

GCC Instructional Playbook



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Introduction



The Instructional Playbook is designed to serve as a clear, practical, and supportive guide for our Instructional Leaders as they partner with teachers to strengthen instruction and improve student learning. This playbook brings together high-impact strategies, common language, and shared expectations that help ensure every classroom—and every educator—receives consistent, meaningful support.

You are leaders who help create the conditions where teachers can thrive. This playbook will grow and evolve with you, shaped by your insights, experiences, and the needs of your schools. We are grateful for your partnership and your commitment to supporting high-quality instruction across our classrooms..



Tiered Supports

One Pager

In One Sentence

Tiered supports within an MTSS framework ensure that every student receives the right level of instruction, at the right time, based on evidence of learning, so all students can achieve essential outcomes.

What Research Says

Research from Buffum, Mattos, and Malone (RTI at Work®, 2018) emphasizes that effective MTSS systems focus first on high-quality Tier 1 instruction, then provide timely, targeted, and systematic interventions when students need additional support. Their work highlights that intervention should be based on student need, not labels, and driven by frequent formative assessment and collaborative decision-making. When schools respond to learning rather than labels, achievement gaps narrow and collective efficacy increases.

What's the Point?

Tiered supports shift the question from “Who didn’t get it?” to “How will we respond when students don’t learn—or already know it?” The purpose is to create a guaranteed, viable system of support that prevents failure, accelerates learning, and ensures that no student is left to struggle in silence.

How is This Used by Teachers?

- Deliver strong Tier 1 instruction aligned to essential standards for all students.
- Use frequent checks for understanding and common formative assessments to identify student needs early.
- Collaborate in teams to determine appropriate Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports based on evidence, not assumptions.
- Adjust instruction, grouping, and supports responsively rather than waiting for failure.
- Monitor student progress regularly and refine supports based on results.

How is This Used by Students?

- Receive instruction and support that matches their current learning needs.
- Access additional time, strategies, or instruction without stigma.
- Understand that learning is a process and support is temporary and purposeful.
- Experience success through targeted reteaching, practice, or enrichment.
- Build confidence and agency as barriers to learning are removed.

Tiered Supports

Resources

Overview

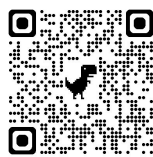
MTSS is an integrated, comprehensive framework that focuses on CCSS, core instruction, differentiated learning, student-centered learning, individualized student needs, and the alignment of systems necessary for all students' academic, behavioral, and social success. In 2012, the MTSS model focused on three main areas

1. Introduction of Common Core Standards (making sure students were prepared for career and college)
2. Shifting from RTI (reactive) to MTSS (proactive)
3. Teacher evaluations (Teachers focus was on curriculum and instruction-what is being taught), teaching ALL students-Inclusivity, family collaboration and professional responsibilities-PD to learn about MTSS and UDL)

MTSS Video Overview

Multi-Tiered System of Support

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has 30 years of research



Evidence-Based Practices

- Culturally and Linguistically Relevant and Responsive Teaching
- High Leverage Practices (collaboration, assessment, SEL & Instruction)
- Interconnected Systems Framework
- Mental health
- Positive behavioral interventions and supports
- Restorative practices
- School climate and conditions work group
- Trauma Responsive practices
- Universal Design for Learning

Instructional Elements

- ❖ Chunking content
- ❖ Using structured practice sessions
- ❖ Demonstrating value and respect for reluctant learners
- ❖ Asking in-depth questions of reluctant learners
- ❖ Probing incorrect answers with reluctant learners

Differentiation

One Pager

In One Sentence

Differentiation is a proactive, standards-aligned approach to instruction that adjusts content, process, and product—within Tier 1—to ensure all students access grade-level learning while receiving the support or challenge they need to succeed.

What Research Says

Differentiated instruction is grounded in the understanding that learner variability is the norm, not the exception. Research aligned to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) emphasizes that all students can work toward the same firm goals when barriers to learning are intentionally removed. Effective differentiation maintains grade-level expectations while providing scaffolds, supports, and options that allow students to access content, engage in learning, and demonstrate understanding in multiple ways. When instruction is designed to the “edges” rather than the mythical average student, more learners experience success.

What’s the Point?

The purpose of differentiation is not to individualize everything or lower expectations—it is to ensure equitable access to essential standards. Differentiation shifts instruction from “one-size-fits-all” to responsive teaching, where supports are built into lessons so students do not have to fail before receiving help. The goal is access, growth, and agency for every learner.

