Response to Intervention: A Model to Help Struggling Students in General Education

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Frequently Asked Questions about RTI

1. **What is Response to Intervention (RTI)?** RTI is a school-wide model of student support. While all students can benefit from the RTI model, a primary focus is students in general-education classrooms who are struggling with academic and/or behavior problems. The foundation of RTI in any school is strong core instruction happening in all classrooms. The school also uses screening data such as brief academic assessments, disciplinary office referrals, attendance, and grades to identify students who need additional intervention assistance. The school then designs individualized intervention plans for those at-risk students to meet their learning needs. All interventions used under RTI should be ‘evidence-based’; that is, they have been shown through rigorous research to be effective in school settings. When the school puts students on intervention plans, the school collects baseline data to estimate the student’s current performance in the area(s) of academic or behavioral difficulty and sets goals for improvement. During the intervention, the student is monitored periodically so that the school can judge in a short amount of time (e.g., 6-8 instructional weeks) whether a particular intervention plan is effective.

2. **What type of student is RTI designed to help?** The RTI model benefits all students. The first area of focus for RTI is on high-quality universal instruction. In a typical school, however, it is estimated that about 20 percent of the general-education student population may not be successful even when receiving high-quality classroom instruction. These ‘difficult-to-teach’ students require more specialized intervention plans to supplement their core instruction. Schools can also see benefits in applying the standards of the RTI model to special education students. Schools should expect, for example, that the IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) of special needs students will contain evidence-based instructional and behavior management strategies, identify student baseline and performance goal levels, and require the collection of progress-monitoring data to determine if those students are in fact reaching their performance goals.

3. **How does RTI organize a school’s intervention services?** RTI intervention services are set up in a multi-tier system, with intervention plans becoming increasingly intensive as students face a higher risk of school failure. The first tier of RTI support, Tier 1, is universal instruction/intervention and is available to all students. Tier 1 is the responsibility of the classroom teacher, who delivers strong core instruction and also employs a range of feasible, practical strategies to provide additional academic or behavioral support for struggling students. It should be noted that a classroom Tier 1 intervention plan continues as a required foundation even for those students who may eventually go on to receive more intensive intervention assistance at Tiers 2 and 3.

In a typical school, up to 20 percent of students will need additional interventions to address academic delays beyond what is available in the classroom. Most of these students would receive supplemental Tier 2 intervention services. When setting up Tier 2 services, a school will typically adopt what is referred to as the ‘standard treatment protocol’ approach. That is, the school identifies common areas of student concern (e.g., deficits in general academic vocabulary, limited reading comprehension ‘fix up’ skills) and purchase or create an evidence-based ‘standard treatment’ program to target these student academic deficits. Tier 2 services are most often delivered in small groups (capped at 6-7 students) or via computer-based learning.

Approximately 5 percent of general-education students in a typical school receive Tier 3 intervention support in a given year. The profile of a Tier 3 student is one who has not responded to lesser interventions and who is facing
a potentially negative, high-stakes outcome such as course failure if that student cannot significantly improve his or her academic or behavioral performance. Most schools adopt a ‘problem solving protocol’ when planning intensive, Tier 3 interventions: The school establishes an RTI Problem-Solving Team that meets with the referring teacher(s) and efficiently uses the intervention resources of the building to develop a customized intervention plan that matches the unique needs of the student.

4. **What role do assessment and data collection play in the RTI process?** Student assessment is a necessary part of RTI, as data allows the school to locate students who need intervention support and to judge in ‘real time’ whether specific interventions are actually helping those students. At Tier 1, the teacher who has a student on classroom intervention collects information from the instructional environment to show if the student is benefiting from that intervention plan. Because teachers typically intervene proactively at Tier 1 to address emerging student deficits before they become major, the stakes are lower. Therefore, the kinds of data collected by teachers to document their classroom interventions can be varied and may not be as time-intensive or rigorous as data collection at the higher-stakes Tiers 2 and 3. At Tier 1, for example, a classroom teacher may document a student’s classroom writing intervention through work samples of student writing assignments, grades, occasional scoring of writing assignments using a rubric, and a weekly administration of a Curriculum-Based Measurement writing probe.

RTI schools also adopt a proactive approach to identifying struggling learners by selecting several methods to screen the entire student population at several points per year. Schools may use a mix of data sources in their screenings, including brief, timed academic measures (e.g., Curriculum-Based Measures such as oral reading fluency probes and Maze Reading Comprehension passages); as well as existing data (e.g., disciplinary office referrals; grades; attendance; recent state test results; etc.). Individuals who are flagged in these universal screenings as needing additional intervention support are placed in supplemental (Tier 2 or 3) intervention services.

Academic measures selected to monitor the progress of students at Tiers 2 and 3 should possess ‘technical adequacy’: that is, they should be valid, reliable, have multiple alternate forms to allow repeated administration, and be sensitive to short-term student academic gains. Examples of CBMs that can be useful for assessing academic skills for elementary students include letter naming, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension (Maze passage), math computation, and writing probes. Students who receive Tier 2 ‘standard treatment protocol’ interventions should have their progress monitored at least 2 times per month. Students on high-stakes Tier 3 interventions overseen by the RTI Problem-Solving Team should be assessed at least weekly.

