

## Differentiated Instruction: Extending the Silence

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Several studies have looked into the effect that the amount of time teachers pause after asking a question has on learners. For example pausing for three or more seconds showed a noticeable positive impact on learning. Yet the average length that teachers pause was found to be 0.9 seconds.

In differentiating instruction, process and learning preference are the keys. Process is how learners make sense of ideas, compose their thinking, and prepare a thoughtful answer. Learning preference, in the case of questions posed to the whole class, refers to how some students prefer to silently process the content, keeping their own counsel (Internal Thinkers), while others prefer to talk or express their thinking with an audience as a sounding board (External Thinkers).

### Strategies for Providing Students with Time to Think

**Provide wait time:** Give learners five to 15 seconds to formulate a response to a question for which they should know the answer. Not every learner processes thinking at the same speed. Quality should be measured in the content of the answer, not the speediness.

**Give think time:** Give learners 20 seconds to two minutes to make sense of questions that require analysis to synthesize concepts into a different construct or frame. This can be aided by encouraging journaling, silent reflection, or partner discussions. Giving such chunks of time honors the work being asked of learners. After the allotted time, any learner can be called on to share their response.

**Teach reflection:** Coach learners on the value and practice of reflection.

When learners are provided with structured ways to practice thinking and specific directions about what to accomplish within the silent time, they can become more productive during reflection.

Source: [Edutopia](#) ↗