How is This Used by Teachers?

- Start with essential standards and learning targets before planning supports
- Use student data (CAASPP, ELPAC, i-Ready, reading levels, CFUs) to anticipate barriers to learning
- Differentiate content, process, and product while maintaining grade-level rigor
- Scaffold materials using visuals, annotated texts, sentence stems, graphic organizers, and vocabulary supports
- Ask a range of questions (DOK 1–3) and provide structured opportunities for discussion and feedback
- Pre-teach and reinforce key Tier 2 and Tier 3 academic vocabulary
- Use flexible small groups to preview, review, or extend learning based on evidence
- Monitor student work continuously and adjust instruction in real time

How is This Used by Students?

- Access grade-level content through supports that remove barriers to learning
- Engage in learning using multiple pathways (visual, auditory, collaborative, independent)
- Demonstrate understanding in different ways while working toward the same learning goals
- Receive scaffolds as needed, understanding that supports are temporary and purposeful
- Build confidence as instruction responds to their strengths and needs
- Develop agency as learners who can articulate what helps them learn

Differentiation

Resources

Overview

Content	Process	Product
How students access information or the materials students are given	The activities or tasks the student does to master content	How students demonstrate learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide leveled, or scaffolded texts Provide a preview of the text Use a variety of media to engage students with content including visuals and auditory tasks Provide language supports to ELs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manipulatives Multiple opportunities to work with a partner or small group with corrective feedback before working independently or being assessed Supportive scaffolds like graphic organizers, sentence stems, paragraph frames, and vocabulary banks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide supportive scaffolds like graphic organizers, sentence stems, paragraph frames, and vocabulary banks to students who need them Provide rubrics and clear success criteria Options for students to demonstrate learning

Differentiation is **not**:

- Something extra on top of good teaching
- Mostly for students with identified learning challenges
- IEPs for all
- Individualized instruction
- A synonym for group work

The Learner Variability Navigator

Building Literacy PK-3 Factors

Below are the Learner Factors critical to literacy outcomes. Hover to see how these factors connect across the **whole child**. Then click to find out how each factor impacts learning and explore strategies that support it. Read more [about this model](#).

Learner Background	Social and Emotional Learning	Cognition	Literacy
Adverse Experiences	Emotion	Attention	Alphabet Knowledge
Hearing	Motivation	Auditory Processing	Background Knowledge
Home Literacy Environment	Self-Regulation	Cognitive Flexibility	Decoding
Physical Fitness	Sense of Belonging	Inhibition	Foundational Writing Skills
Primary Language	Social Awareness & Relationship Ski...	Long-term Memory	Handwriting Skills
Safety	Stereotype Threat	Sensory Integration	Morphological Awareness
Sleep		Short-term Memory	Narrative Skills
Social Supports		Speed of Processing	Phonological Awareness
Socioeconomic Status		Visual Processing	Print Awareness
Vision		Working Memory	Sight Recognition
			Syntax
			Verbal Reasoning
			Vocabulary

Evidence-Based Practices

- Scaffold Materials
- Scaffold CFUs, TDQs (Text Dependent Questions)
- Select key tier 2 and 3 vocabulary necessary for academic discussions and writing and explicitly teach
- Use a variety of media to build background knowledge
- Use small groups to preview, review, and for support



Instructional Elements

- ❖ Annotate Texts
- ❖ Provide visuals, videos, graphic organizers, sentence stems, paragraph frames and cloze notes
- ❖ Engage students in partner or group discussions
- ❖ Use picture books, infographics, pictorial and audio recordings
- ❖ Use small groups



Common Formative Assessments (CFAs)

One Pager

In One Sentence

Short, **team-created assessments** used during instruction to check student learning on priority standards

What Research Says

- Frequent formative assessment has a high impact on student achievement (Black & William; Hattie)
- Teacher collaboration around evidence of learning improves instructional quality
Timely feedback is one of the most effective influences on learning

What's the Point?

To know *which students learned what* before moving on
To reduce variability and inequity across classrooms
To shift PLCs from talking about teaching to responding to learning

How is This Used by Teachers?

Analyze results to identify trends, misconceptions, and levels of mastery

Adjust instruction through reteaching, intervention, or enrichment

Collaborate in PLCs to refine instruction and assessment quality

How is This Used by Students?

