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Reading Intervention in the Primary Grades: A Common-Sense Guide to RTI, by Heidi Anne E. Mesmer, Eric Mesmer, and Jennifer Jones.
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CHAPTER 3

The Primary Grades Intervention Lesson Plan

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GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are helpful ways to evaluate programs, strategies, or content for a research base?
- How is the developmental continuum key in planning effective interventions?
- How should diagnostic assessments be used to inform intervention instruction?
- What is the framework for effectively and efficiently setting intervention goals and timelines and for monitoring students' progress?
- What lesson planning guidelines are important for successful interventions in the primary grades?
- How do instructional leaders (administrators and teachers alike) evaluate the effectiveness of instructional interventions?

Across many years of both clinical work and RTI work we have learned how to help teachers and schools structure RTI and deliver interventions successfully. In this chapter we provide a structure for planning Tier 2 reading interventions in the primary grades. As described in Chapter 1, reading interventions are qualitatively different from small-group instruction in the classroom. We like to say, "Do something different!" Remember, the student is in intervention because business-as-usual instruction did not work. Interventions should not be extra, improvised, "ad hoc" instruction offered by random people. They should be planned, but the planning should not overwhelm a school or teachers (see the text box *What Is an Intervention?*). Our approach supports effective instructional intervention with

WHAT IS AN INTERVENTION?

An intervention is:

- Based on universal screening and diagnostic data.
- A specific research-based strategy or technique targeted to improve a particular reading skill.
- A strategy or technique that requires planning and progress monitoring.
- Typically delivered in a small-group or one-on-one format.

Interventions are specific instructional strategies or techniques targeted to improve a particular aspect of reading. Intervention needs are determined by using universal screening and diagnostic data. Universal screening data identify students who are not performing as they should in reading, and diagnostic data can further pinpoint specific literacy needs. Intervention instruction should use strategies that are research-based and are used to meet the needs of specific students.

Interventions are offered to students *in addition to* core classroom reading instruction; they are most effective when delivered in small-group or one-on-one settings. Intervention requires intentional planning and the monitoring of students' progress in order to inform instruction. Examples of intervention programs might include the Wilson Reading for students with decoding needs or Read Naturally for students with fluency needs. Chapters 4–6 in this text provide intervention instructional guidelines and strategies for students with specific needs in the primary grades.

An intervention is *not*:

- A person.
- An accommodation.
- A modification.
- A program.
- A piece of computer software.

In many cases, schools mistakenly view interventions as people. For example, Ms. Rodriguez may be referred to as "the intervention" for a particular group of students because she is the classroom teacher who delivers small-group instruction to students who need mostly fluency work. In fact, Ms. Rodriguez is the *teacher* who delivers the intervention. She is not the intervention itself.

Accommodations are changes made in instruction or assessment. For example, a student's needs might be accommodated with additional time to complete reading assignments or by being allowed to respond to questions orally, rather than in written form. With accommodations, students are expected to perform at the same level of all their peers with these slight changes. As you can see, an accommodation is *not* a specific strategy, does *not* involve additional instruction, and is *not* focused on a specific reading skill. Students receiving interventions may also receive accommodations.

Modifications are also changes made to instruction or assessment, but modifications *lower* the performance expectation or standard. For example, students with modifications may receive shortened vocabulary lists or fewer choices on multiple-choice tests. Again, modifications are *not* instructional strategies or techniques matching data to students' reading needs in research-based ways.

reasonable investments of time and pragmatic routines and practices. Schools and teachers can undertake reading interventions without burying themselves in paperwork and planning. The process that we share in this chapter is supported by some simple forms for organizing notes, plans, and progress monitoring (see Figure 3.1). In Chapters 4–6 we illustrate how these forms are used within the context of different types of lessons (i.e., letter-sounds, decoding, fluency). Our approach unifies RTI procedures, provides schools with a common language for working together, and helps to avoid the instructional fragmentation that can happen when multiple educators are working with struggling students.

The lesson planning structure offered in this chapter is also repeated in the content-specific chapters (4–6) that follow. Our lesson plan scheme contains the following seven elements:

1. A research basis.
2. Attention to developmental reading.
3. Diagnostic assessments.
4. Determining the focus of the intervention.
5. Careful instructional planning and activities.
6. Goal setting and progress monitoring.
7. A plan for evaluation.

The goal of this chapter is to set the stage for the skill-specific chapters that follow. We have found that many books supply the theoretical tenets of RTI or offer intervention ideas. Few books put it all together and show the steps for planning RTI. Each of the skill-specific chapters in this book is structured around the seven essential ingredients in our lesson plan scheme.

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Essential Elements of an Intervention Lesson

Research Basis

According to IDEIA (United States Congress, 2004, Sec. 614.b.6.B), an RTI model is grounded in research-based interventions—that is, interventions for which there is verifiable evidence of effectiveness. At a very basic level, when we say that an intervention is *research-based*, we mean that there is some reliable information indicating that the intervention will result in students' learning a specific content. In other words, the approach has been tried before and proven to be effective. Someone has used the approach, product, or strategy and collected pretest data to show that the students did not demonstrate the skill *before* the research-based approach but were able to demonstrate the skill *after* the research-based approach. In Chapter 2, the text box *Using the What Works Clearinghouse to Evaluate the*

