



*RTI/MTSS Classroom Teacher Toolkit*

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# The Teacher as 'First Responder': RTI/MTSS & Struggling Learners

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Workshop Materials: <http://www.interventioncentral.org/ramaz>



## The Struggling Student in a General-Education Setting: Pivot Points



**Directions.** The student competencies in the table below represent 'pivot points'—opportunities for educators to support the at-risk student to 'pivot' them toward school success. Number in descending order the 5 competencies that you believe pose the greatest challenge for students in your classroom or school to attain.

Ranking	Student Competency
	A. <b>Basic Academic Skills.</b> The student has sufficient mastery of basic academic skills (e.g., reading fluency) to complete classwork.
	B. <b>Academic Survival Skills.</b> The student possesses the academic survival skills (e.g., homework skills, time management, organization) necessary to manage their learning.
	C. <b>Work Completion.</b> The student independently completes in-class work and homework.
	D. <b>Transitions.</b> The student flexibly adapts to changing academic routines and behavioral expectations across activities and settings (e.g., content-area classes; specials).
	E. <b>Attentional Focus.</b> The student has a grade- or age-appropriate ability to focus attention in large and small groups and when working independently.
	F. <b>Emotional Control.</b> The student manages emotions across settings, responding appropriately to setbacks and frustrations.
	G. <b>Peer Interactions.</b> The student collaborates productively and has positive social interactions with peers.
	H. <b>Self-Efficacy.</b> The student possesses a positive view of their academic abilities, believing that increased effort paired with effective work practices will result in improved outcomes ('growth mindset').
	I. <b>Self-Understanding.</b> The student can articulate their relative patterns of strength and weakness in academic skills, general conduct, and social-emotional functioning.
	J. <b>Self-Advocacy.</b> The student advocates for their needs and negotiates effectively with adults.



## How To: Implement Strong Core Instruction

When teachers must present challenging academic material to struggling learners, they can make that material more accessible and promote faster learning by building assistance directly into instruction. Researchers use several terms to refer to this increased level of student instructional support: explicit instruction, direct instruction, supported instruction (Rosenshine, 2008).

The checklist below summarizes the essential elements of a supported-instruction approach. When preparing lesson plans, instructors can use this resource as a 'pre-flight' checklist to make sure that their lessons reach the widest range of diverse learners.

1. Increase Access to Instruction	
Instructional Element	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Instructional Match.</b> Lesson content is appropriately matched to students' abilities (Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Boice, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Content Review at Lesson Start.</b> The lesson opens with a brief review of concepts or material that have previously been presented. (Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Boice, 2008, Rosenshine, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Preview of Lesson Goal(s).</b> At the start of instruction, the goals of the current day's lesson are shared (Rosenshine, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Chunking of New Material.</b> The teacher breaks new material into small, manageable increments, 'chunks', or steps (Rosenshine, 2008).	

2. Provided 'Scaffolding' Support	
Instructional Element	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Detailed Explanations &amp; Instructions.</b> Throughout the lesson, the teacher provides adequate explanations and detailed instructions for all concepts and materials being taught (Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Boice, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Think-Alouds/Talk-Alouds.</b> When presenting cognitive strategies that cannot be observed directly, the teacher describes those strategies for students. Verbal explanations 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) (Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Boice, 2008, Rosenshine, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Work Models.</b> The teacher makes exemplars of academic work (e.g., essays, completed math word problems) available to students for use as models (Rosenshine, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Active Engagement.</b> The teacher ensures that the lesson engages the student in 'active accurate responding' (Skinner, Pappas & Davis, 2005) often enough to capture student attention and to optimize learning.	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Collaborative Assignments.</b> Students have frequent opportunities to work collaboratively--in pairs or groups. (Baker, Gersten, & Lee, 2002; Gettinger & Seibert, 2002).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Checks for Understanding.</b> The instructor regularly checks for student understanding by posing frequent questions to the group (Rosenshine, 2008).	



<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Group Responding.</b> The teacher ensures full class participation and boosts levels of student attention by having all students respond in various ways (e.g., choral responding, response cards, white boards) to instructor questions (Rosenshine, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>High Rate of Student Success.</b> The teacher verifies that students are experiencing at least 80% success in the lesson content to shape their learning in the desired direction and to maintain student motivation and engagement (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Brisk Rate of Instruction.</b> The lesson moves at a brisk rate--sufficient to hold student attention (Carnine, 1976; Gettinger & Seibert, 2002).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fix-Up Strategies.</b> Students are taught fix-up strategies (Rosenshine, 2008) for use during independent work (e.g., for defining unknown words in reading assignments, for solving challenging math word problems).	

