How to Create and Use an Extension Menu

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Definition of Extension Menu
An extension menu is an array of independent learning activities presented in a 2x2, 2x3, or 3x3 format (boxes) to provide students with choices for extending or enriching the essential curriculum.

Purposes of Extension Menus
• Enrich or extend the essential curriculum
• Challenge the abilities of highly able students
• Provide alternative activities that address the differing abilities, interests, or learning styles of students

Advantages of Extension Menus
• Can be written for any curriculum area
• Provide rigorous and challenging learning activities for highly able students
• May be tiered to accommodate all levels of instruction in the classroom
• Can be used to target specific learning activities for an individual student or group of students
• Allow student choice as well as challenge
• Encourage the development of independent thinkers
• Allow the teacher to monitor students’ choices and behaviors to learn more about their interests, abilities and learning styles
• Promote student use of higher level thinking skills
• Promote flexible grouping in the classroom
• Allow the teacher to be a facilitator

Varied Uses of Extension Menus
• Follow-up activity after a lesson
• Culminating activity at the end of a unit or book study
• Anchoring activity (defined by Carol Ann Tomlinson as, “meaningful work done individually and silently”) especially when children first begin a class or when they finish assigned work
• **Learning center** for enrichment and/or extension of the curriculum, especially when a student is *compacted out of* curricular objectives previously mastered (Extension menu activities are to be completed in the classroom with all materials provided.)

• **Independent activity** for students who have *compacted out of* specific curricular objectives or who have completed their work (Tasks can be completed in class, media center, or other designated area.)

**“Think Abouts” for Creating an Extension Menu**
- Essential curriculum standard(s) and indicator(s) upon which the extension menu will be based
- Criteria to be used in assessing and evaluating student work
- Rigorous tasks that extend the lesson/unit and can challenge students with 20 minutes or more of independent learning
- Appropriate levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy to be addressed
- Possible inclusion of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences
- Appropriate number of learning activities (boxes) to include in the extension menu
  - Newly oriented students should be offered 2-4 boxes
  - Experienced students may be offered 6-9 boxes

**Creating Extension Menus**
- Develop learning activities at the appropriate levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. (Refer to the FCPS source, *Vocabulary for Developing Tiered Questions and Tiered Assignments.*)
  - Consider using different levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy for the various learning activities.
  - Begin each extension menu activity with a vocabulary word from Bloom’s Taxonomy.
  - Boldface each Bloom’s Taxonomy word to help students begin to internalize and comprehend the vocabulary words.
- Number or letter boxes so that activities can be assigned or recommended to students based on their abilities, interests or learning styles.
- Consider designating one box “Write your idea here” so that a child can use creativity to develop his/her own learning activity. Approve each self-designed learning activity before the student pursues it.
- Develop rubrics, as needed, for learning activities provided in the extension menu.
- Consider completing a *Teacher Resource Page* that lists the standard(s) and indicator(s) for each learning activity as well as organizational tips and resources needed.

**Introducing Students to Extension Menus**
- Introduce each different type of learning activity during whole group instruction.
- Familiarize students with the vocabulary pertinent to the extension menu processes and products.
- Model the use of an extension menu before expecting students to complete one independently.
- Present an extension menu with 2-4 learning activities and increase to 6-9 learning activities in subsequent extension menus.
- Share expectations and criteria for evaluating student work.
Management Tips for Extension Menus
- Letter or number the boxes for ease of reference.
- Consider coding the boxes to target ability groupings of students.
- Assign or recommend specific boxes to specific students or groups of students based on their abilities, interests, and/or learning styles.
- Consider different grouping options, based on the purpose of the extension menu:
  - Whole Group - All students complete the same required box and then each student completes one or more additional boxes of choice.
  - Small Group - Students are grouped so they can be assigned specific boxes based on their abilities, interests and/or learning styles.
  - Individual - Student chooses or is assigned the box(es) to complete based on his/her abilities, interests, and/or learning style.

Options for Assessing and Evaluating Student Work on Extension Menus
- Rubrics should be developed for some of the learning activities as appropriate.
- Students who have compacted out of the curriculum may earn the equivalent value of regular classroom assignments by completing extension menu activities.
- Extra credit points may be awarded to students who successfully complete certain learning activities.

Bibliography