for which the meat-packing industry labor unions were fighting, then design a flag that incorporates symbols of each of those ideas in its pattern. Write a short paragraph describing the flag’s symbols.

**Math:**
Identify the number of faces, edges, and vertices for each of the following 3-dimensional shapes: cube, rectangular prism, rectangular pyramid, triangular pyramid, triangular prism, pentagonal pyramid, hexagonal prism, cylinder. Then draw the patterns on paper that, when folded and edges taped together, would create each of these shapes. Then, actually build each 3-d shape from your 2-d drawings.

Sample Anchor Activities, continued

**Language Arts:**
Draw and label the plot profile of the novel. Then, draw a second plot profile of the same story, but this time pretend a character from another book is inserted into the story at the midpoint and has a major influence on the outcome of the story. Draw the new changes in the plot profile and explain in writing how the story might change as a result of this new character being added.

**Science:**
Draw two graphs to represent the data collected in the experiment. One that provides us with an accurate portrayal of what happened, and one that changes the vertical scale and thereby distorts our interpretations of the data. Write an explanation on the importance of proper scale when graphing data, including how data can be misrepresented based on the scale used in data’s graphing. Finally, choose one of the sample graphs of data given to you and explain whether or not the scale was appropriate for the data—does it lead to accurate interpretations?

What to Do When the Teacher is Not Available

**Suggestions include:**
- Move on to the next portion; something may trigger an idea
- Draw a picture of what you think it says or asks
- Re-read the directions or previous sections
- Find a successful example and study how it was done
- Ask a classmate ("Ask Me," "Graduate Assistant,"
  "Technoids")
- Define difficulty vocabulary
- Try to explain it to someone else
The Football Sequence

1. First teach a general lesson to the whole class for the first 10 to 15 minutes.
2. After the general lesson, divide the class into groups according to readiness, interest, or learning profile and allow them to process the learning at their own pace or in their own way. This lasts for 15 to 20 minutes. We circulate through the room, clarifying directions, providing feedback, assessing students, and answering questions. This section is very expandable to help meet the needs of students.
3. Bring the class back together as a whole group and process what they've learned. This can take the form of a summarization, a Question and Answer session, a quick assessment to see how students are doing, or some other specific task that gets students to debrief with each other about what they learned. This usually takes about 10 minutes.

The football metaphor comes from the way we think about the lesson's sequence: a narrow, whole class experience in the beginning, a wider expansion of the topic as multiple groups learn at the own pace or in their own ways, then narrowing it back as we re-gather to process what we've learned.

Additional Structures that May Help

- Use Anticipation Guides
- Create personal agendas for some students
- Use centers/learning stations
- Adjust journal prompts and level of questioning to meet challenge levels
- Incorporate orbital studies ("Orbitals")

Tiering Assignments and Assessments

Example -- Graph the solution set of each of the following:
1. $y > 2$
2. $6x + 3y < 2$
3. $-y < 3x - 7$

2. $6x + 3y < 2$
   $3y < -6x + 2$
   $y < -2x + 2/3$

Given these two ordered pairs, students would then graph the line and shade above or below it, as warranted.

Tiering Assignments and Assessments

For early readiness students:
- Limit the number of variables for which student must account to one in all problems. ($y > 2$)
- Limit the inequality symbols to, "greater than" or, "less than," not, "greater then or equal to" or, "less than or equal to"
- Provide an already set-up 4-quadrant graph on which to graph the inequality
- Suggest some values for $x$ such that when solving for $y$, its value is not a fraction.
Tiering Assignments and Assessments

For advanced readiness students:
- Require students to generate the 4-quadrant graph themselves
- Increase the parameters for graphing with equations such as: $-1 \leq y \leq 6$
- Ask students what happens on the graph when a variable is given in absolute value, such as: $|y| > 1$
- Ask students to graph two inequalities and shade or color only the solution set (where the shaded areas overlap)

Tiering Assignments and Assessments -- Advice

- Begin by listing every skill or bit of information a student must use in order to meet the needs of the task successfully. Most of what we teach has subsets of skills and content that we can break down for students and explore at length.

Tiering Assignments and Assessments -- Advice

- Tier tasks by designing the full-proficiency version first, then design the more advanced level of proficiency, followed by the remedial or early-readiness level, as necessary.