5. **What is the role of the classroom teacher in the RTI model?** The classroom teacher is responsible under RTI for providing high-quality core instruction to effectively reach the widest possible range of learners. Additionally, the teacher notes any struggling students who need additional ‘differentiated’ instructional or behavioral support and provides that support in the form of a Tier 1 (classroom) intervention plan. Of course, the teacher should document Tier 1 interventions. The teacher should also be prepared to refer any students who do not respond sufficiently to classroom Tier 1 interventions for higher levels of RTI support—while continuing to use RTI classroom strategies with those students. The classroom teacher should also contact parents of struggling students to share concerns about these students and to encourage open, positive and regular communication between school and home.
6. **What is the parent’s role in the RTI model?** The school is responsible for finding ways for struggling students to be successful—whether or not parents choose to actively participate in their children’s educational program. Nonetheless, there is wide agreement that parents play a crucial role in guiding and motivating their children toward academic success. For example, parents can serve as influential role models for work and study skills, set up and supervise homework sessions, stay in close communication with the school about their child’s academic performance and behaviors, and dispense home privileges contingent on the effort that their child makes in school. There is no question that the protective factors offered by parents who are positively involved in their children’s schooling directly promote academic success and support the mission of RTI. Schools must, however, also recognize that, for a variety of reasons, not all parents find it easy to be involved in their child’s education. Schools can most fully engage the power of parent participation by expecting that teachers will contact parents when a student begins to experience difficulties in school, inviting parents to attend RTI Problem-Solving Team meetings, taking care that staff adopt respectful language and tone when speaking with parents about their children, and treating parents at all times as respected colleagues in the RTI process.

7. **How can RTI information assist schools in identifying students who need special education services?** When a student is being considered for possible special education services, the school must first answer a fundamental question: Are that student's academic problems primarily a result of educational factors such as a mismatch between student and instruction—or do they stem instead from a chronic, within-child condition such as a learning disability? The RTI model provides evidence that helps schools to rule out instructional explanations for underperformance by clearly defining a student’s problems, matching those problems to evidence-based interventions, verifying that all interventions are fully carried out as designed, and collecting formative assessment data to judge whether the student has made adequate progress in moving from baseline to goal levels. In other words, when a general-education student is ultimately found to be a ‘non-responder’ to appropriate evidence-based interventions, that failure to respond can be viewed as one diagnostic marker serving as partial evidence for a possible underlying learning disability or other special education condition.

8. **Why must schools use ‘evidence-based’ interventions in RTI?** Schools have limited resources and time to put effective interventions in place for struggling students. That is simply a reality of our public education system. Therefore, the RTI model requires that schools be able to justify the intervention strategies that they select by showing that they are ‘evidence-based’—i.e., that there is sufficient research to support these strategies. Most researchers agree that evidence-based interventions are those whose effectiveness has been demonstrated through well-crafted studies that use rigorous research methodologies. Ideally, too, these studies should have been published in reputable research journals that have a blind peer-review process to ensure that only studies of the highest quality are published.

9. **Is RTI required by law?** RTI was first introduced to public schools across the nation with the reauthorization by Congress in 2004 of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004). This federal legislation encourages the spread of RTI in public education by directing states to allow any of their schools to adopt an RTI model if they so choose and by explicitly preventing states from mandating the continuing use of a test score discrepancy formula in diagnosing learning disabilities. However, IDEIA 2004 also lets states decide whether to require that their schools adopt RTI and—if so—what the particulars of each state’s RTI model might look like. At present, then, the U.S. Department of Education strongly supports schools’ efforts to restructure their student support according to RTI guidelines. However, schools should contact their state education departments for guidance in determining whether RTI is mandated statewide and for specifics about what RTI model(s) their state supports.
## Intervention & Related RTI Terms: Definitions

Educators who serve as interventionists should be able to define and distinguish among the terms *core instruction, intervention, instructional adjustment,* and *modification.* (In particular, interventionists should avoid using modifications as part of an RTI plan for a general education student, as they can be predicted to undermine the student's academic performance.) Here are definitions for these key terms.

- **Core Instruction.** Those instructional strategies that are used routinely with all students in a general-education setting are considered ‘core instruction’. High-quality instruction is essential and forms the foundation of RTI academic support. NOTE: While it is important to verify that a struggling student receives good core instructional practices, those routine practices do not ‘count’ as individual student interventions.

- **Intervention.** An academic intervention is a strategy used to teach a new skill, build fluency in a skill, or encourage a child to apply an existing skill to new situations or settings. An intervention can be thought of as “a set of actions that, when taken, have demonstrated ability to change a fixed educational trajectory” (Methe & Riley-Tillman, 2008; p. 37). As an example of an academic intervention, the teacher may select question generation (Davey & McBride, 1986.; Rosenshine, Meister & Chapman, 1996), a strategy in which the student is taught to locate or generate main idea sentences for each paragraph in a passage and record those ‘gist’ sentences for later review.

