

## When ACQUISITION is the Target: How to Set Individual Student Academic Goals

The focus of classroom interventions is often to help students to acquire a fixed set of academic-skill items (e.g., naming numbers 1-10). When the intervention supports the acquisition of a finite set of items, timelines tend to be short (e.g., 1-8 weeks) and the goal is typically mastery of all items in the academic-item set. Here are the steps to follow in defining a student goal to acquire a limited set of academic items:

1. **Select a Set of Academic Items as the Intervention Target.** The teacher decides on a finite set, or 'pool', of academic items to be targeted in the intervention. Examples of possible academic-item sets suitable for intervention are naming of all mixed-case letters; answering 2-term multiplication math facts 0-12; and giving definitions for 20 key biology terms.
2. **Establish Criteria for Item Mastery.** The teacher next defines the criteria that allow him or her to judge when the student has mastered any particular item from the academic-item pool. Along with the expectation of a *correct* response, mastery criteria usually include expectations for *speed* of responding.

Creating criteria for determining item mastery is useful because these criteria allow the teacher both to be more consistent and to have greater confidence in judging whether a particular item has been mastered.

As an example of criteria for item mastery, a first-grade teacher decides that mastery on a mixed-case letter-naming intervention should be defined as: "When shown a flash-card with an upper- or lower-case letter, the student will correctly name the letter within 3 seconds." To cite a second example, a high-school science teacher whose intervention is intended to promote definitions of 20 key biology terms defines mastery as follows: "When shown a biology term, the student will correctly state the definition orally within 10 seconds."

3. **Collect Baseline Data.** Before beginning the intervention, the teacher determines the student's baseline level of performance. The easiest way to collect baseline data is to present each of the items from the item-pool to the student in random order, have the student respond, apply the mastery criteria (developed in the previous step) to determine whether each item is correct or incorrect, and record the student's responses.

For example, a first-grade teacher collects baseline data by showing her student flash-cards with all 52 mixed-case letters while applying her mastery criteria: The teacher sorts each card whose letter the student can correctly name within 3 seconds into a 'known' pile and sorts into an 'unknown' pile those flash-cards that the student identifies incorrectly or hesitates in responding beyond 3 seconds. At the end of the session, the teacher tallies the student's responses and discovers that at baseline he can correctly identify 38 of a possible 52 mixed-case letters.

TIP: If a student tends to have a high degree of variability in responding—e.g., on some days the student answers items correctly and on other days he or she gets those same items wrong—the teacher may want to inventory the student's skills across 2-3 successive days and count as 'known' for baseline only those items the student can correctly answer across all sessions.

4. **Set an Intervention Exit Goal.** The teacher next sets a student exit goal that defines a successful intervention. In most cases, the teacher will probably decide that the intervention is to be judged a success when the student

has met the standard for mastery on all items in the academic- item pool. For example, a high school science teacher may set, as an intervention exit goal, that a student will be able to correctly define all of the items from a list of 20 key biology terms.

Occasionally, however, the teacher may decide that an alternative outcome goal is acceptable. For example, a fourth-grade teacher may set as an exit goal that a student whose intervention focuses on 2-term multiplication facts 0-12 will be able to answer at least 90 percent of those math facts correctly. In this teacher's judgment, 90 percent proficiency on this collection of math facts will permit the student to experience sufficient success on math class- and homework to discontinue the intervention.

5. **Decide on the Frequency and Session Length of the Intervention.** The teacher decides how long each intervention session is to last and how many intervention sessions the student will receive per week. For students with mild academic deficits, intervention sessions can be as short as 20 minutes per day, 3 days per week. For students with greater deficits, intervention sessions may last 30-45 minutes per session and occur as often as 4-5 days per week.
6. **Set a Timespan for the Intervention.** The teacher estimates the number of instructional weeks the intervention should be attempted and sets an end-date by which the student is predicted to attain success. An intervention that targets the student's acquisition of a specific set of academic items is typically of short duration: between 1 and 8 instructional weeks.

However, predicting long an acquisition intervention should last is more of an art than a science. The teacher must exercise professional judgment, selecting a timespan that is both ambitious *and* realistic. Also, the frequency and session length of a particular intervention will affect the timespan. For example, a student whose intervention is scheduled at a higher 'dosage' (e.g., daily for 40-minute sessions) can be expected to reach the exit goal faster than a similar student whose intervention is scheduled at a lower 'dosage' (e.g., 3 times per week for 20-minute sessions).

7. **Monitor the Student's Progress.** Throughout the intervention, the teacher can monitor the student's progress periodically (e.g., weekly or even more frequently) by having the student attempt all of the items in the item-pool and recording the results.

For example, the first-grade teacher whose intervention targets a student's letter-naming skills for mixed-case letters measures her student's progress by reviewing all 52 letter flash-cards once per week and, each time, tracking the number of letters that the student is able to name correctly within 3 seconds of being shown the flash-card.

As a second example, the high school science teacher working with a student on acquiring 20 key biology terms and their definitions ends each intervention session by having the student attempt to define all terms, with each vocabulary word counted as correct if the student defines it correctly within 10 seconds.

## References

Burns, M. K., & Gibbons, K. A. (2008). *Implementing response-to-intervention in elementary and secondary schools*. Routledge: New York.

## When ACQUISITION is the Target: How to Set Individual Student Goals: CASE 1

**Directions:** Review the intervention scenario shared in the workshop. Then use this sheet to set a goal and progress-monitoring plan for this acquisition –level intervention:

1. **Select a Set of Academic Items as the Intervention Target.**

Describe the 'pool' or set of academic items for this intervention: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. **Establish Criteria for Item Mastery.**

Write your criteria to judge mastery for each item in the set: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. **Collect Baseline Data.**

Describe how you would go about collecting baseline data on this skill-set: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. **Set an Intervention Exit Goal.**

Develop an intervention exit goal for this set of academic items: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. **Decide on the Frequency and Session Length of the Intervention.**

Based on the degree of student delay, come up with recommendations for how frequent the intervention should occur and how long each intervention session should last:

Frequency (times per week): \_\_\_\_\_ Length of Session: \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

6. **Set a Timespan for the Intervention.**

How many weeks do you think that this intervention should last? \_\_\_\_\_ weeks

7. **Monitor the Student's Progress.**

How frequently would you recommend monitoring this student's progress during the intervention?

\_\_\_\_\_

## When ACQUISITION is the Target: How to Set Individual Student Goals: CASE 2

**Directions:** Review the intervention scenario shared in the workshop. Then use this sheet to set a goal and progress-monitoring plan for this acquisition –level intervention:

1. **Select a Set of Academic Items as the Intervention Target.**

Describe the 'pool' or set of academic items for this intervention: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. **Establish Criteria for Item Mastery.**

Write your criteria to judge mastery for each item in the set: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. **Collect Baseline Data.**

Describe how you would go about collecting baseline data on this skill-set: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. **Set an Intervention Exit Goal.**

Develop an intervention exit goal for this set of academic items: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. **Decide on the Frequency and Session Length of the Intervention.**

Based on the degree of student delay, come up with recommendations for how frequent the intervention should occur and how long each intervention session should last:

Frequency (times per week): \_\_\_\_\_ Length of Session: \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

6. **Set a Timespan for the Intervention.**

How many weeks do you think that this intervention should last? \_\_\_\_\_ weeks

7. **Monitor the Student's Progress.**

How frequently would you recommend monitoring this student's progress during the intervention?

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