### 3. Give Timely Performance Feedback

Instructional Element	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Regular Feedback.</b> The teacher provides timely and regular performance feedback and corrections throughout the lesson as needed to guide student learning (Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Boice).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Step-by-Step Checklists.</b> For multi-step cognitive strategies, the teacher creates checklists for students to use to self-monitor performance (Rosenshine, 2008).	

### 4. Provide Opportunities for Review & Practice

Instructional Element	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Spacing of Practice Throughout Lesson.</b> The lesson includes practice activities spaced throughout the lesson. (e.g., through teacher demonstration; then group practice with teacher supervision and feedback; then independent, individual student practice) (Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Boice).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Guided Practice.</b> When teaching challenging material, the teacher provides immediate corrective feedback to each student response. When the instructor anticipates the possibility of an incorrect response, that teacher forestalls student error through use of cues, prompts, or hints. The teacher also tracks student responding and ensures sufficient success during supervised lessons before having students practice the new skills or knowledge independently (Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Boice, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Support for Independent Practice.</b> The teacher ensures that students have adequate support (e.g., clear and explicit instructions; teacher monitoring) to be successful during independent seatwork practice activities (Rosenshine, 2008).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Distributed Practice.</b> The teacher reviews previously taught content one or more times over a period of several weeks or months (Pashler et al., 2007; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1995).	



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## Classroom Accommodations for Academics: A Teacher Toolkit

An accommodation (“instructional adjustment”) 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 accommodation is intended to remove barriers to learning while still expecting that students will master the same instructional content as their typical peers.

Here is a list of possible accommodations that teachers can consider using for specific students or with the entire class.

1.	ALLOW PHYSICAL MOVEMENT. To accommodate the fidgety student, negotiate appropriate outlets for movement (e.g., allowing the student to pace at the back of the classroom during a lesson).	Attention/Impulsivity
2.	CHUNK CLASSWORK SESSIONS AND INCLUDE BREAKS. Break up lectures or student work sessions into smaller segments and include brief breaks to sustain student attention.	
3.	CREATE LOW-DISTRACTION WORK AREA. Set up a study carrel in the corner of the room or other low-distraction work area. Direct or allow distractible students to use this area when needed.	
4.	USE PREFERENTIAL SEATING. Seat the student in a classroom location that minimizes distractions and maximizes the ability to focus on the teacher’s instruction.	
5.	USE 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.	
6.	USE ‘VISUAL BLOCKERS’. Encourage the student to reduce distractions on assignments by using a blank sheet of paper or similar aid to cover sections of the page that the student is not currently working on.	
7.	REPEAT/REPHRASE COMMENTS. Repeat or rephrase student questions or comments to the class or group before responding.	Communication
8.	DIRECTIONS: ASSIGN A BUDDY. Assign a study buddy who is willing and able to repeat and explain directions to the student.	
9.	DIRECTIONS: SIMPLIFY. Simplify written directions on assignments to promote student understanding.	
10.	PROVIDE SCHEDULES/AGENDAS. Provide the student with an academic agenda or schedule for the class period or school day, to include: instructional activities, independent assignments, other tasks to be covered during the period, as well as their approximate duration. Preview with students to prepare them for upcoming activities.	



11.	ALLOW EXTRA WORK TIME. Allow the student additional time to complete an in-class activity or assignment. (For longer assignments, the instructor can announce to students at the start the amount of extra time available for those that need it.)	Independent Work
12.	ASSIGN A 'FALL-BACK' PEER. Choose a peer whom the student can check in with to get details about missing or lost homework assignments.	
13.	DEVELOP A STUDENT SELF-CHECK ERROR CHECKLIST. Meet with the student to generate a short list of their most common errors made on course assignments (e.g., 'In writing assignments, some words are illegible', 'Not all words at sentence beginning are capitalized'.) Format that list as a customized error-correction checklist for the student to use before turning in the work.	
14.	GIVE AN ASSIGNMENT HEAD-START. Allow students who require extra time to complete a lengthy or involved assignment to start it early.	
15.	HIGHLIGHT ESSENTIAL MATERIAL. Have the student use a highlighter to identify key ideas and vocabulary in text. (Provide training in this skill if needed.)	
16.	OFFER CHOICE: MODES OF TASK COMPLETION. Allow the student two or more choices for completing a given academic task: e.g., keyboarding vs. handwriting an essay; oral vs. written responding to math-fact worksheet.	
17.	OFFER CHOICE: ASSIGNMENT SUBSTITUTION. Present the student with two or more alternative activities to choose from with equivalent academic requirements: e.g., to review a textbook chapter, student can answer a series of questions independently or discuss those questions in a structured cooperative learning activity.	
18.	OFFER CHOICE: TASK SEQUENCE. When the student has several tasks to complete during independent work time, allow the student to select the order in which she or he will complete those tasks.	
19.	PROVIDE A WORK PLAN. For a multi-step assignment, give the student an outline of a work plan that breaks the task into appropriate sub-steps (e.g., 'find five research articles for the paper', 'summarize key information from research articles into notes', etc.). For each sub-step, (1) estimate the minimum amount of 'seat time' required to complete and (2) set a calendar-date deadline for completion.	
20.	PROVIDE TEXTS WITH EASIER READABILITY. Locate alternative texts for course readings with the same vocabulary and concepts as the standard text(s) but written at a lower reading level. Allow students to select the easier texts as substitute or supplemental course readings.	
21.	PROVIDE WORK SAMPLES / EXEMPLARS. Provide samples of successfully completed academic items (e.g., math computation or word problems) or exemplars (e.g., samples of well-written paragraphs or essays) for the student to refer to when working independently.	
22.	RESPONSE EFFORT: CHUNK INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENTS. To reduce the required response effort, break a larger in-class or homework assignment into smaller, more manageable 'chunks'.	