- **Instructional Adjustment (Accommodation).** An instructional adjustment (also known as an ‘accommodation’) is intended to help the student to fully access and participate in the general-education curriculum without changing the instructional content and without reducing the student’s rate of learning (Skinner, Pappas & Davis, 2005). An instructional adjustment is intended to remove barriers to learning while still expecting that students will master the same instructional content as their typical peers. An instructional adjustment for students who are slow readers, for example, may include having them supplement their silent reading of a novel by listening to the book on tape. An instructional adjustment for unmotivated students may include breaking larger assignments into smaller ‘chunks’ and providing students with performance feedback and praise for each completed ‘chunk’ of assigned work (Skinner, Pappas & Davis, 2005).

- **Modification.** A modification changes the expectations of what a student is expected to know or do—typically by lowering the academic standards against which the student is to be evaluated. Examples of modifications are giving a student five math computation problems for practice instead of the 20 problems assigned to the rest of the class or letting the student consult course notes during a test when peers are not permitted to do so. Instructional modifications are essential elements on the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans of many students with special needs. Modifications are generally not included on a general-education student’s RTI intervention plan, however, because the assumption is that the student can be successful in the curriculum with appropriate interventions and instructional adjustments alone. In fact, modifying the work of struggling general education students is likely to have a negative effect that works against the goals of RTI. Reducing academic expectations will result in these students falling further behind rather than closing the performance gap with peers.

### References


Documenting Tier 1 (Classroom) Interventions: A Sample Form

When general-education students begin to struggle with academic or behavioral issues, the classroom teacher will typically select and implement one or more evidence-based intervention strategies to assist those students. But a strong intervention plan needs more than just well-chosen interventions. It also requires 4 additional components (Witt, VanDerHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2004): (1) student concerns should be clearly and specifically defined; (2) one or more methods of formative assessment should be used to track the effectiveness of the intervention; (3) baseline student data should be collected prior to the intervention; and (4) a goal for student improvement should be calculated before the start of the intervention to judge whether that intervention is ultimately successful. If a single one of these essential 4 components is missing, the intervention is to be judged as fatally flawed (Witt, VanDerHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2004) and as not meeting minimum RTI standards.

Teachers need a standard format to use in documenting their ‘Tier 1’ (classroom) intervention plans. The attached form, Tier 1/Classroom Intervention Planning Sheet, is designed to include all of the essential RTI elements of an effective intervention plan. The form includes space to document:

- **Definition of up to two student academic or behavioral problems.** The most significant step in selecting an effective classroom intervention is to correctly identify the target student concern(s) in clear, specific, measurable terms (Bergan, 1995). The teacher selects no more than two student concerns to address on the intervention plan.

- **Intervention description.** The teacher describes the evidence-based intervention(s) that will be used to address the identified student concern(s).

- **Intervention delivery.** The teacher writes down details necessary for implementing the intervention in the classroom (e.g., where and when the intervention will be used; the adult-to-student ratio; how frequently the intervention will take place; the length of time each session of the intervention will last; materials needed for the intervention, etc.

- **Checkup date.** The teacher notes the date at which the intervention will be reviewed to determine whether it has been sufficiently effective. NOTE: For academic interventions, it is advisable to allow at least 4 instructional weeks before deciding whether the intervention has been effective.

- **Assessment data.** For each intervention, the teacher selects the type(s) of classroom data that will be collected formatively throughout the intervention period to judge its effectiveness. For each data source, in turn, the teacher collects baseline data on student performance—and calculates an outcome goal that the student is expected to attain if the intervention is successful. (During the period in which the intervention is in effect, the teacher collects ongoing data to judge student performance and attaches that data to the classroom intervention documentation form.)
While a Tier 1/classroom intervention documentation form is a helpful planning tool, schools should remember that teachers will need other resources and types of assistance as well to be successful in selecting and using Tier 1 interventions. For example, teachers should have access to an 'intervention menu' that contains evidence-based strategies to address the most common academic and behavioral concerns and should be able to get coaching support as they learn how to implement new classroom intervention ideas.

References


### Tier 1/Classroom Intervention Planning Sheet

**Teacher/Team:** __________________________________________  **Date:** __________________  **Student:** __________________________________________

**Student Problem Definition #1:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

**Student Problem Definition #2:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

[Optional] **Person(s) assisting with intervention planning process:** _____________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention Description</th>
<th>Intvention Delivery</th>
<th>Check-Up Date</th>
<th>Assessment Data</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe each intervention that you plan to use to address the student’s concern(s).</td>
<td>List key details about delivery of the intervention, such as: (1) where &amp; when the intervention will be used; (2) the adult-to-student ratio; (3) how frequently the intervention will take place; (4) the length of time each session of the intervention will last;</td>
<td>Select a date when the data will be reviewed to evaluate the intervention.</td>
<td>Note what classroom data will be used to establish baseline, set a goal for improvement, and track the student’s progress during this intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interventions: Essential Elements (Witt et al., 2004)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Clear problem-definition(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Baseline data</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Goal for improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Progress-monitoring plan</td>
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Type(s) of Data to Be Used:

- Baseline
- Goal by Check-Up

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- Baseline
- Goal by Check-Up

Type(s) of Data to Be Used:

- Baseline
- Goal by Check-Up

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Motivation Challenge 1: The student is unmotivated because he or she cannot do the assigned work.

Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem: The student lacks essential skills required to do the task. Areas of deficit might include basic academic skills, cognitive strategies, and academic-enabler skills. Here are definitions of these skill areas:

- **Basic academic skills.** Basic skills have straightforward criteria for correct performance (e.g., the student defines vocabulary words or decodes text or computes ‘math facts’) and comprise the building-blocks of more complex academic tasks (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009). The instructional goal in basic skills is for students to become ‘automatic’ in the skill(s) being taught.

- **Cognitive strategies.** Students employ specific cognitive strategies as “guiding procedures” to complete more complex academic tasks such as reading comprehension or writing (Rosenshine, 1995). Cognitive strategies are “intentional and deliberate procedures” that are under the conscious control of the student (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009; p. 127). The instructional goals are to train students to use specific cognitive instruction strategies, to reliably identify the conditions under which they should employ these strategies, and to actually use them correctly and consistently.

  Question generation is an example of a cognitive strategy to promote reading comprehension (Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996); the student is trained to locate or write main-idea sentences for each paragraph in a passage, then write those main ideas onto separate note cards with corresponding questions.

- **Academic-enabling skills.** Skills that are ‘academic enablers’ (DiPerna, 2006) are not tied to specific academic knowledge but rather aid student learning across a wide range of settings and tasks. Examples of academic-enabling skills include organizing work materials, time management, and making and sticking to a work plan. The instructional goal is to train students to acquire these academic-support skills and to generalize their use to become efficient, self-managing learners.

What the Research Says: When a student lacks the capability to complete an academic task because of limited or missing basic skills, cognitive strategies, or academic-enabling skills, that student is still in the acquisition stage of learning (Haring et al., 1978). That student cannot be expected to be motivated or to be successful as a learner unless he or she is first explicitly taught these weak or absent essential skills (Daly, Witt, Martens & Dool, 1997).

How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem: The teacher collects information (e.g., through observations of the student engaging in academic tasks; interviews with the student; examination of work products, quizzes, or tests) demonstrating that the student lacks basic skills, cognitive strategies, or academic-enabling skills essential to the academic task.
How to Fix This Motivation Problem: Students who are not motivated because they lack essential skills need to be taught those skills.

Direct-Instruction Format. Students learning new material, concepts, or skills benefit from a ‘direct instruction’ approach. (Burns, VanDerHeyden & Boice, 2008; Rosenshine, 1995; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009). When following a direct-instruction format, the teacher:

- ensures that the lesson content is appropriately matched to students’ abilities.
- opens the lesson with a brief review of concepts or material that were previously presented.
- states the goals of the current day’s lesson.
- breaks new material into small, manageable increments, or steps.
- throughout the lesson, provides adequate explanations and detailed instructions for all concepts and materials being taught. NOTE: Verbal explanations can include ‘talk-alouds’ (e.g., the teacher describes and explains each step of a cognitive strategy) and ‘think-alouds’ (e.g., the teacher applies a cognitive strategy to a particular problem or task and verbalizes the steps in applying the strategy).
- regularly checks for student understanding by posing frequent questions and eliciting group responses.
- verifies that students are experiencing sufficient success in the lesson content to shape their learning in the desired direction and to maintain student motivation and engagement.
- provides timely and regular performance feedback and corrections throughout the lesson as needed to guide student learning.
- allows students the chance to engage in practice activities distributed throughout the lesson (e.g., through teacher demonstration; then group practice with teacher supervision and feedback; then independent, individual student practice).
- ensures that students have adequate support (e.g., clear and explicit instructions; teacher monitoring) to be successful during independent seatwork practice activities.

References:


ASSISTED CLOZE INTERVENTION: INCREASE READING FLUENCY. Fluency is the goal of this reading intervention. Sessions last 10-15 minutes. The teacher selects a passage at the student's instructional level. The teacher reads aloud from the passage while the student follows along silently and tracks the place in the text with a finger. Intermittently, the teacher pauses and the student is expected to read aloud the next word in passage. Then the teacher continues reading. The process continues until the entire passage has been read. Then the student is directed to read the text aloud while the teacher follows along silently. Whenever the student commits a reading error or hesitates for 3 seconds or longer (whether during the assisted cloze or independent reading phase), the teacher stops the student, points to and says the error word, has the student read the word aloud correctly, has the student read the surrounding phrase that includes the error word, and then continues the current reading activity. Optionally, the teacher may then have the student read the passage again (repeated reading) up to two more times as the teacher continues to silently monitor and correct any errors or hesitations.