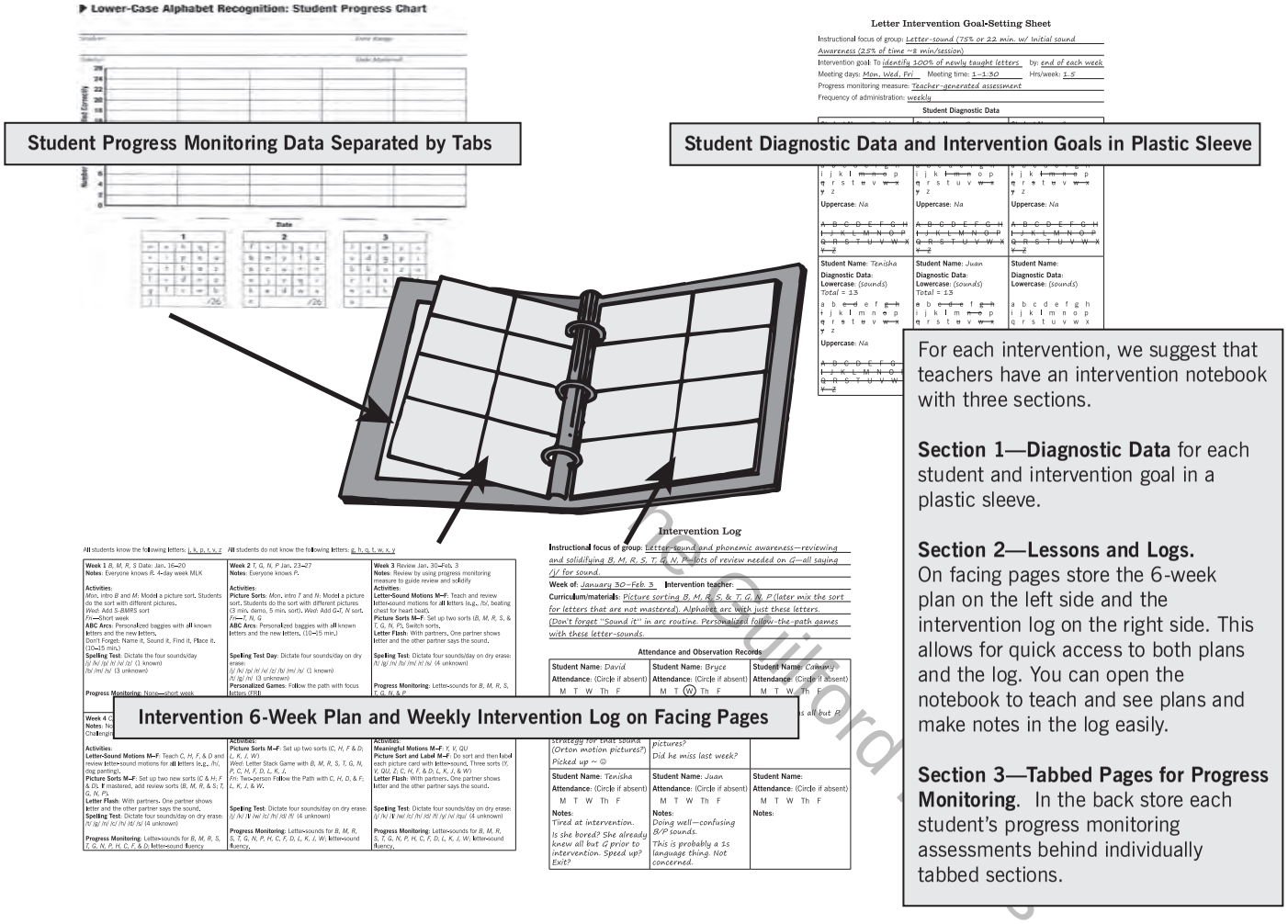

FIGURE 3.1. An interventionist's notebook.

Effectiveness of Intervention Programs (on pp. 36–37) describes one tool used to ensure a research base for programs and practices.

Instructional interventions must be research-based for two reasons. The first and most obvious reason is that research-based interventions help students. They make a difference, and by using them teachers and schools will not be wasting time with unproven strategies. The second reason that interventions should be research-based is that federal regulations require that a student's response to intervention using research-based instruction is the litmus test for determining a learning disability. If the approach, strategy, or program is not research-based, then a student might not respond to it because it is not effective and not because he/she has a learning disability.

Effective schools and teachers use high-quality practices and strategies to deliver instructional intervention. The strategies that we describe in this book are all research-based, and many are common strategies that teachers know and love. Fortunately, there are many new and exciting strategies that are also research-based that can help students. We use several resources to find strong, engaging strategies. First, we like to use articles from practitioner journals such as *The Reading Teacher* and *Teaching Exceptional Children*. These pieces tend to have a solid research backing and step-by-step instructions. We also like ReadWriteThink (*www.readwritethink.org*), a website sponsored by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English, with links to hundreds of reading lessons, many based on *Reading Teacher* articles. This website is searchable by topic and each is linked to an in-depth article. We also like the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University website, which also has links to solid, fun activities for students (*www.fcrr.org*). In addition, we have found many strong activities at the Center on Instruction (*www.centeroninstruction.org*).

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Developmental Continuum

An understanding of reading development is absolutely essential to the delivery of high-quality reading interventions. Students go through the same general sequence of developmental steps but not at the same rate. The key to delivering intervention is identifying a student's position on the developmental continuum, at which there is trouble, and then matching instruction to need. A common problem in schools is that students come into classrooms at a point on the developmental continuum that is below their peers. These students are not at the same place as their peers, but they are developing nonetheless. Often these students are characterized as being disabled or having an innate problem when they simply have not been taught what they now need (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1996). In fact, as mentioned earlier, students with reading difficulties, whether "learning disabled" or not, will need research-based reading instruction that is fundamentally similar in nature (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000).

The developmental continuum that we present in Figure 3.2 shows a set of developmental milestones that research has established to be associated with reading success. There is nothing innovative about this continuum. It is supported by the DIBELS continuum, which is informed by a rich literature on literacy stages that is empirically supported by many studies (Chall, 1967; Ehri, 2005; National Early Literacy Panel Report, 2008; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Snow et al., 1998). Although there is not perfect agreement, generally the research has converged around a set of milestones or benchmarks that appear to be strongly associated with reading success. The milestones that we identify on our continuum represent only essential behaviors that signify progression in learning to read. Teachers will achieve much, much more with their students than the skills we have listed on this continuum. These benchmarks simply form a loose set of criteria that schools can use to gauge if a student is behind or not.

