



# Flexible Pacing

## An Overview for Quest Forward Academy Families

At Quest Forward Academy, we aim to provide the best education possible for **every** student. There's strong evidence that differentiation, or personalizing learning experiences for students, can help to engage and challenge students in appropriate ways and support each student as they learn, grow, and find their path in life.<sup>1</sup>

There are many ways students' experiences at Quest Forward Academy are customized to best address their needs, as well as, interests. Learning is differentiated by modifying:

1. the content (depth at which some topics are covered),
2. the process (how students learn), and
3. the products or artifacts (how students demonstrate skills and knowledge).<sup>2</sup>

One other way to adjust the process in which students learn is through flexible pacing. Flexible pacing, coupled with these other approaches, is an effective approach for helping every student maximize their learning and growth.



## What is Flexible Pacing?

Our students work through their courses in various ways and often at different speeds. There are three different approaches to pacing. For most of us, our experience in school was "lock-step." Everyone did the same thing every day. While this might work some of the time, such as for a class debate, it's not the most effective approach for every student all the time. Our goal is to help students become more self-directed and develop self-regulation skills and independence. Semi-flexible pacing is a great approach for helping them to develop these skills. Generally, students are working at the same pace, but individuals or small groups might be working on different things on a given day. Flexible pacing also provides an opportunity for students who already have the skills and knowledge to take on more challenges and for those who need more support to get the attention they need.

Flexible pacing is **not** individualized instruction where students are working individually or on their own all the time, or even most of the time. One of the Quest Forward Learning Guiding Principles is “We Learn Better Together.” Students participate in group activities and discussions, collaborate, present and share information, and get one-on-one and group support from peers and their mentors. Here are a few examples of differentiated and flexibly-paced classes:

1. Students view resources on their own and conduct independent research. On an agreed-upon date, they convene with a group to share their findings and discuss.
2. Students read a book along with a small group and discuss sections of it each day. Then, students work independently to create an artifact, each of them having unique target dates based on what they’re creating and skills they need to practice. Throughout this time, students provide peer feedback as needed.

3. Students select different choice quests and work with a sub-group of peers. Target dates for completing quests vary based on the work they are doing and the goals they have set with their mentor.

It is possible, but rare, for a student to have mastered course skills and content prior to completing all the required quests. In these situations, students may benefit from focusing primarily on milestone artifacts and projects, creating time to complete additional projects of interest or starting the next journey or course. There can still be opportunities for them to peer mentor and participate in discussions and activities, even if they completed the prep work far in advance.

No matter what a student’s pace is through the curriculum, there will always be opportunities for social learning for every student.

## Pacing Approaches



### Lock-Step Pacing

Every student works on the same activity every day and finishes the journey on the same day.



### Semi-Flexible Pacing

Every student anticipates completing the journey the same week, but on some days students or groups of students are working on different activities.



### Flexible Pacing

Most students anticipate completing the journey the same week, but other students (working individually or in small cohorts) plan to complete it earlier or later. On most days students or groups are working on different activities and quests.

# How do mentors support every student when they're working on different things?

There are a few strategies that mentors use to support flexible pacing. These include:

## 1. Flipped Classrooms

Mentors provide instructions and more information via recorded videos that can be watched when your student is ready to start that quest or activity. This is often referred to as a “flipped classroom” approach because students consume information on their own and class time is dedicated to collaborative discussions and feedback.

## 2. Planning

Mentors and advisors help your student to identify weekly and daily goals. Not everyone needs to have the same goals and this works as long as every student knows what their goals and target dates are.

## 3. Connecting Students

Mentors take several steps to ensure no student is isolated or working on their own all the time. They create shared objectives and visuals, like a community board that shows what students are working on, so they can easily ask for and get help from others.

## 4. Meetups

While every student might be working at their own pace, mentors occasionally ask everyone to meet up at a specific activity and by a specific date. For example, everyone needs to be prepared on Monday for a group discussion and sharing their artifacts, but they can complete the prep work Friday morning, Sunday night, or any other time before class on Monday.



# FAQs

## 1. Can my student move at a faster pace?

If your student wants to move at a faster pace and has the skills to do so, they can! This means they could open up time for independent projects, community college courses, or even graduating early. If this is something they're interested in, they should develop a plan with their counselor and mentors.

## 2. How will you ensure my student doesn't move too slowly through the curriculum and then not graduate on time?

Flexible pacing doesn't mean students can take as long as they want to complete a course. Moving slowly can be frustrating and demotivating. We want to ensure every student succeeds and graduates. For those students that need more time to fully develop skills and grasp concepts, their learning experiences might be differentiated in other ways. Flexible pacing isn't the only way to customize a student's experience. It's not a reason to fall behind and students are still held accountable for their learning and work.

## 3. My student needs structure. How is that provided with such a flexible approach?

Flexible pacing doesn't mean class time is a free-for-all. Class time and the work students do is still intentionally, and often highly, structured to maximize learning. Every student has clear objectives and tasks to work on each day.

## 4. Will my student be penalized for not moving as quickly or completing as many quests as other students?

Progress through a course is not factored into students' projected and final grades. They don't get 0's on assignments like they might have at other schools. Instead, the credits students earn for a course reflect how much of the course they actually completed.

## 5. How can I support my student with flexible pacing?

Ask your student about their goals and associated target dates. Each week, students identify personal goals. They also identify goals for their courses, which can include goals they have for completing work, but also goals related to practicing skills and habits. Occasionally students will also have goals related to the Pathways Program. You can also set aside time each week for your student to share the artifacts they're working on or recently completed. Ask them what they did, what they learned, who they worked with and how, and what they'd do differently next time.

<sup>1</sup> Tomlinson, C.A. (2017). *How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms*. ASCD: Alexandria, VA. McQuarrie, L., McRae, P., & Stack-Cutler, H. (2008). *Differentiated instruction provincial research review*. Edmonton: Alberta Initiative for School Improvement.

<sup>2</sup> Tomlinson, C. A. & Strickland, C. A. (2005). *Differentiation in practice: A resource guide for differentiating curriculum, grades 9-12*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

## Do you have additional questions about flexible pacing?

If you'd like to learn more about flexible pacing, please feel free to get in touch with our Mentor Coaches.

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