CHORAL READING: INCREASE READING FLUENCY. This simple strategy to build reading fluency can be used with individuals and groups of students. Sessions last 10-15 minutes. The teacher selects an engaging text at students' instructional or independent level. During choral reading sessions, the teacher or other fluent reader takes the role of 'lead reader', reading the passage aloud, while students also read aloud. Students are encouraged to read with expression.


DUET READING: INCREASE READING FLUENCY. This strategy targets reading fluency. Sessions last for 10-15 minutes. The teacher selects an engaging text at the student's instructional or independent level. During duet reading, the teacher and student alternate reading aloud from the passage one word at a time, while the teacher tracks the place in the passage with an index finger. As the student grows more accomplished, the teacher can change the reading ratio to shift more responsibility to the student: for example, with the teacher reading one word aloud and then the student reading three words aloud in succession. As the student becomes more familiar with duet reading, the teacher can also direct the student to track the place in the text. Whenever the student commits a reading error or hesitates for 3 seconds or longer, the teacher stops the student, points to and says the error word, has the student read the word aloud correctly, has the student read the surrounding phrase that includes the error word, and then continues the reading activity.

ECHO READING: INCREASE READING FLUENCY. In this strategy to boost student reading fluency, the teacher selects a text at the student's instructional level. The teacher reads aloud a short section (e.g., one-two sentences at a time) while the student follows along silently. The student then reads the same short section aloud—and the read-aloud activity continues, alternating between teacher and student, until the passage has been completed. Whenever the student commits a reading error or hesitates for 3 seconds or longer, the teacher stops the student, points to and says the error word, has the student read the word aloud correctly, has the student read the surrounding phrase that includes the error word, and then continues the reading activity.


LISTENING PASSAGE PREVIEW: INCREASE READING FLUENCY. This intervention targets student reading fluency in sessions of 10-15 minutes. The teacher selects a passage at the student's instructional level. The student is directed to follow along silently and track the place in the text with a finger while the teacher reads the passage aloud. Then the student is prompted to read the passage aloud as the teacher follows along silently. Whenever the student commits a reading error or hesitates for 3 seconds or longer, the teacher stops the student, points to and says the error word, has the student read the word aloud correctly, has the student read the surrounding phrase that includes the error word, and then directs the student to continue reading. Optionally, the teacher may then have the student read the passage again (repeated reading) up to two more times as the teacher continues to silently monitor and correct any errors or hesitations.


PAIRED READING: INCREASE READING FLUENCY. This reading fluency intervention prompts the student to read independently with prompt corrective feedback. Each session lasts 10-15 minutes. The teacher selects an engaging passage at the student's instructional level. The student is told that the teacher and student will begin the session reading aloud in unison. The student is also told that, whenever the student chooses, he/she can give a silent signal (e.g., lightly tapping the teacher's wrist); at this signal, the teacher will stop reading aloud and instead follow along silently while the student continues to read aloud. In addition, the student is told that, if he/she hesitates for 3 seconds or longer or misreads a word when reading aloud independently, the teacher will correct the student and then resume reading in unison. The session then begins with teacher and student reading aloud together. Whenever the student commits a reading error or hesitates for 3 seconds or longer (during either unison or independent reading), the teacher stops the student, points to and says the error word, has the student read the word aloud correctly, has the student read the surrounding phrase that includes the error word, and resumes reading in unison.
The teacher also praises the student for using the silent signal to read aloud independently and occasionally praises other aspects of the student's reading performance or effort.


REPEATED READING: INCREASE READING FLUENCY. During 15-20 minute sessions, the student practices difficult words in isolation, reads the same passage several times to boost fluency, and tries to beat a previous fluency score. (1) PREPARATION: Before each session, the teacher selects a text within the student's instructional range long enough occupy the student for more than a minute of reading aloud and makes teacher and student copies. The teacher locates five challenge words in the passage to practice. (2) GOAL-SETTING: The teacher shows the student the performance graph with his/her most recent repeated-reading score and encourages the student to beat that score; (3) PREVIEW CHALLENGING WORDS: The teacher introduces each of the passage challenge words: "This word is ___. What is this word?"; (4) INITIAL READ: The student is directed to read the passage aloud, to do his/her best reading, to start at the beginning of the passage [which the teacher points out] and to read until told to stop. Also, the student is told that--if stuck on a word--the teacher will supply it. While the student reads aloud, the teacher marks reading errors. At the end of one minute, the teacher says "Stop", marks the student's end-point in the text with a bracket, totals the number of words correctly read, plots that score on the student graph, and labels that graph data-point "1st reading". (5) FEEDBACK AND ERROR CORRECTION: The teacher shows the student his/her graphed performance. The teacher then reviews student errors. Pointing to each error word, the teacher says, "This word is ___. What is this word?" and has the student repeat the correct word three times before moving to the next. (6) MODELING: The teacher directs the student to read aloud in unison with the teacher while using a finger to track the place in the text. The teacher takes the lead, reading the entire passage aloud at a pace slightly faster than that of the student. (6) REPEAT STUDENT READS. The teacher has the student repeat steps 4 and 5 twice more, until the student has read the passage independently at least 3 times. If the student's fluency score on the final read exceeds that of the previous session, the teacher provides praise and perhaps incentives (e.g., sticker, points toward rewards).