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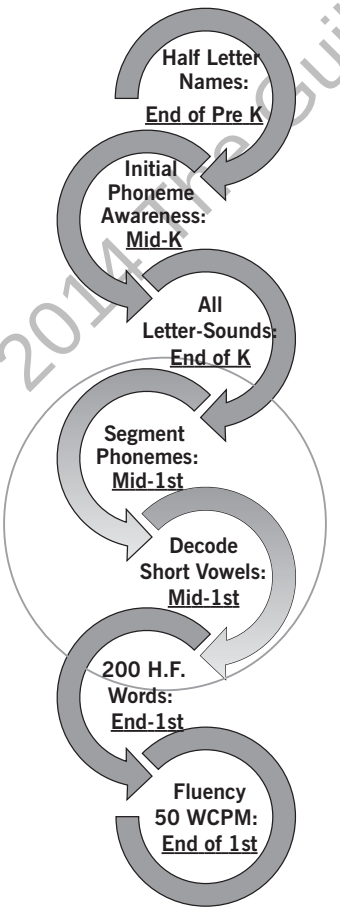

FIGURE 3.2. Developmental continuum.

We list seven milestones across PreK through first grade. (Students in second grade who are struggling usually have not met milestones in the first-grade year.) At the beginning of the continuum in PreK is *letter naming*. As described in depth in Chapter 4, the ability to rapidly name letters is strongly associated with later reading achievement (Adams, 1990; Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Chall, 1967; Vellutino & Scanlon, 1987).

At the middle of kindergarten students should demonstrate *awareness of initial phonemes* (e.g., the /b/ sound heard prior to the vowel in *bat*), because this level of phoneme awareness supports their attainment of the alphabetic principle and helps them apply letter-sounds. The *alphabetic principle* is the awareness that letters represent speech sounds. Students should be able to identify the beginning sounds in pictures or orally spoken words. Without this ability, letter-sound and decoding instruction will not move forward. By the end of kindergarten students should demonstrate letter-sound knowledge for all letters, both upper- and lowercase. In order to enter first grade ready to read, *accurate, automatic knowledge of letter-sounds* is required. In Figure 3.2 we shaded the shapes for initial phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge to reflect that initial sound awareness builds capacity for letter-sound knowledge. These two skills are linked.

By the middle of first grade students should be able to easily *decode an unknown short-vowel CVC (consonant–vowel–consonant) word*. This skill is often measured with pseudoword instruments. Pseudoword assessments present nonsense words containing common letter patterns to students, such as *zat*, in order to assess their ability to read unknown words. Pseudoword assessments ensure that students have not holistically memorized a word (see the text box *Discussion about Advantages and Disadvantages of Pseudowords* in Chapter 5, p. 000). The ability to blend sounds together into a word shows that the student has integrated and applied letter-sound knowledge and can access the English alphabetic system. Some students struggle with this skill, typically because they do not have awareness of phonemes or speech sounds. The ability to *segment phonemes*—that is, to break an oral word into its sounds (*cat* = /c/ + /a/ + /t/)—is a prerequisite to decoding words. Therefore, this milestone is shown *before* decoding. We find that phonemic segmentation practice builds capacity for decoding, and if a student is struggling to blend sounds together, practicing this skill will help.

By the end of first grade, two additional milestones should be reached: (1) *fluent reading* at a rate of 50 words per minute and (2) *accurate recognition of about 200 high-frequency words*. As with phonemic segmentation and decoding, these two skills are linked with sight-word knowledge-building capacity for fluent reading. Once first graders can decode and have a requisite store of high-frequency words, they are ready to move toward faster and more fluent reading. We once worked with a school that did such a good job with code skills in the first grade that they wanted to keep going and going and going. At midyear we had to help them shift their instructional focus toward fluent reading. Throughout the

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first-grade year, students are usually learning lists of high-frequency words, such as the Dolch list, that support their emerging fluency.

This instructional continuum essentially forms the framework for reading interventions provided in this book. As indicated by the graphic, certain skills are linked and build capacity for others (e.g., initial phoneme awareness–letter-sound, phonemic segmentation–decoding, high-frequency words–fluency).

Table 3.1 translates the continuum into a set of measurable reading behaviors that schools and teachers can check at different grades and different times in the year. This table is used to follow up with students who have not passed the literacy screening. The best way to use the table is to identify the grade level of the student and the time of the year. If a student has not passed the literacy screener, then this table provides guidance for administering additional diagnostic assessments. In general, we think of the beginning of the year as the first 2 months of school, mid-year as January, and spring as early April, when teachers can still have an impact on students. The skills are listed from the easiest at the top to the most difficult at the bottom. When working with an older struggling reader, perhaps in second grade, it may be necessary to work up the table to find the appropriate focus for intervention instruction (see Stahl, Kuhn, & Pickle, 1999). For instance, Cal, a second grader with whom we worked, could not read 50 words correctly per minute at the beginning of second grade. In fact, he read less than 25, so we moved up the table to check his ability to decode CVC words and found that he was unable to do so. We started our intervention instruction with Cal at decoding, but had we not probed earlier skills listed on the chart, we might have inappropriately started with fluency instruction.

We believe that teachers who have internalized knowledge of a simple developmental continuum and receive guidance in how to evaluate where their students are located on that continuum can be more flexible in how they view students. Using the continuum, teachers can identify struggling students and appropriately differentiate reading instruction in the classroom, as well as design appropriate instructional interventions for them. Teachers who locate students on a developmental continuum can identify specific needs that will move their students to the next position on the continuum. When teachers do not have this fundamental understanding, they default to grade-level expectations or grade-level standards as their continuum. Their focus then falls to the ways that a student is *not* like the others in a grade, and this perspective does not point to the type of instruction that a student needs. When teachers use a developmental continuum, they act as problem solvers as opposed to simply problem identifiers.