23.	RESPONSE EFFORT: START ASSIGNED HOMEWORK IN CLASS. Have students begin assigned homework in class. For reading assignments, have a skilled reader read the first several paragraphs aloud while students follow along silently. For academic homework, have students pair off to complete the first several items. Students are then expected to finish the work on their own.	
24.	STRUCTURE ASSIGNMENTS FOR INITIAL SUCCESS. Promote student motivation on worksheets and independent assignments by presenting easier items first and more challenging items later.	
25.	TEACH FIX-UP STRATEGIES. Teach the student steps to follow when stuck during independent work: e.g., "If I don't understand what I am reading, (1) slow my reading; (2) focus full attention on the reading; (3) underline unfamiliar words and try to figure them out from context."	
26.	CREATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION FOLDER. Help the student to create work folder(s) to organizer materials for a course or content area. Each folder can include dividers and color-coding to organize materials by subject or topic.	Organization
27.	CLASS NOTES: CREATE GUIDED NOTES. Prepare a copy of notes summarizing content from a class lecture or assigned reading—with blanks inserted in the notes where key facts or concepts should appear. During instruction, prompt the student to write missing content into the blanks.	
28.	CLASS NOTES: PROVIDE A STUDENT COPY. Provide a copy of class notes to allow the student to focus more fully on the lecture and class discussion. This strategy can be strengthened by requiring that the student highlight key vocabulary terms appearing in the prepared notes as they are brought up in the lecture or discussion.	
29.	CLASS NOTES: PROVIDE LECTURE OUTLINE. Make up an outline of the lecture to share with students. Encourage students to use the elements of the outline to help to structure their class notes and to ensure that their notes do not omit important information.	
30.	LECTURE: TIE INFORMATION TO COURSE READINGS. When presenting important course concepts during lecture, explicitly link that content to page references in the course text or other assigned readings that also cover that information. Prompt students to write these page references into their notes.	
31.	PROVIDE CLASSROOM STORAGE SPACE. Provide the student with shelf space or container in the classroom to store work materials required for class.	
32.	PROVIDE MISSING WORK MATERIALS. Provide essential work materials (e.g., paper, writing utensil) for students who forget to bring them to class.	
33.	CUE IMPORTANT INFORMATION. In instruction and on handouts, identify academic content to be evaluated on upcoming tests and quizzes.	Test-Taking
34.	TEST: ALLOW EXTRA TIME. For tests that evaluate student knowledge or skills but do not formally assess speed/fluency with fixed time limits, allow the student a reasonable amount of additional time if needed.	
35.	TEST: HIGHLIGHT KEY WORDS IN DIRECTIONS. When preparing test directions, highlight key words or phrases (e.g., bold; underlined) to focus student attention.	
36.	TEST: PRACTICE UNDER TEST CONDITIONS. Create practice tests that mimic the actual test in format and environmental conditions (e.g., with time limits). Have the student complete practice tests to build endurance, reduce test anxiety.	





## Classroom Data Tools: What Are They and What Can They Measure?

When a teacher wants to monitor a student's progress on a classroom academic intervention, the instructor will (1) decide what data 'channel' to use to collect that data, and then (2) select a data tool designed to capture the desired information. Here are those steps:

**Step 1: Select a Data 'Channel'.** While there are many ways to collect data to monitor student academic performance, virtually all information is gathered through one of four general 'data channels': direct observation, interviews, work products, or self-monitoring.