Reading Comprehension ‘Fix-Up’ Skills: A Toolkit

Good readers continuously monitor their understanding of informational text. When necessary, they also take steps to improve their understanding of text through use of reading comprehension ‘fix-up’ skills. Presented here are a series of fix-up skill strategies that can help struggling students to better understand difficult reading assignments.

- **[Core Instruction]** Providing Main Idea Practice through ‘Partner Retell’ (Carnine & Carnine, 2004). Students in a group or class are assigned a text selection to read silently. Students are then paired off, with one student assigned the role of ‘reteller’ and the other appointed as ‘listener’. The reteller recounts the main idea to the listener, who can comment or ask questions. The teacher then states the main idea to the class. Next, the reteller locates two key details from the reading that support the main idea and shares these with the listener. At the end of the activity, the teacher does a spot check by randomly calling on one or more students in the listener role and asking them to recap what information was shared by the reteller.

- **[Accommodation]** Developing a Bank of Multiple Passages to Present Challenging Concepts (Hedin & Conderman, 2010; Kamil et al., 2008; Texas Reading Initiative, 2002). The teacher notes which course concepts, cognitive strategies, or other information will likely present the greatest challenge to students. For these ‘challenge’ topics, the teacher selects alternative readings that present the same general information and review the same key vocabulary as the course text but that are more accessible to struggling readers (e.g., with selections written at an easier reading level or that use graphics to visually illustrate concepts). These alternative selections are organized into a bank. Students are encouraged to engage in wide reading by choosing selections from the bank as a means to better understand difficult material.

- **[Student Strategy]** Promoting Understanding & Building Endurance through Reading-Reflection Pauses (Hedin & Conderman, 2010). The student decides on a reading interval (e.g., every four sentences; every 3 minutes; at the end of each paragraph). At the end of each interval, the student pauses briefly to recall the main points of the reading. If the student has questions or is uncertain about the content, the student rereads part or all of the section just read. This strategy is useful both for students who need to monitor their understanding as well as those who benefit from brief breaks when engaging in intensive reading as a means to build up endurance as attentive readers.

- **[Student Strategy]** Identifying or Constructing Main Idea Sentences (Davey & McBride, 1986; Rosenshine, Meister & Chapman, 1996). For each paragraph in an assigned reading, the student either (a) highlights the main idea sentence or (b) highlights key details and uses them to write a ‘gist’ sentence. The student then writes the main idea of that paragraph on an index card. On the other side of the card, the student writes a question whose answer is that paragraph’s main idea sentence. This stack of ‘main idea’ cards becomes a useful tool to review assigned readings.

- **[Student Strategy]** Restructuring Paragraphs with Main Idea First to Strengthen ‘Rereads’ (Hedin & Conderman, 2010). The student highlights or creates a main idea sentence for each paragraph in the assigned reading. When rereading each paragraph of the selection, the student (1) reads the main idea sentence or student-generated ‘gist’ sentence first (irrespective of where that sentence actually falls in the paragraph); (2) reads the remainder of the paragraph, and (3) reflects on how the main idea relates to the paragraph content.
[Student Strategy] Summarizing Readings (Boardman et al., 2008). The student is taught to summarize readings into main ideas and essential details—stripped of superfluous content. The act of summarizing longer readings can promote understanding and retention of content while the summarized text itself can be a useful study tool.

[Student Strategy] Linking Pronouns to Referents (Hedin & Conderman, 2010). Some readers lose the connection between pronouns and the nouns that they refer to (known as ‘referents’)—especially when reading challenging text. The student is encouraged to circle pronouns in the reading, to explicitly identify each pronoun’s referent, and (optionally) to write next to the pronoun the name of its referent. For example, the student may add the referent to a pronoun in this sentence from a biology text: “The Cambrian Period is the first geological age that has large numbers of multi-celled organisms associated with it Cambrian Period.”

[Student Strategy] Apply Vocabulary ‘Fix-Up’ Skills for Unknown Words (Klingner & Vaughn, 1999). When confronting an unknown word in a reading selection, the student applies the following vocabulary ‘fix-up’ skills:

1. Read the sentence again.
2. Read the sentences before and after the problem sentence for clues to the word’s meaning.
3. See if there are prefixes or suffixes in the word that can give clues to meaning.
4. Break the word up by syllables and look for ‘smaller words’ within.

[Student Strategy] Compiling a Vocabulary Journal from Course Readings (Hedin & Conderman, 2010). The student highlights new or unfamiliar vocabulary from course readings. The student writes each term into a vocabulary journal, using a standard ‘sentence-stem’ format: e.g., "Mitosis means..." or "A chloroplast is...". If the student is unable to generate a definition for a vocabulary term based on the course reading, he or she writes the term into the vocabulary journal without definition and then applies other strategies to define the term: e.g., look up the term in a dictionary; use Google to locate two examples of the term being used correctly in context; ask the instructor, etc.).

