Filtering Individualizing the Checklist

One teacher asked, "This is my first year using the IEW program. I would like to individualize the checklists for my middle school students, and I was hoping you would have some practical ideas for me about how to do so. Also, how do you recommend best motivating lazy students to master concepts when they know that mastering an item on the checklist will only lead to more work?"

Individualizing the checklists is easy to do for all grades. I always had two checklists: one with basic grade level requirements and one with more challenging requirements. Occasionally I would have a third one when the students I had were experienced IEW writers, and I needed to give them added choices.

Checklists for the same assignment can have the same number of things required. The basic checklist can have as many or more grammar requirements than stylistic techniques. The advanced one can have more stylistic techniques.

Alternatively, you can list the same requirements, but put advanced versions on advanced checklist. For example, the basic checklist would have a strong verb while the advanced would have dual verbs. The basic could have an www.asia clause while the advanced had an adverb teeter-totter, etc.

Basic Checklist	Intermediate Checklist	Advanced Checklist
❏ capitals at start of each sentence ❏ no spelling errors ❏ strong verb	❏ dress-up: strong verb ❏ dress-up: quality adjective ❏ dress-up: -ly adverb	❏ dress-up: dual verbs ❏ dress-up: quality adjective ❏ dress-up: -ly adverb

If each checklist has the same number of things to do, the parents cannot claim unfairness. You may need to explain to a few parents that their students were not given more to do; instead they received more challenging requirements because your methodology is to be sure every student was challenged to be the best they can be.

Student motivation can truly be more about character than ability. The problem is that students have made getting out of work an art form. Remember that they generally try to get out of work, because they feel that they cannot do it; however, when they gain the confidence that they can succeed, because help is not withheld, they willingly do all that is asked of them.

I noticed that I had more problems with laziness from my strongest students. They had become accustomed to everything being easy, so when I individualized the checklist, they had to work and resented it.

Webster solved this by publicly rewarding those who moved up to more advanced checklists. In the *Blended Structure & Style* book, Webster talks about a bulletin board depicting a solar system that had a rocket for each student. As the students moved to independence or received a more challenging checklist, their rocket moved across the galaxy. This would be too corny for middle students today, but the idea that students are motivated by competition still exists. I think a public record of some kind with an attitude of "we all cheer for progress regardless of where we start" is a positive cultivator of a work ethic.

This process cultivates the ethic that each can and should work to his fullest potential, and the class can applaud those who excel without demoralizing those who just need a little more time.