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Diagnostic Assessments

As described earlier, the literacy *screening assessment* may or may not provide specific diagnostic information that can inform instruction. *Diagnostic assessments*,

TABLE 3.1. Developmental Continuum with Specific Reading Behaviors

Grade	Skill	Standard indicating potential risk[a]
Middle of PreK	Letter naming	Fewer than 7 letter-names—upper- or lowercase (approx. one-quarter)
Spring of PreK	Letter-naming	Fewer than 10 letter-names—upper- or lowercase (half)
Beginning of K	Letter-names	Fewer than 10 letter names—upper- or lowercase (half)
Middle of K	Letter-sounds	Fewer than 13 *letter-sounds*—both upper- and lowercase
	Initial phoneme awareness[b]	If below letter-sound standards, check to see if the student can identify the initial sound of spoken word presented orally or in a picture.
Spring of K	Letter-sounds	Fewer than 20 *letter-sounds*—both upper- and lowercase
	Initial phoneme awareness	If below letter-sound standards, check to see if the student can identify the initial sound of spoken word presented orally or in a picture.
Beginning of grade 1	Letter-sounds	Fewer than 23 *letter-sounds*—both upper- and lowercase
	Initial phoneme awareness	If below letter-sound standards, check to see if the student can identify the initial sound of spoken word presented orally or in a picture.
Middle of grade 1	Decoding	Unable to consistently read *unknown* CVC words with short vowels (e.g., *vut, heg, dop* or *bag, hit, tell*).
	Phonemic segmenting[c]	Unable to consistently break *oral* words into each of their sounds.
	Fluency—reading rate	Reads less than 25 words per minute in a first-grade-level passage.
	High-frequency words[d]	Knows fewer than half of the 200 most frequently occurring words.
Spring of grade 1	Fluency—reading rate	Reads less than 50 words per minute.
Beginning of grade 2	Fluency—reading rate	Reads less than 50 words per minute.

[a]If the student is below this level, intervention may be needed.

[b]Initial phoneme awareness builds capacity for a student to learn letter-sounds. If a student doesn't know letter-sounds, initial phoneme awareness should be checked.

[c]Phonemic segmentation supports full alphabetic decoding. It builds capacity for a student to sound out a CVC word. If a student cannot consistently sound out CVC, then phonemic segmentation should be checked.

[d]Knowledge of high-frequency words supports fluent reading in grade 1. Students who are below reading rate standards may need additional support with high-frequency words.

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in contrast, are thorough measures that guide instruction by providing detailed information about exactly what content a student needs to learn. Sometimes screening measures do provide diagnostic information and sometimes they do not. For instance, there are several measures of letter-naming fluency that present a series of randomly interspersed upper- and lowercase letters. The student is asked to name as many letters has he/she can in 1 minute. Then this number of letters is compared to established standards. If a student doesn't meet the standard, however, a teacher would not know exactly which letters the student does not know. For this reason, a diagnostic letter-name or letter-sound measure would need to be administered for at-risk students. Such a measure would contain a complete listing of the letters in both upper- and lowercase forms, informing teachers about specific letters the student does and does not know. However, a screener that includes all 26 letters would provide the kind of diagnostic information that indicates which letters require specific focus. In contrast, a fluency measure, which indicates that a student is reading inefficiently, may or may not indicate the precise content on which a student needs to work on.

States across the country use many different literacy screening assessments to identify at-risk children in PreK through second grade. Many of these assessments tap the very skills that we highlight on the developmental continuum (e.g., letter naming, letter-sound knowledge, initial phoneme awareness). In the primary grades, screening measures and diagnostic measures sometimes intersect. Many primary grade skills, such as decoding, letter-sound knowledge, and fluency, are very discrete and can be easily measured. For instance, the PALS measure in Virginia uses a complete letter-sound measure as part of the screening, so a teacher using this measure would have both screening and diagnostic information all in one measure (Invernizzi, Meier, Swank, & Juel, 1997).

In some states and schools districts the screening measures are not diagnostically transparent. For example, some school systems use computer programs such as STAR Early Reading to identify at-risk students—which, as discussed in Chapter 2, are criterion-referenced assessments. These programs typically identify the students' levels of skill, but not the specific needs that would inform the content of an intervention. The developmental continuum that we provide would help to inform teachers who are not sure how to follow up if a student is identified as at risk. In PreK, for instance, a teacher would want to follow up with a letter-naming measure. A kindergarten teacher at the beginning of the year would want to use a letter-naming or letter-sound measure. Table 3.2 lists a series of easily accessible assessments for the various skills listed (e.g., letter naming, fluency, decoding). In addition, in each of the chapters we provide a skill-specific diagnostic template for recording diagnostic information in a way that guides planning. These forms look different depending on the skill being assessed, and teachers will have to use their judgment and a careful analysis of their state's literacy screening measure to decide whether or not additional diagnostic measures should be administered.

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TABLE 3.2. Diagnostic Assessments for Literacy Skills

Area	Assessment name	Website
Phonological awareness		
Initial phonemes	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills—Initial Sound Fluency	*https://dibels.uoregon.edu*
Initial phonemes	Abecedarian Reading Assessment	*www.balancedreading.com/assessment/abecedarian.pdf*
Phonemic segmentation	Yopp–Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation	*www.balancedreading.com/assessment/freeassessments.html* (see Figure 5.3 for example)
Phonemic segmentation	Abecedarian Reading Assessment	*www.balancedreading.com/assessment/abecedarian.pdf*
Phonemic segmentation	Easy CBM—Phoneme Segmenting	*https://easycbm.com*
Letters		
Letter naming and letter-sounds	Abecedarian Reading Assessment	*www.balancedreading.com/assessment/abecedarian.pdf*
Letter naming and letter-sounds	Easy CBM—Letter Names and Letter Sounds	*https://easycbm.com*
Letter naming and letter-sounds	Really Great Reading—Predecoding Survey	*www.rgrco.com*
Decoding		
Decoding real words	Abecedarian Reading Assessment	*www.balancedreading.com/assessment/abecedarian.pdf*
Decoding pseudowords	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills—Nonsense Word Subtest	*https://dibels.uoregon.edu*
Decoding real words and pseudowords	Really Great Reading—Diagnostic Decoding Survey	*www.rgrco.com* (see Chapter 5 for a sample and more details)
High-frequency sight words		
Automatic word recognition	Easy CBM—Word Reading Fluency	*https://easycbm.com*
Dolch words	Dolch Word Kit (by frequency)	*https://theschoolbell.com* (see Chapter 6 for more details)
Fluency		
Reading rate	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills—Oral Reading Fluency Passages	*https://dibels.uoregon.edu*
Reading rate	Easy CBM—Passage Reading Fluency	*https://easycbm.com*

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In Chapters 4–6 we specify the type of information that is needed to conduct a literacy intervention in a given area and then leave it to teachers to obtain that information from the assessment sources available to them.