[Student Strategy] Encouraging Student Use of Text Enhancements (Hedin & Conderman, 2010). Text enhancements can be used to tag important vocabulary terms, key ideas, or other reading content. If working with photocopied material, the student can use a highlighter to note key ideas or vocabulary. Another enhancement strategy is the ‘lasso and rope’ technique—using a pen or pencil to circle a vocabulary term and then drawing a line that connects that term to its underlined definition. If working from a textbook, the student can cut sticky notes into strips. These strips can be inserted in the book as pointers to text of interest. They can also be used as temporary labels—e.g., for writing a vocabulary term and its definition.

[Student Strategy] Reading Actively Through Text Annotation (Harris, 1990; Sarkisian et al., 2003). Students are likely to increase their retention of information when they interact actively with their reading by jotting comments in the margin of the text. Using photocopies, the student is taught to engage in an ongoing ‘conversation’ with the writer by recording a running series of brief comments in the margins of the text. The student may write annotations to record opinions about points raised by the writer, questions triggered by the reading, or unknown vocabulary words.
References


Sample Accommodations for Use in General Education

This report lists selected accommodations in one column and research citations for each in the next column. A third column includes a space to write notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Research Citation</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. CUE IMPORTANT INFORMATION. Identify those concepts, ideas, or other academic content likely to be evaluated on upcoming tests and quizzes. During lecture or class discussion, teacher comment can draw attention to important content, while on handouts, asterisks or other visual highlighting techniques can be used to emphasize content likely to appear as test items.</td>
<td>International Dyslexia Association. (2002). Accommodating students with dyslexia in all classroom settings. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.interdys.org/">http://www.interdys.org/</a></td>
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<td>2. EMPHASIZE THE POSITIVE IN REQUESTS. When delivering a request, directive, or command to a student, state the request using positive phrasing (e.g., &quot;I will be over to help you on the assignment just as soon as you return to your seat&quot;) rather than negative phrasing (e.g., &quot;I can’t help you with your assignment until you return to your seat.&quot;). When a request has a positive ‘spin’, that teacher is less likely to trigger a power struggle and more likely to gain student compliance.</td>
<td>Braithwaite, R. (2001). Managing aggression. New York: Routledge.</td>
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<td>3. FOCUS ATTENTION VIA SILENT CUES. Meet with the student and agree on one or more silent teacher cues to redirect or focus the student (e.g., placing a paperclip on the student’s desk) during class instruction. Use the cue as needed. Optionally, direct the student to keep track of the number of times the cue is used and provide incentives to the student for reducing the number of teacher prompts needed.</td>
<td>Barkley, R. A. (2008). 80+ classroom accommodations for children or teens with ADHD. The ADHD Report, 16(4), 7-10.</td>
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<td>Accommodation</td>
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<td>4. PREPARE A COURSE GLOSSARY. Create a glossary with definitions of vocabulary terms essential for the course or content area. Make copies of the glossary available to all students. Provide opportunities for struggling students to practice and demonstrate mastery of these crucial vocabulary items.</td>
<td>International Dyslexia Association. (2002). Accommodating students with dyslexia in all classroom settings. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.interdys.org/">http://www.interdys.org/</a></td>
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<td>8. USE STRONG TEACHER COMMANDS. Maximize the likelihood of student compliance with teacher commands by (1) gaining the attention of the student, (2) stating the command calmly in clear and simple language as a ‘do’ statement, (3) presenting multi-step commands one step at a time, and (4) waiting for compliance with each step before moving to the next.</td>
<td>Kern, L, &amp; Clemens, N. (2007). Antecedent strategies to promote appropriate classroom behavior. Psychology in the Schools, 44(1), 65-75.</td>
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<td>9. ALLOW MUSIC DURING INDEPENDENT WORK. Permit the student to listen to music with earphones during independent work if this allows her or him to improve concentration and increase productivity.</td>
<td>Barkley, R. A. (2008). 80+ classroom accommodations for children or teens with ADHD. The ADHD Report, 16(4), 7-10.</td>
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Academic Survival Skills Checklists: 5 Ways to Help Students to Become Effective Self-Managing Learners

Students who hope to achieve success on the ambitious Common Core State Standards must first cultivate a set of general 'academic survival skills' that they can apply to any coursework (DiPerna, 2006). Examples of academic survival skills include the student's ability to study effectively, be organized, and manage time well.

When academic survival skills are described in global terms, though, it can be difficult to define them. For example, two teachers may have different understandings about what the term 'study skills' means. A solution is to complete a 'task analysis' of a given global academic-survival skill, dividing that larger skill into a checklist of component sub-skills (Kazdin, 1989). For an example of a component-skills checklist for 'study skills', see Table 1: Academic Survival Skills Example: Study Skills.

With a checklist in hand that breaks a global academic survival skill into components, a teacher can judge whether a student possesses those essential building-block strategies that make up a larger global 'survival skills' term. Teachers have access to good sources of information to verify what academic survival skills a student possesses, including direct observation; interviews (of the student, past teacher, or parent); and student work products.

