Academic Interventions 'Critical Components' Checklist

This checklist summarizes the essential components of academic interventions. When preparing a student's Tier 1, 2, or 3 academic intervention plan, use this document as a 'pre-flight checklist' to ensure that the academic intervention is of high quality, is sufficiently strong to address the identified student problem, is fully understood and supported by the teacher, and can be implemented with integrity. NOTE: While the checklist refers to the 'teacher' as the interventionist, it can also be used as a guide to ensure the quality of interventions implemented by non-instructional personnel, adult volunteers, parents, and peer (student) tutors.

Directions: When creating an academic intervention plan, review that plan by comparing it to each of the items below.

- If a particular intervention element is missing or needs to be reviewed, check the 'Critical Item?' column for that element.
- Write any important notes or questions in the 'Notes' column.

Allocating Sufficient Contact Time & Assuring Appropriate Student-Teacher Ratio

The cumulative time set aside for an intervention and the amount of direct teacher contact are two factors that help to determine that intervention's 'strength' (Yeaton & Sechrest, 1981).

Critical Item?	Intervention Element	Notes
☐	**Time Allocated.** The time set aside for the intervention is appropriate for the type and level of student problem (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Kratochwill, Clements & Kalymon, 2007). When evaluating whether the amount of time allocated is adequate, consider: • Length of each intervention session. • Frequency of sessions (e.g.., daily, 3 times per week) • Duration of intervention period (e.g., 6 instructional weeks)	
☐	**Student-Teacher Ratio.** The student receives sufficient contact from the teacher or other person delivering the intervention to make that intervention effective. NOTE: Generally, supplemental intervention groups should be limited to 6-7 students (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).	

Matching the Intervention to the Student Problem

Academic interventions are not selected at random. First, the student academic problem(s) is defined clearly and in detail. Then, the likely explanations for the academic problem(s) are identified to understand which intervention(s) are likely to help—and which should be avoided.

Critical Item?	Intervention Element	Notes
☐	**Problem Definition.** The student academic problem(s) to be addressed in the intervention are defined in clear, specific, measureable terms (Bergan, 1995; Witt, VanDerHeyden & Gilbertson, 2004). The full problem definition describes: • *Conditions*. Describe the environmental conditions or task demands in place when the academic problem is observed. • *Problem Description*. Describe the actual observable academic behavior in which the student is engaged. Include rate, accuracy, or other quantitative information of student performance. • *Typical or Expected Level of Performance*. Provide a typical or expected performance criterion for this skill or behavior. Typical or expected academic performance can be calculated using a variety of sources,	
☐	**Appropriate Target.** Selected intervention(s) are appropriate for the identified student problem(s) (Burns, VanDerHeyden & Boice, 2008). TIP: Use the Instructional Hierarchy (Haring et al., 1978) to select	

	academic interventions according to the four stages of learning: • *Acquisition*. The student has begun to learn how to complete the target skill correctly but is not yet accurate in the skill. Interventions should improve accuracy. • *Fluency*. The student is able to complete the target skill accurately but works slowly. Interventions should increase the student's speed of responding (fluency) as well as to maintain accuracy. • *Generalization*. The student may have acquired the target skill but does not typically use it in the full range of appropriate situations or settings. Or the student may confuse the target skill with 'similar' skills. Interventions should get the student to use the skill in the widest possible range of settings and situations, or to accurately discriminate between the target skill and 'similar' skills. • *Adaptation*. The student is not yet able to modify or adapt an existing skill to fit novel task-demands or situations. Interventions should help the student to identify key concepts or elements from previously learned skills that can be adapted to the new demands or situations.	
☐	'Can't Do/Won't Do' Check. The teacher has determined whether the student problem is primarily a skill or knowledge deficit ('can't do') or whether student motivation plays a main or supporting role in academic underperformance ('wont do'). If motivation appears to be a significant factor contributing to the problem, the intervention plan includes strategies to engage the student (e.g., high interest learning activities; rewards/incentives; increased student choice in academic assignments, etc.) (Skinner, Pappas & Davis, 2005; Witt, VanDerHeyden & Gilbertson, 2004).	

