

10 stretch and challenge ideas you can easily use in your classroom

In the many feedback conversations I've had this term differentiation is a reoccurring area for development; in particular stretch and challenge. And it's not just NQTs. Following an intensive 2-day internal CPD event at one outstanding school, I asked the teaching staff to complete a survey; the number one area that they requested more input on was stretch and challenge. When we hear the word challenge we need to remember that this shouldn't be reserved for the 'brightest' students but rather teachers should be creating a climate where all students are rapidly making progress, moving beyond their own comfort zones, aiming higher and developing resilience in the process. The stretch and challenge classroom is about creating an ethos of ambition, aspiration and passion for learning NOT creating lots of resources and simply giving students more work. The strategies below ([link](#) for original source) are about empowering students and fostering curiosity without huge amounts of preparation and added work.

Strategy 1: Avoid the following teaching styles

- The Knight in Shining Armour: coming to the rescue
- Blue Peter 'Here's one I Prepared Earlier': pre-digested resources
- Negator of Challenge: over simplifying and over scaffolding
- Accepting the first response too readily and not grilling students
- Life Support Machine: creating need not independence

- The nodding dog: over praising and giving approval too readily

Strategy 2: 'Thunks' as starters

Get students thinking from the outset



Which is the odd one out?



Strategy 3: Plan lessons that encourage independence

- Have a starter that students can be doing from the moment that they enter the room to ensure a prompt start to the lesson
- Use homework to prepare students for the learning in the lesson
- Prepare learning resources that students can use independently without reliance on you

Strategy 4: Step back

- Set a strict time limit for speaking to the class. 80% of the lesson should be about student action, not teacher action
- Delegate leading activities to students e.g. starters, plenaries, modelling and summarising previous learning or taking questions from the class
- Once students have started a task, minimise your interruptions:

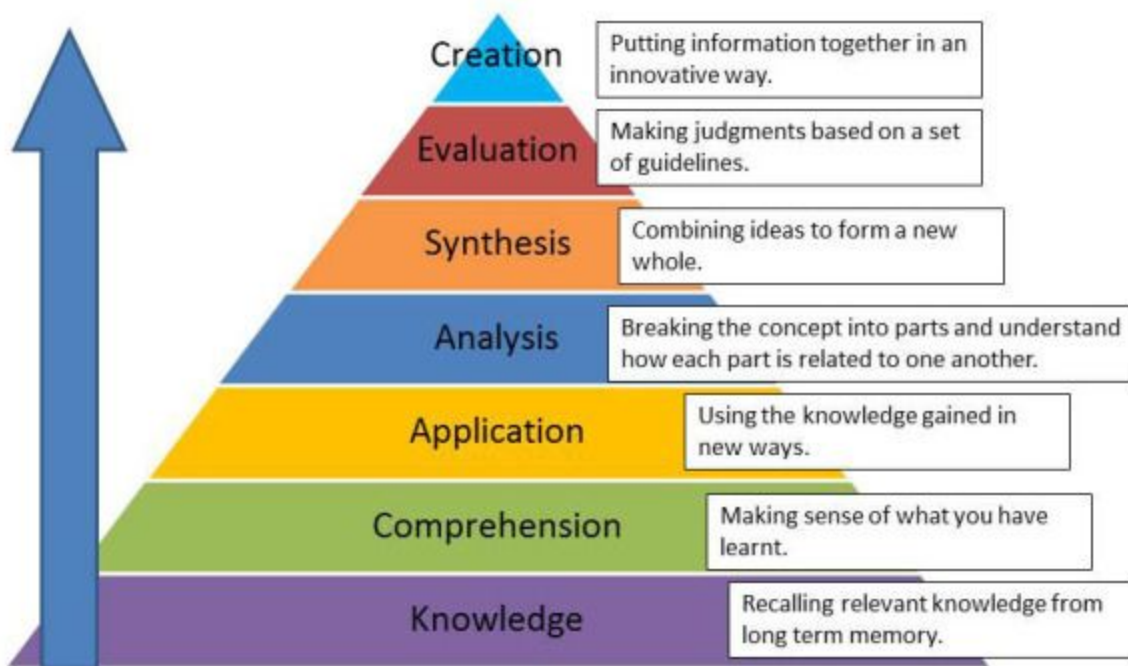
Strategy 5: Get students involved in the learning process

- Get students to engage with the learning objective by explaining it, or underlining priorities in it
- Get students to engage with the success criteria by introducing a 'red herring' success criteria which needs to be removed

- Build in lesson time for students to respond to teacher feedback

Strategy 6: Questioning

- Play question basketball, not tennis. Encourage questions and answers to go from student to student, not student to teacher.
- No hands up questioning
- Ask higher order questions using Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide



Strategy 7: 'Hot' learning menus

- Differentiate learning activities by how challenging (hot) they are
- Students self-select activities...with a little direction from the teacher

Strategy 8: 'Charge' for help

- Give students help tokens which they need to spend if they want teacher input
- Praise students who spend the least and have thought independently



Strategy 9: Challenge me cards

- Create a bank of cards that can be used in the classroom
- Students can be given secret missions/or self-select to add depth to their work

Strategy 10: Homework

- Good quality homework gives students greater freedom to demonstrate what they really know and produce quality work. Lesson work can be consolidated and extended
- To get over the problem of setting homework for homework's sake, an alternative is to create a Homework Challenge Bank featuring a range of tasks that require students to consolidate and master key concepts and apply their knowledge in different contexts.