TIP: Teachers can access a free web application to create customized student-skill checklists. The Academic Survival Skills Checklist Maker provides a starter set of strategies to address homework, note-taking, organization, study, test-taking, and time management. Teachers can use the application to create and print customized checklists and can also save their checklists online. This application is available at: http://www.interventioncentral.org/tools/academic-survival-skills-checklist-maker

Schools can find a number of valuable uses for 'academic survival skills' checklists, including the following:

1. **Consistent expectations among teachers.** Teachers at a grade level, on an instructional team, or within an instructional department can work together to develop checklists for essential global academic-survival skills. As teachers collaborate to create these checklists, they reach agreement on the essential skills that students need for academic success and can then consistently promote those skills across their classrooms.

2. **Proactive student skills training.** One excellent use of these checklists is as a classwide student training tool. At the start of the school year, teachers can create checklists for those academic survival skills in which students are weak (e.g., study skills, time management) and use them as tools to train students in specific strategies to remediate these deficiencies. Several instructors working with the same group of students can even pool their efforts so that each teacher might be required to teach a checklist in only a single survival-skill area.

3. **Student skills self-check.** Teachers can use academic survival-skills checklists to promote student responsibility. Students are provided with master copies of checklists and encouraged to develop their own customized checklists by selecting and editing those strategies likely to work best for them. Instructors can then hold students accountable to consult and use these individualized checklists to expand their repertoire of strategies for managing their own learning.
4. Monitoring progress of academic survival-skills interventions. Often, intervention plans developed for middle and high school students include strategies to address academic survival-skill targets such as homework completion or organization. Checklists are a good way for teachers to measure the student's baseline use of academic survival skills in a targeted area prior to the start of the intervention. Checklists can also be used to calculate a student outcome goal that will signify a successful intervention and to measure (e.g., weekly) the student's progress in using an expanded range of academic survival-skills during the intervention period.

For example, a teacher may develop a checklist (like that appearing in Table 1) outlining 11 sub-skills that define her expectations for 'study skills'. Through interview, direct observation, and examination of student work products, the teacher ascertains that the student reliably used 7 of the 11 skills during baseline. She sets the outcome goal that— at the conclusion of a 5-week intervention period— the student will reliably use all 11 of those study sub-skills. Once per week during the intervention, the teacher meets with the student to review the checklist, record which additional study skills—if any—the student is now using, and chart this growth on a simple visual graph.

5. Parent conferences. When teachers meet with parents to discuss student academic concerns, academic survival-skills checklists can serve as a vehicle to define expected student competencies and also to decide what specific school and home supports will most benefit the student. In addition, parents often appreciate receiving copies of these checklists to review with their child at home.

When students struggle with global academic survival skills such as study, organization, or time management, those deficits can seem so all-encompassing as to inspire a sense of helplessness. In contrast, targeted and prescriptive checklists (such as those described here) that outline practical strategies to enhance school survival skills can serve as a tool to focus and empower teachers, parents, and students to accomplish the shared goal of turning every student into an effective, self-managing learner.

References


**TABLE 1: ACADEMIC SURVIVAL SKILLS EXAMPLE: STUDY SKILLS**

- **MAINTAIN A STUDY SCHEDULE.** Maintain a regular (e.g., daily) study schedule with sufficient time set aside to review course content and information.

- **AVOID DISTRACTERS.** When studying, avoid distracters (e.g., cell phone, television, Internet) that can erode study time and divert attention.

- **CREATE AN ORGANIZED STUDY SPACE.** Prepare the study environment by organizing a space and setting out all necessary work materials before beginning study.

- **SET STUDY GOALS.** Prior to a study session, define one or more specific study goals to accomplish (e.g., to review information for an upcoming quiz; to locate key information to include in an essay).

- **MAKE A STUDY AGENDA.** If studying multiple subjects in one session, create a study agenda for that session with a listing of the key information to be reviewed for each subject and the time allocated for that review.

- **DO THE TOUGH STUDY WORK FIRST.** Tackle the most difficult or challenging study objectives first during study sessions, when energy levels and ability to concentrate are at their peak.

- **VARY ACTIVITIES.** Mix up study activities during a study session (e.g., alternating between reading and writing) to maintain engagement and interest.

- **CHUNK A LARGE STUDY TASK INTO SMALLER UNITS.** If studying a large amount of material in a single session, ‘chunk’ the material into smaller units and take short breaks between each unit to maintain focus.

- **TEACH CHALLENGING CONTENT.** When studying complex or challenging material, assume the role of instructor and attempt to explain or describe the material to a real or imagined listener. Teaching study material is an efficient way to verify understanding.

- **HIGHLIGHT QUESTIONS.** When reviewing notes or completing course readings, use highlighters, margin notes, sticky notes, or other notation methods to flag questions, unknown vocabulary terms, or areas of confusion for later review with teacher or tutor.

- **SEEK HELP WHEN NEEDED.** Approach the teacher or tutor for help as needed to answer questions or clear up areas of confusion identified during study sessions.