Determining the Instructional Focus of an Intervention

As described in Chapter 2, schools using RTI conduct regular grade-level meetings prior to instructional interventions to discuss the details involved in implementation. These conversations usually address the intervention focus and the goal. In addition, the progress monitoring measure to be used is also identified. Such professional conversations are important for intervention success.

The team begins by identifying the focus of the intervention. Table 3.3 lists the forms included in this book that can be used by the team. First is the Intervention

TABLE 3.3. Forms and Their Purposes

Form	When used?/frequency	Purpose
Intervention Goal-Setting Sheet (Form 3.1)	Preplanning Once per intervention	This form is used during a grade-level or team meeting in which teachers are preplanning interventions. Teachers record the following information about the intervention: • Focus • Goal • Progress monitoring measure • Days and times the intervention meets • Diagnostic data for each student (baseline)
Six-Week Intervention-Planning Sheet (Form 3.2)	Preplanning During intervention (once per intervention)	Teachers use this form to record their tentative plans for 6 weeks of instruction. The form provides support for establishing the scope (content of instruction) and sequence (order) of instruction. Activities, notes, and progress monitoring days are also planned. The form serves as a guide for intervention instruction that can be revised in response to students' progress.
Intervention Log (Form 3.3)	During intervention During evaluation Once per week	This form is a "log" or record of what *actually* happened during the intervention on a weekly basis. It provides space to record the attendance for each student. Teachers also record specific notes about each student as needed. These notes are useful in evaluating the intervention and revising it.
Fidelity Checklist (Forms 4.2, 5.3, 6.3)	During intervention During evaluation Occasionally as needed	The purpose of this form is to check the fidelity of the intervention or the degree to which the lesson activities will fulfill the goal or purpose of the intervention. Fidelity checklists often contain a list of "essential" activities that should be taking place during the intervention. This form is used to evaluate an intervention to make sure that it is "true" to its intended goal.

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Goal-Setting Sheet (Form 3.1), which includes space for individual student data as well as for recording the intervention focus, goal, and timeline.[1] The intervention focus is the content of the intervention lesson—in other words, what will be taught (e.g., letter-sounds, decoding, and fluency). Sometimes there will be a little additional instruction during the intervention that *supports* focus. For instance, when teaching letter-sounds, many times readers will need some initial phoneme awareness practice with pictures to build their sensitivity to sounds. Although this is not directly teaching letter-sounds, it supports letter-sound learning. The intervention goal is the measurable objective of the intervention, the skill that will be captured by the progress monitoring measures.

In the Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring section of this chapter we discuss how to quantify progress monitoring goals in more detail. However, at the planning stage, when teachers are formulating an intervention, they also must specify their progress monitoring assessment. As described in Chapter 2, there are two types of progress monitoring: mastery monitoring (MM) and general outcome monitoring (GOM). The MM directly reflects the content of the intervention and sometimes helps to clarify exactly what should be taking placed during the intervention. Jamie, an experienced educator, explained:

> "When I go to a meeting, I want to know what I am supposed to do. I don't want to sit around having long discussions about the intervention. I just want to cut to the chase. I have a whole classroom program that I am trying to deliver, and I don't have time to waste. We have the diagnostic data that tell us where the gaps are and we know that we want to fill those gaps. So if a kid is not able to decode, we go straight to a progress monitoring measure. How are we going to assess that content? That clarifies everything else that we are going to do. Then all the other stuff is planned, like how long the intervention will be, and who will do it."

Also, teachers may need to identify a GOM that represents a skill to which they would eventually hope the intervention would transfer. In the primary grades GOMs differ based on the student's stage of development. A GOM for a decoding intervention would likely look different than a GOM for a fluency intervention. In Chapters 4–6 we specifically describe the GOMs that might accompany different types of interventions.

Once the progress monitoring measure has been established, the next question is timing and scheduling. Decisions about time and personnel are essential. Who is delivering the intervention? What amount of time will be dedicated to the intervention? The answers to these questions impact both the quality of the intervention and the quantity of time devoted to it. We suggest making a record of *who* the

[1]All reproducible forms are found at the ends of the respective chapters.

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interventionist will be and which *days* and *times* he/she will meet with a student. In addition, we suggest that a decision be made about *how many hours* per week the intervention will take place and *how much time* will be spent in the intervention each meeting day.

As with any other skills, students will improve in direct proportion to the amount of time they spend doing or practicing something. We recommend that interventions occur five times per week for 30 minutes per meeting. When this is not feasible, we believe that interventions should last at least 1.5 hours, three times per week. The amount of time dedicated to intervention should ultimately match the intervention goal and the amount of time that it will take for students to learn a content. We have often found that letter naming is a very teachable content that does not usually require daily treatment. However, letter-sound instruction can be more difficult, especially for students who do not have an awareness of initial phonemes in words. When phoneme awareness is deficient, intervention lessons must include both phonemic awareness activities and letter-sound instruction. Usually this type of intervention requires daily intervention time. Similarly, deeply entrenched fluency issues require more practice and time. In the subsequent chapters we address the amount of improvement that one might expect over a particular period of time with different literacy skills. Ultimately, the amount of time dedicated to intervention should be sufficient for consistent instruction to take place and should match the difficulty of the focus (more difficult content will require more time). In the planning section, we provide more insight about time and its distribution within the lesson.

Personnel decisions about interventions relate to quality. We do not recommend that volunteers be responsible for intervention instruction. However, with Tier 2 interventions, we have found that well-trained and well-supervised paraprofessionals with good attendance records can often be very successful in delivering interventions. Paraprofessionals are most successful with a very well-specified intervention. In one elementary school, we remember Shirley, who was very successful in delivering interventions designed by the reading specialist. Kathy, the reading specialist, used a blend of professional resource materials and her own knowledge to preplan an intervention and then checked in with Shirley every 2 to 3 weeks. Shirley enjoyed delivering intervention because she felt that she was really contributing to the success of the children and was often bored and overwhelmed when assigned to do clerical work and copying. The planning provided by the reading specialist proved to be a "win–win" situation for everyone involved, most importantly the students.

