

What makes a task challenging?

Teachers are frequently being told they need to provide learners with challenging activities, but what makes a task challenging?

Some suggestions:

- Allowing a shorter time for an activity – requiring more able learners to work more quickly, and then providing challenging extension activities or the opportunity to move on to new work.
- Allowing *more* time for a task and expecting greater depth and breadth – this is often more satisfying for more able learners.
- Imposing restrictions on how a task can be completed.
- The type of resources used – e.g. books with denser text and more difficult vocabulary, ICT, more sophisticated equipment, etc.
- Requiring learners to choose from a range of resources, so they must evaluate and select appropriate material.
- Use of abstract concepts and ideas.
- Minimum teacher guidance – allowing learners to work things out for themselves, providing less structure.
- Setting tasks that do not rely on previous knowledge.
- Tasks that involve the re-ordering or re-structuring of materials.
- Tasks that involve the use of the higher-order skills of synthesis, analysis, evaluation and reasoning.

- Expecting learners to justify their opinions or conclusions.
- In some subjects, the level of manual dexterity or technical difficulty required can be made more challenging.
- Greater learner involvement in the planning of activities.
- Opportunities to evaluate evidence and data.
- Opportunities for learners to research and orally present material.