Tiering Assignments and Assessments -- Advice

- Respond to the unique characteristics of the students in front of you. Don't always have high, medium, and low tiers.

Tiering Assignments and Assessments -- Advice

- Don't tier every aspect of every lesson. It's often okay for students to do what everyone else is doing.

Tiering Assignments and Assessments -- Advice

- When first learning to tier, stay focused on one concept or task.
To Increase (or Decrease) a Task’s Complexity, Add (or Remove) these Attributes:

- Manipulate information, not just echo it
- Extend the concept to other areas
- Integrate more than one subject or skill
- Increase the number of variables that must be considered; incorporate more facets
- Demonstrate higher level thinking, i.e., Bloom’s Taxonomy, William’s Taxonomy
- Use or apply content/skills in situations not yet experienced
- Make choices among several substantive ones
- Work with advanced resources
- Add an unexpected element to the process or product
- Work independently
- Reframe a topic under a new theme
- Share the backstory to a concept – how it was developed
- Identify misconceptions within something

To Increase (or Decrease) a Task’s Complexity, Add (or Remove) these Attributes:

- Identify the bias or prejudice in something
- Negotiate the evaluative criteria
- Deal with ambiguity and multiple meanings or steps
- Use more authentic applications to the real world
- Analyze the action or object
- Argue against something taken for granted or commonly accepted
- Synthesize (bring together) two or more unrelated concepts or objects to create something new
- Critique something against a set of standards
- Work with the ethical side of the subject
- Work in with more abstract concepts and models
- Respond to more open-ended situations
- Increase their automaticity with the topic
- Identify big picture patterns or connections
- Defend their work

- Reframe a topic under a new theme:
  - “Re-write the scene from the point of view of the antagonist.”
  - “Re-envision the country’s involvement in war in terms of insect behavior.”
  - “Re-tell Goldilocks and the Three Bears so that it becomes a cautionary tale about McCarthyism.”

- Synthesize (bring together) two or more unrelated concepts or objects to create something new:
  - “How are grammar conventions like music?”
  - “At what point is the Federal government justified in subordinating an individual’s rights in the pursuit of safe-guarding its citizens?”

The Equalizer
(Carl Ann Tomlinson)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundational</th>
<th>Transformational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Facet</td>
<td>Multi-Faceted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Leap</td>
<td>Greater Leap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Structured</td>
<td>More Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly Defined</td>
<td>Fuzzy Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Independence</td>
<td>Greater Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slower</td>
<td>Quicker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s put the Equalizer to use!

- Identify an assessment/assignment that has one of the attributes listed on the left of the Equalizer. Write out the prompt for it.
- Now, re-write the prompt so it reflects the attribute listed on the right side of its continuum in the Equalizer.
- Finally, design an assignment/assessment that incorporates any three of the attributes listed on either side of the Equalizer.
Learning Contracts -- Basic Components:

- Student and Teacher responsibilities
- Teacher expectations of Student
- Consequences for the student if he does not live up to responsibilities and expectations
- Spaces for both teacher and student to evaluate the success of each task
- Opportunities for students to go beyond the basic requirements of the contract, if interested, are described
- Spaces for dates and signatures, signifying agreement to the contract’s stipulations by both teacher and student
- Space for parents’ signatures

Checkpoints:

These are dates and descriptions that indicate when each item will be submitted for teacher assessment. Checkpoints serve two purposes: 1) For the teacher to assess student progress and possibly change instruction as a result, and 2) to keep students dedicated to the tasks and learning.

It is understood that:

A learning contract is an alternative experience, not to be taken for granted by students. If a student breaks any portion of the contract, then the contract becomes null and void at teacher discretion, and the student must return to what the rest of the class is doing. Because a contract’s tasks are done in lieu of the regular class’s tasks, teachers make sure everything the rest of the class is learning is provided in alternative contracts negotiated by students.