Usually a reading specialist, Title I reading teacher, or classroom teacher is a better choice for delivering interventions. The person delivering the intervention must want to teach the intervention, be skilled in the content focus, and able to consistently deliver the intervention. In our opinion, teachers *do* need to feel some level of control over the interventions they teach. They should be able to give input about the interventions that best connect with their gifts, and they should

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feel motivated to do the intervention. Intervention should be a positive, energetic instructional time for both students and teachers. Ultimately, the person delivering the intervention should possess the skills and motivation to deliver it. We also recommend placing the students with the greatest needs with the professionals in the building who have the most extensive training and experience to meet those needs. For example, students with extreme phonological awareness weaknesses would likely be best placed with the reading specialist. Students with language difficulties might be best placed with the English language learner (ELL) teacher or speech pathologist.

Schools should consider the following questions as they establish a progress monitoring measure, the intervention goal, timeline, and personnel:

- Is the person delivering the intervention willing to do so? (motivated)
- Does the person delivering the intervention possess the skills necessary to effectively deliver the intervention? (competent)
- If a paraprofessional is to deliver the instructional intervention, will the person be supervised and supported?
  - Who will provide plans for the paraprofessional to execute with students?
- If a paraprofessional is to deliver the instructional intervention, does the person have a good attendance record?
- Is the amount of time devoted to the intervention reasonable for the content being taught?

Planning for an Intervention

We suggest that teachers who are providing interventions plan in larger chunks and then reevaluate their plans every 3 weeks. Form 3.2 provides a template for planning the content, activities, and progress monitoring measures for up to 6 weeks, or about one-half of the time of a typical intervention period. Because interventions are so focused and consistent, teachers find extended planning useful from time to time. Each box on the form represents one week of intervention planning. The Six-Week Intervention-Planning Sheet provides a scope and sequence for the intervention. The sections of the Six-Week Intervention-Planning Sheet are illustrated in each of the content chapters (e.g., Chapter 6, Letters, and Chapter 7, Decoding). The Six-Week Intervention-Planning Sheet has space to record the focus content, which is what will be taught (e.g., letter-sound knowledge, decoding short vowels, fluency reading rate, and expression). Each week's content is sequenced or put into a specific order over the 6 weeks of the intervention (e.g., *B, M, R, S*—first week). In addition, the instructional activities for each week are also recorded. Instructional activities are the planned actions that teachers choose to teach the content and accomplish the goals of the intervention (e.g., word or picture sorting, repeated oral reading, sound boxes).

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Writing Plans

We do suggest that brief, written plans be used during instructional interventions. When we have introduced the planning approach using the Six-Week Intervention-Planning Sheet to teachers, they have been initially skeptical. Often it seems easier to simply sit down and plan for a week, but we find that this does not work for two reasons. First, teachers tell us that investing about an hour of time up front on planning actually *saves* time in the long run. We did a little experiment and asked teachers to do the planning their way and then to do it our way. Teachers reported that going back to the plan each week, in a sense, was like reinventing the wheel. Carol explained:

> "I actually ended up spending about 30 minutes per week on intervention planning when I did it my way and I started to dread it. It was like, 'What are we going to do this week?' But when I sat down and did it for 6 weeks, I would basically review my plans each week for about 10 minutes and make changes based on data that I had on the students. I found it much easier to refine established plans than to do new plans each week."

The second reason that we believe long-term planning is more effective is that it leads to more consistent and coherent instructional intervention. When teachers plan for 6 weeks, the content is delivered in a more sensible fashion. Carol explained:

> "So when I plan for 6 weeks, I know where I am going this week and then I know where I want to be in 3 weeks. It keeps me focused on the goal. Yeah, I do change the plans if the kids are not responding, but it keeps urgency in my teaching and direction."

With intervention, the unit of instruction is usually the period of time in which the intervention will take place. Planning for the end goal and pacing the content are very important.

Different contents will lead to different types of pacing. With code-level skills, such as letter-sound instruction, decoding, or phonemic awareness, there are many resources to guide the scope and the sequencing. Sequencing of letter-sounds, for instance, can be done using *Words Their Way* (Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, & Johnston, 2012), or the Neuhaus Reading Readiness materials. Phonemic awareness activities can be structured based on the type of phonemes (e.g., vowels, continuant consonants, stop consonants) and the number of phonemes in a word (e.g., *at* vs. *trap*).

With instructional intervention, teachers must be systematic in their presentation because the approaches that worked in the classroom did not work with these

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students. Attention to introducing the content from the easiest to the hardest or from the least complex to the most complex is particularly important with Tier 2 interventions. In addition, we suggest specifying the number of minutes dedicated to each activity. This step helps teachers move the lesson along and ensures that the lesson focus is receiving the requisite amount of time. For example, if the focus of the lesson is increasing fluency and reading rate, then the majority of the lesson, or 70% of the time, should be geared toward fluency instruction. In one fluency lesson, we found that the teacher was spending about 15–17 minutes on high-frequency word practice (50–56% of a 30-minute lesson) and the rest of the time on repeated reading and oral reading. In actuality, to keep the focus of the lesson on the target skill—fluency—only about 7–10 minutes of time should have been dedicated to high-frequency word practice. The majority of the lesson time, about 20 minutes, should have focused on fluency practice. Although these distinctions seem nitpicky, the cumulative effects of time are compounded across 6 weeks. Students get better at what they practice the most, and so the intervention time should be dedicated to the focus of the intervention.

Selecting Instructional Activities

The selection of activities is also very important to the intervention. We like to tell teachers, "Establish your content, be research-based, and then HAVE FUN!" Keep activities simple and repetitive, but not boring. The content of the intervention should be kept very consistent from day to day, but the lessons should be brisk and engaging, with different student-friendly activities. Students should receive multiple opportunities to engage in active learning/participation within each intervention session. In a letter intervention, this means that the students might focus on the same five letters and/or letter-sounds but engage in three different activities with those letter-sounds. From the perspective of the child, a variety of activities makes the lesson interesting, and from the perspective of the teacher the variety provides different opportunities to reach the student. The litmus test for an instructional activity is the degree to which it *meets the goal of the intervention and improves the students' performance on the MM progress monitoring measure*. When in doubt about an activity, ask yourself, "Would I expect this activity to result in a student's performing better on my progress monitoring measure?"