Incorporating Effective Instructional Elements

These effective 'building blocks' of instruction are well-known and well-supported by the research. They should be considered when selecting or creating any academic intervention.

Critical Item?	Intervention Element	Notes
☐	Explicit Instruction. Student skills have been broken down "into manageable and deliberately sequenced steps" and the teacher provided" overt strategies for students to learn and practice new skills" (Burns, VanDerHeyden & Boice, 2008, p.1153).	
☐	Appropriate Level of Challenge. The student experienced sufficient success in the academic task(s) to shape learning in the desired direction as well as to maintain student motivation (Burns, VanDerHeyden & Boice, 2008).	
☐	Active Engagement. The intervention ensures that the student is engaged in 'active accurate responding' (Skinner, Pappas & Davis, 2005).at a rate frequent enough to capture student attention and to optimize effective learning.	
☐	Performance Feedback. The student receives prompt performance feedback about the work completed (Burns, VanDerHeyden & Boice, 2008).	
☐	Maintenance of Academic Standards. If the intervention includes any accommodations to better support the struggling learner (e.g., preferential seating, breaking a longer assignment into smaller chunks), those accommodations do not substantially lower the academic standards against which the student is to be evaluated and are not likely to reduce the student's rate of learning (Skinner, Pappas & Davis, 2005).	

Verifying Teacher Understanding & Providing Teacher Support		
The teacher is an active agent in the intervention, with primary responsibility for putting it into practice in a busy classroom. It is important, then, that the teacher fully understands how to do the intervention, believes that he or she can do it, and knows whom to seek out if there are problems with the intervention.		
Critical Item?	Intervention Element	Notes
☐	Teacher Responsibility. The teacher understands his or her responsibility to implement the academic intervention(s) with integrity.	
☐	Teacher Acceptability. The teacher states that he or she finds the academic intervention feasible and acceptable for the identified student problem.	
☐	Step-by-Step Intervention Script. The essential steps of the intervention are written as an 'intervention script'--a series of clearly described steps—to ensure teacher understanding and make implementation easier (Hawkins, Morrison, Musti-Rao & Hawkins, 2008).	
☐	Intervention Training. If the teacher requires training to carry out the intervention, that training has been arranged.	
☐	Intervention Elements: Negotiable vs. Non-Negotiable. The teacher knows all of the steps of the intervention. Additionally, the teacher knows which of the intervention steps are 'non-negotiable' (they must be completed exactly as designed) and which are 'negotiable' (the teacher has some latitude in how to carry out those steps) (Hawkins, Morrison, Musti-Rao & Hawkins, 2008).	
☐	Assistance With the Intervention. If the intervention cannot be implemented as designed for any reason (e.g., student absence, lack of materials, etc.), the teacher knows how to get assistance quickly to either fix the problem(s) to the current intervention or to change the intervention.	

Documenting the Intervention & Collecting Data		
Interventions only have meaning if they are done within a larger data-based context. For example, interventions that lack baseline data, goal(s) for improvement, and a progress-monitoring plan are 'fatally flawed' (Witt, VanDerHeyden & Gilbertson, 2004).		
Critical Item?	Intervention Element	Notes
☐	Intervention Documentation. The teacher understands and can manage all documentation required for this intervention (e.g., maintaining a log of intervention sessions, etc.).	
☐	Checkup Date. Before the intervention begins, a future checkup date is selected to review the intervention to determine if it is successful. Time elapsing between the start of the intervention and the checkup date should be short enough to allow a timely review of the intervention but long enough to give the school sufficient time to judge with confidence whether the intervention worked.	
☐	Baseline. Before the intervention begins, the teacher has collected information about the student's baseline level of performance in the identified area(s) of academic concern (Witt, VanDerHeyden &	

	Gilbertson, 2004).	
☐	Goal. Before the intervention begins, the teacher has set a specific goal for predicted student improvement to use as a minimum standard for success (Witt, VanDerHeyden & Gilbertson, 2004). The goal is the expected student outcome by the checkup date if the intervention is successful.	
☐	Progress-Monitoring. During the intervention, the teacher collects progress-monitoring data of sufficient quality and at a sufficient frequency to determine at the checkup date whether that intervention is successful (Witt, VanDerHeyden & Gilbertson, 2004).	

References

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