- *Direct observation.* The evaluator watches the student engaged in the academic task and records significant behaviors observed during that observation.
- *Interviews.* The evaluator talks with the student and/or adults familiar with the student to collect useful information about the student's academic performance.
- *Work products.* The evaluator reviews completed student work (e.g., in-class or homework assignments, quizzes and tests, etc.) to draw conclusions about that student's academic performance.
- *Self-monitoring.* The student collects information about his or her own academic performance and shares that data with the evaluator.

The four channels described here give teachers access to vital information on student performance. However, it is likely that the data the teacher collects across multiple situations will be highly variable and subjective—unless that instructor makes an effort to collect information in a structured, consistent format over time.

For example, a teacher might *observe* a student weekly during independent work to monitor whether the learner is consistently applying all steps of an academic strategy. If the teacher simply jots down random notes during these observations, the information collected will probably vary considerably across time, depending on what the teacher decides to include in his notes on any given day. If instead, however, the teacher uses a checklist that includes the essential steps in the academic strategy, that instructor's observations are far more likely to record accurately and consistently what steps in the strategy the student actually uses.

Checklists, rubrics, and other tools can transform information collected via observation, interviews, work products, or self-monitoring into objective formative data that can be charted over time to track the outcomes of classroom interventions.

**Step 2: Select a Data Tool.** Teachers have a variety of tools that they can access to collect behavioral or academic information and monitor classroom interventions. This 'look-up' chart provides a review of the most common data sources and what they can measure:

Data Tool	What It Is	What It Can Measure
<b>Archival Data</b>	Existing data routinely collected by schools that provides useful ongoing information about the student's academic or behavioral performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Office disciplinary referrals</li> <li>• Other aspects of behavior or academic performance captured in the school database</li> </ul>



<b>Behavior Report Cards</b>	A teacher-created rating scale that measures student classroom behaviors. A behavior report card contains 3-4 rating items describing goal behaviors. Each item includes an appropriate rating scale (e.g., Poor-Fair-Good). At the end of an observation period, the rater fills out the report card as a summary snapshot of the student's behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General behaviors (e.g., complies with teacher requests; waits to be called on before responding)</li> <li>• Academic 'enabling' behaviors (e.g., has all necessary work materials; writes down homework assignment correctly and completely, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Checklists</b>	The dividing of a larger behavioral task or sequence into constituent steps, sub-skills, or components. Each checklist element is defined in a manner that allows the observer to make a clear judgment (e.g., YES/NO, COMPLETED/NOT COMPLETED) about whether the student is displaying it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Step-by-step cognitive strategies</li> <li>• Behavioral routines</li> <li>• Generalization: Target behavior carried out across settings</li> </ul>
<b>Cumulative Mastery Records</b>	A cumulative record of the student's acquisition/mastery of a defined collection of academic items such as multiplication math facts. This record is updated after every intervention session.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any discrete collection of academic items to be mastered: e.g., vocabulary, math facts, spelling words, letter or number names</li> </ul>
<b>Curriculum-Based Measures/ Assessment</b>	A series of brief measures of basic academic skills given under timed conditions and scored using standardized procedures. CBM/CBA measures often include research-derived benchmark norms to assist in evaluating the student's performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speed and accuracy in basic academic skills: e.g., letter naming, number naming, number sense, vocabulary, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension (maze), production of writing, math fact computation</li> </ul>
<b>Grades</b>	Represent in letter or number form the teacher's formal, summary evaluation of the student's academic performance on an assignment, quiz, test, or longer span of evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework grades</li> <li>• Test grades</li> <li>• Quarterly report card grades</li> </ul>
<b>Logs</b>	Written adult or student entries that track the frequency (and perhaps additional details) of relevant academic performance and/or behaviors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework completion</li> <li>• Incidents of non-compliance</li> <li>• Student record of dates when he or she uses a self-guided academic intervention.</li> <li>• Listing of student-teacher meetings.</li> </ul>
<b>Rubrics</b>	An instrument designed to measure a student on complex tasks.  In a rubric, the teacher defines the categories that make up the important dimensions of a task, develops written exemplars representing mastery for each dimension, and creates a rating scale to be used in evaluating a particular student's work for each dimension.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any complex, multi-dimensional task: e.g., participation in a discussion; writing a research paper; preparing and presenting a PowerPoint; completing and documenting a science lab project, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Work Products</b>	Student work that reflects performance on a series of similar in-class or homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work completion</li> <li>• Work accuracy</li> </ul>



	<p>assignments (e.g., successive writing assignments or ongoing math homework). A work product is selected because it can reflect growth in the intervention target skill(s). The element(s) of the work product being tracked can be objectively measures and converted to numeric data (e.g., percentage of problems completed).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Written evidence of problem-solving steps</li><li>• Quality of student work (e.g., on writing assignments)</li></ul>
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