There are several activities that we suggest interventionists steer clear of or minimize. One nonproductive activity involves cutting, pasting, and coloring. Such activities do not contribute to improvement on a progress monitoring measure, and they eat away at precious instructional time. Sometimes we have observed teachers doing picture or word sorts or letter matching activities with word cards or pictures in which students are asked to cut up cards, color pictures, or paste cards *during* the intervention. This is not a wise use of intervention time, especially with young learners. Cutting cards and pasting them could easily consume 20 minutes

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of a 30-minute intervention session and do not sufficiently improve performance in the target area. As much as possible, we suggest that teachers avoid paperwork during interventions. Students love manipulatives and even writing activities can incorporate dry erase boards and colorful markers. In addition, we suggest that teachers minimize choral responding or whole-group instruction.

The intervention activities should allow children to handle their own manipulatives and to have as many practice opportunities as possible. We suggest that teachers evaluate their activities by also thinking about the number of practice opportunities that each child is given. For instance, we love games, but some formats do not provide a lot of practice opportunities per child. A Follow-the-Path-type game might give each student only one opportunity for response every four turns. A bingo game, on the other hand, might offer an opportunity for response each time. Follow-the-path games can be altered so that individual children must respond during everyone else's turn. Last, avoid nonspecific feedback or vague language. The intervention time is a time to provide students as much individual, specific, corrective feedback as possible in a small group.

Following is a list of questions to use in guiding intervention planning:

- Do you create long-term plans for instructional interventions?
- Does the content during the instructional intervention reflect a logical, research-based sequence?
- Do the plans include days to monitor progress?
- Are the instructional activities well matched to the progress monitoring measure (e.g., no cutting and pasting)?
- Are the instructional activities lively and varied?
- Is the amount of time dedicated to each instructional activity specified?
- Is the time dedicated to instructional activities aligned with the content focus (e.g., not too much time on support skills or ancillary activities)?
- Do games and instructional activities optimize the amount of individual practice for each student?

Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring

On the Intervention Goal-Setting Sheet, there is room for the interventionist to write the intervention goal (see Form 3.1). As described in Chapter 2 the intervention goal is a very precise statement of exactly what kind of progress monitoring score will constitute success. The first goal that should be established is the MM goal. The intervention goal addresses questions such as these:

- How will we know when the student has been successful?
- How many items must a student answer correctly to be considered proficient?
- How many words correct per minute must be gained?

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Often these goals are based on the benchmark scores in a given screener for the next screening period (e.g., winter or spring). For example, a teacher who is working with a student in fluency may use the fluency benchmark scores for the next screening to shape a goal. At other times, a more specific goal is set that specifies a target relative to the instructional intervention. As described in Chapter 2, at least 12 data points or 3 months of intervention should be conducted before moving into more intensive Tier 3 interventions. However, it is often the case that students at the primary levels will make sufficient progress and meet goals before 12 weeks' time. The earlier that intervention begins in a student's school career, the more likely that he/she can be "caught up," and the less likely that a full 12 weeks of intervention will be needed. Our goal statement can be found on the intervention planning form in Form 3.1. Following are a few examples of goals for intervention groups:

- To read pseudowords containing short vowels *a, e, i, o, u* with 90% accuracy by March 1st.
- To identify the sounds for 24/26 letters by May 16th.
- To read 50 words per minute correctly by May 1st.

Evaluating an Intervention: Intervention Logs, Progress Monitoring, and Fidelity Checklists

Teachers have planned and delivered instructional interventions long before RTI, but what distinguishes RTI from other approaches is a thorough approach to assessing the effectiveness of instructional interventions. We recommend three tools to evaluate instructional interventions: (1) intervention logs, (2) fidelity checklists, and (3) progress monitoring data.

Intervention Logs

An intervention log is a weekly record of what actually happened during the intervention. Like a ship's log, it is a dated journal, in this case documenting the conditions of the intervention and the responses of each student. Form 3.3 shows a blank intervention log with boxes for all participating students, their attendance, and notes about their progress. After the intervention has been running for several weeks, teachers use the intervention log to support their discussions of student progress. With the notes that they have on the intervention logs, teachers complement progress monitoring data with information about attendance, students' demeanor during interventions (e.g., cooperative, eager, discouraged, sleepy), and responses (e.g., "James read accurately and his time improved, but he sounded robotic" or "Kayla takes a longer time to blend words than other students"). Frequently, the intervention log will include teachers' hypotheses about why an intervention might not be working effectively.

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Because the intervention log is simple and anecdotal, teachers usually find it helpful. In each of the following chapters we include a sample intervention log for the particular content focus, such as letter teaching, fluency, or decoding. These sample logs show the types of comments that teachers typically make about students. Many of these comments are hypotheses. Teachers reflect upon the progress (or lack thereof) that students are making. For example, in Chapter 4, which focuses on letter-sound learning, a teacher comments that a student, Juan, an English language learner, may be confusing the /b/ and /p/ sounds because of his first language, in which these sounds are very similar. When we see a high-quality intervention log, we can almost see the wheels turning in the brain of the interventionist.

Intervention logs are also important because they help teachers improve instruction when an intervention is not working. With an intervention log teachers can maintain brief notes about students' immediate responses to instruction. Danielle explained to us:

> "I like having data in front of me during a meeting because I can provide examples of how a student responded to instruction. For example, I was doing this fluency intervention group and everyone was doing so well except for Felicia. I just couldn't figure out was going on and why the intervention wasn't working with her. When I looked at my notes, I had occasionally made notes that she read the passages silently because she told me she was shy. I don't know why I let her do that, but I did. I realized that she should have been reading the passages orally and so I insisted and I saw her improve."