Science Class: The student will complete the following tasks by December 10th:

- Build and maintain a healthy terrarium for four weeks that contains all the elements listed on the accompanying directions sheet.
- Explain in writing how each element influences the health of the terrarium.
- Read and take notes on Chapter 13 “Habitat and Biomes” in the Life Science textbook using one of the five note-taking techniques we’ve learned this year.
- In writing, answer the questions on pages 137-139 at the end of Chapter 13, and design one more analysis question for the chapter and answer it.
- View the video, “At Home in the Biome,” and create a matrix graphic organizer that identifies the five biomes described in the video according to: water sources, climate, typical flora, typical fauna, geographic location, and sample food chain.
- Identify five limiting factors for a local habitat’s carrying capacity and one action we can take to reduce those factors from the local community.
- Write a personal mission statement about your dedication to protecting our natural resources. It must include your definition of natural resources, why it’s important to protect them, and what specific steps you’ll take to keeping them healthy for generations to come.

Enrichment Opportunities

- Create a diorama, Web site, or public library display that accurately portrays the food, water, space, shelter, and arrangement for any three animals, each from a different biome, and include a statement as to why it’s important to understand an animal’s habitat elements.
- Create a poem or artistic performance (fine or performing art) that expresses the interconnectedness of the food chain or web of life. Specific elements of the energy transfer cycle must be included.

While working on these tasks during contract time, the student will:

- Use time wisely
- Ask questions when he doesn’t understand something
- Avoid bothering other students
- Come to class prepared with two pencils, plenty of paper, rough drafts of writings, and his textbook
- Speak in a quiet indoor voice
- Stay in his seat unless obtaining something or information for his contractual tasks
- Not work on homework from other classes
Contractual Consequences

"All grades earned on each of the contract's tasks will be used to determine the student's official grade for this unit of study. If any portion of this contract is not achieved in the time and manner specified, it becomes null and void at teacher discretion. In such instances, the student may be required to end all contractual tasks and return to what the rest of the class is doing without complaint."

William's Taxonomy

Fluency
Flexibility
Originality
Elaboration
Risk Taking
Complexity
Curiosity
Imagination

Frank Williams' Taxonomy of Creative Thinking

Fluency – We generate as many ideas and responses as we can

Example Task: Choose one of the simple machines we've studied (wheel and axle, screw, wedge, lever, pulley, and inclined plane) and list everything in your home that uses it to operate, then list as many items in your home as you can that use more than one simple machine in order to operate.

Flexibility – We categorize ideas, objects, and learning by thinking divergently about them

Example Task: Design a classification system for the items on your list.

Frank Williams' Taxonomy of Creative Thinking

Risk Taking – We take chances in our thinking, attempting tasks for which the outcome is unknown

Example: Write a position statement on whether or not genetic engineering of humans should be funded by the United States government.

Complexity – We create order from chaos, we explore the logic of a situation, we integrate additional variables or aspects of a situation, contemplate connections

Example: Analyze how two different students changed their lab methodology to prevent data contamination.

Frank Williams' Taxonomy of Creative Thinking

Originality – We create clever and often unique responses to a prompt

Example Task: Define life and non-life.

Elaboration – We expand upon or stretch an idea or thing, building on previous thinking

Example: What inferences about future algae growth can you make, given the three graphs of data from our experiment?

Frank Williams' Taxonomy of Creative Thinking

Curiosity – We pursue guesses, we wonder about varied elements, we question.

Example: What would you like to ask someone who has lived aboard the International Space Station for three months about living in zero-gravity?

Imagination – We visualize ideas and objects, we go beyond just what we have in front of us

Example: Imagine building an undersea colony for 500 citizens, most of whom are scientists, a kilometer below the ocean's surface. What factors would you have to consider when building and maintaining the colony and the happiness of its citizens?
Cubing

Ask students to create a 3-D cube out of foam board or posterboard, then respond to one of these prompts on each side:

Describe it, Compare it, Associate it, Analyze it, Apply it, Argue for it or against it.

We can also make higher and lower-level complexity cubes for varied groups' responses.

R.A.F.T.S.

R = Role, A = Audience, F = Form, T = Time or Topic, S = Strong Adjective or Adverb

Students take on a role, work for a specific audience, use a particular form to express the content, and do it within a time reference, such as pre-Civil War, 2023, or ancient Greece.

Sample assignment chosen by a student:

A candidate for the Green Party (role), trying to convince election board members (audience) to let him be in a national debate with Democrats and the Republicans. The student writes a speech (form) to give to the board during the Presidential election in 2004 (time). Within this assignment, students use arguments and information from this past election with third party concerns, as well as their knowledge of the election and debate process. Another student could be given a RAFT assignment in the same manner, but this time the student is a member of the election board who has just listened to the first student’s speech.