We particularly believe in the importance of tracking attendance on the intervention log. We worked in one school where we remember a third grader who had made marvelous progress in a decoding intervention and then started to drop off. When we consulted the intervention logs, we realized that she was only attending about 3 days per week of a 5-day intervention. Although she was attending school regularly, she was frequently being pulled out of class for appointments or going home sick or even in school suspension. If we had relied on the school's attendance records, we would have assumed that she attended intervention much more than she did.

Fidelity Checklists

A fidelity checklist is simply a listing of the essential elements of an intervention used to evaluate it. Most often someone will use the fidelity checklist to observe an intervention and look for the essential components. A fidelity checklist for a fluency intervention might include questions like the following:

- Did students read orally?
- Was the oral reading timed?
- Were the students reading expressively (e.g., not robot reading)?

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The fidelity checklist is essentially a way of making sure that the intervention is on track.

In all of our work with teachers doing RTI, we have found that the fidelity checklist can be the most misunderstood element of RTI. Some teachers are resentful of someone "checking up on them." Our friend Cheryl from Chapter 1 had many questions about the fidelity checklist. "It bugged me," she told us. "I am a professional and I don't need someone 'checking on me.' I can do my job, and I have been doing it for several decades." This perspective is common and certainly understandable. However, fidelity checklists are not evaluation tools for people. They are evaluations of the *intervention*. They are not shared with parents, administrators, or even other teachers. People who use them are not curriculum police. We use these when students are struggling and not making progress. A fidelity checklist is usually a good way to clarify the active ingredients in the intervention. Susan explained:

> "It's funny. When you put everything into a simple checklist, it's like a set of priorities. I find it clarifying. After we did this, I had a reading specialist ask me about my intervention when we were doing lunch duty. I used to hate those kind of on-the-fly conversations because I always floundered, but since we started to use fidelity checklists like this, I can quickly tell someone what I am doing and why."

One way to alleviate the negative feelings that good teachers have about fidelity checklists is to ask them to draft a few bullet points that capture what *they* believe to be the most important components of the intervention. If something is missing, the committee can discuss that at the onset. After being part of developing the checklists, Cheryl softened a bit.

> "I still bristle a bit with the fidelity checklists, but that's because I usually stay on course pretty well with what I do. I have found that it's really helpful if I am coaching another teacher or if I am sitting on a team and an intervention is not working. I have been asked by my principal to go in and observe interventions, and I use the checklists to help me think clearly. Sometimes I don't even share them with the teachers I am observing but they help me be organized and specific in supporting a teacher, if I need to. Also, it helps me to stay grounded in what's important in the intervention. I like being creative and I think that interventions *can* be lively and fun, but they can't veer from the focus of the intervention. When I am coming up with intervention activities, I look at the fidelity checklist and ask myself, 'Is this going to contribute to helping the kids do what we set up as the goal? Is the activity matched to the target behavior that we want the kids to display?' You just have less time to play around in an intervention, and this keeps me focused."

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Teachers should not feel as if the fidelity checklist is a secret "gotcha" tool. It should be clear to everyone which elements of the intervention are most important. We include sample fidelity checklists in each of the chapters on specific types of interventions.

Progress Monitoring Data

Perhaps the most important tool used in evaluating the quality of a reading intervention is progress monitoring data. Without this information we cannot really judge the student's *response* to the intervention. When evaluating data, we first suggest that teachers look at the MM data to see if the student has responded to the content of the intervention. Chapter 2 provides a detailed description of analyzing data. If the student has not shown progress in acquiring the content in the intervention, then looking at the GOM will not be helpful. We would not expect a student to generalize an unlearned skill. When teachers see a lack of progress in MM, they know that they must examine the intervention instruction for the student. If the student has shown progress at the MM level, then we suggest that the GOM data be examined to see if there is some impact on a broader goal and if the discrete content of the intervention is having a more extended effect. Keep in mind, however, that any impact on GOM data will usually take longer because it is not as closely aligned with the intervention.

Following are several questions that we suggest schools and teachers use in guiding the evaluation of interventions:

- Does the intervention log provide a weekly review of what happened during a reading intervention?
- Does the intervention log track student attendance during interventions?
- Are anecdotal comments included on intervention logs and do they complement the progress monitoring data?
- Does the intervention log show hypotheses about why an intervention might *not* be working?
- Are simple fidelity checklists created collaboratively when the intervention is set?
- Are fidelity checklists shared with teachers at the outset of the intervention time and used in a transparent, professional, and respectful fashion?
- Do the elements on the fidelity checklist reflect the *essential* ingredients of the intervention that will lead to results on the progress monitoring measure?
- Is a fidelity checklist used to guide observations when an intervention is not working?
- Is the fidelity checklist treated as a constructive tool to improve interventions rather than a teacher evaluation instrument?

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Conclusion

As we discuss specific intervention content in the coming chapters, it is important to begin with an overarching plan for intervention instruction. Interventions should be research-based, considerate of the developmental continuum, and informed by diagnostic assessments. When schools take the time to thoughtfully investigate the research base of intervention programs and strategies, teachers can confidently embark on interventions knowing that their instructional approach is supported by research, thereby eliminating a "trial-and-error" saga. Knowledge of the developmental continuum, coupled with diagnostic data for struggling learners, further inform teachers on exactly what kids need and where they need to be.

Lesson planning for intervention instruction need not be tedious and time-consuming. By setting goals and timelines and determining progress monitoring measures ahead of time, interventions can be targeted and well-informed. Long-range, 6-week planning for interventions keeps instruction consistent and allows content to flow from session to session. The planning sheets provided within this chapter serve as helpful resources in the planning process.

Finally, it is helpful to determine ways in which to ascertain the effectiveness of interventions and to provide opportunities for self-reflection regarding intervention instruction. Intervention logs, fidelity checklists, and progress monitoring data can serve as key components in this process. Intervention logs provide important information from teachers regarding students' attendance and progress during intervention sessions. Fidelity checklists contain essential components that should be found in every intervention session. Such checklists are helpful when observing interventions as well as serving as "thought points" for teachers as they plan intervention instruction. Progress monitoring data help teachers identify who is progressing as a result of instruction and who is not. When logs, checklists, and progress monitoring data are considered in conjunction with one another, decisions about students' progress are well informed and supported.

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