R.A.F.T.S.

Raise the complexity: Choose items for each category that are farther away from a natural fit for the topic. Example: When writing about Civil War Reconstruction, choices include a rap artist, a scientist from the future, and Captain Nemo.

Lower the complexity: Choose items for each category that are closer to a natural fit for the topic. Example: When writing about Civil War Reconstruction, choices include a member of the Freedmen’s Bureau, a southern colonel returning home to his burned plantation, and a northern business owner.

Learning Menus

Similar to learning contracts, students are given choices of tasks to complete in a unit or for an assessment.

“Entrée” tasks are required, they can select two from the list of “side dish” tasks, and they can choose to do one of the “desert” tasks for enrichment.

(Tomlinson, Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom, 2003)

Tic-Tac-Toe Board

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geometry</th>
<th>Summarize (Describe)</th>
<th>Compare (Analogy)</th>
<th>Critique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Theorem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An math tool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Developments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tier 1 Assignments:

XXXXXXXXXXXXX
YYYYYYYYYYYY
ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

Tier 2 Assignments:

VVVVVVVVVVV
WWWWWWWWWWW
TTTTTTTTTTTT
RRRRRRRRRRR

Student Assignment:

Choose one activity from Tier 1 and two activities from Tier 2.
Change the Verb

Instead of asking students to describe how FDR handled the economy during the Depression, ask them to rank four given economic principles in order of importance as they imagine FDR would rank them, then ask them how President Hoover who preceded FDR would have ranked those same principles differently.

Try it for yourself:

Generate 3 different prompts for assignments or assessments for your subject using different verbs from the previous slide.

Vary the Assessment Formats

- Skill demonstrations
- Portfolios
- Writings and Compositions
- Reflective analysis
- Artistic – Fine and Performing
- Short
- Tests and quizzes
- Projects
- Oral presentations
- Real-life and Alternative Applications
- Group tasks and activities
- Problem-solving
- Laboratory experiments

Emphasis on summative assessment!

Summarization Pyramid

_____________________________
_____________________________
_____________________________
_____________________________
_____________________________

Great prompts for each line: Synonym, analogy, question, three attributes, alternative title, causes, effects, reasons, arguments, ingredients, opinion, larger category, formula/sequence, insight, tools, misinterpretation, sample, people, future of the topic

One-Word Summaries

“The new government regulations for the meat-packing industry in the 1920’s could be seen as an opportunity...”

“Picasso’s work is actually an argument for....”

“NASA’s battle with Rockwell industries over the warnings about frozen temperatures and the O-rings on the space shuttle were trench warfare....”

Basic Idea: Argue for or against the word as a good description for the topic.
Bloom’s Taxonomy Summary Cubes

These are Posterboard cubes with each side emphasizing one level of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking Skills.

Bloom’s Taxonomy:
- **Recall** – Students cite content they remember.
- **Comprehension** – Students demonstrate whether or not they understand a topic.
- **Application** – Students use knowledge and skills in a different situation.
- **Analysis** – Students break down topics into component pieces and analyze them in context of the whole.
- **Synthesis** – Students bring together seemingly contradictory aspects or topics and form something new.
- **Evaluation** – Students use all the other levels to judge the validity, success, or value of something, given specific criteria.

Tier Questions as Warranted
- **Level 1 Test, Level 2 Test**
- **Record objectives being assessed at the top of each version**
- **Provide one large test with all the questions, then circle the particular questions you want individual students to answer.**
- **Consider how to sequence test items:**
  - Start with relatively easier questions early in the testing sequence then get progressively more difficult.
  - Mix up the challenge index by placing test items requiring complex responses early in the test and spacing them evenly throughout the test, rather than lumping them all at the end.

Questions to Consider when Tiering
- Are we supposed to hold them accountable for everything?
- Are we just taking things off their plate, and is that okay?
- How do we assign equitable grades when we tier?
- When we tier, are we just saying that we’re making things easier or harder?
- Do we let all students try the more complex assessments if they want to do so, even if they’re not ready?
- Do we let advanced students “get by” by doing less complex work occasionally? Can students occasionally negotiate the level at which they are asked to perform?
- How do I manage the classroom when I’m tiering?

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