Receive timely feedback on their learning progress

Understand expectations and success criteria more clearly

Reflect on strengths, gaps, and next steps in their learning

[Link to Quick Guide](#)

Common Formative Assessments (CFAs)

Resources

Overview

CFAs are collaboratively designed assessments aligned to priority standards and learning targets

They are administered during instruction to gather actionable evidence of student learning

Results are used in PLCs to drive instructional decisions, not grading decisions

CFAs support consistency, equity, and collective teacher efficacy

Topic/Video/Infographic



Evidence-Based Practices

- **Clarify and share learning intentions and success criteria** (Hattie, effect size ~0.75)
- **Use frequent checks for understanding with timely feedback** (Black & William)
- **Analyze student work collaboratively in PLCs** to identify patterns and instructional responses
- **Plan targeted reteaching and enrichment based on results**, not pacing guides
- **Reassess after instructional adjustments** to confirm learning

Instructional Elements

- ❖ **Priority Standards:** Focus on the most essential learning outcomes
- ❖ **Student-Friendly Learning Targets:** Clearly articulated and shared with students
- ❖ **Aligned Assessment Items:** Directly measure the intended standard and level of rigor
- ❖ **Common Administration Window:** Ensures data comparability across classrooms
- ❖ **Collaborative Analysis Protocols:** Structured PLC conversations around evidence
- ❖ **Planned Instructional Responses:** Agreed-upon strategies for reteaching, intervention, and extension
- ❖ **Feedback Loops:** Timely, actionable feedback for students and teachers

Active Recall-Retrieval Practice

One Pager

In One Sentence

Retrieval practice is an instructional strategy where students actively recall information from memory rather than re-reading or reviewing it.

What Research Says

Research consistently shows that retrieving information strengthens memory more effectively than re-learning.

- In a landmark study, Karpicke & Roediger (2008) found that students who practiced recalling information remembered significantly more one week later than students who repeatedly reviewed the material.
- In a study of upper elementary students, Smith et al. (2016) found that students who practiced recalling what they read — instead of rereading the text — demonstrated stronger reading comprehension and retention over time.
- Additional studies show retrieval practice works across grade levels, subjects, and formats (oral, written, digital).
- When retrieval is low-stakes and frequent, it improves learning without increasing anxiety.

What's the Point?

Key takeaway: The act of remembering is the learning.

How is This Used by Teachers?

Teachers use retrieval practice by intentionally designing short, low-stakes opportunities for students to recall previously learned information before reviewing or reteaching content. This may include warm-up questions, think-pair-recall routines, or brief no-notes checks embedded throughout instruction. Rather than using these moments to assign grades, teachers use them to surface student thinking, identify misconceptions, and guide instructional decisions. By revisiting content across days and weeks, teachers help students strengthen learning over time while maximizing instructional efficiency and reducing the need for extensive reteaching.

How is This Used by Students?

Students use retrieval practice by actively recalling information from memory—without notes, prompts, or immediate answers—and explaining what they remember through speaking, writing, or drawing. During retrieval activities, students think back to prior learning, organize ideas, and test their own understanding before receiving feedback. Over time, this process helps students recognize what they know, what they need to work on, and how their understanding is improving. By regularly practicing recall, students develop stronger comprehension, confidence, and long-term retention of learning.

Active Recall-Retrieval Practice

Resources

Active Recall	Practice (Restudy / Practice Activities)
Students retrieve information from memory without looking at notes	Students review or repeat information with notes or examples available
Focuses on remembering first , then checking accuracy	Focuses on seeing information again
Examples: brain dumps, no-notes questions, explaining aloud	Examples: rereading notes, watching a video again, copying examples
Feels harder and less fluent to students	Feels easier and more fluent
Strengthens long-term memory and transfer	Often improves short-term performance only
Helps students identify gaps in understanding	Can create a false sense of mastery
Supported strongly by cognitive science research	Limited evidence for long-term retention

Active Recall-Retrieval Practice

Resources

Classroom Activities That Support Active Recall
<p>Brain Dump Students write or draw everything they remember about a topic without notes for 2–3 minutes. <i>Use:</i> Lesson warm-up or review <i>Why it works:</i> Free recall strengthens memory pathways.</p>
<p>Sentence Starters for Recall Students complete prompts such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “One thing I remember about...”• “The most important idea was...” <p><i>Use:</i> Reflection or closure <i>Why it works:</i> Supports recall while reducing writing barriers.</p>
<p>True/False + Explain Students decide if a statement is true or false and explain their reasoning from memory. <i>Use:</i> Discussion starter <i>Why it works:</i> Retrieval plus justification strengthens learning.</p>
<p>Spiral Review Questions Mix questions from previous lessons or units into daily practice. <i>Use:</i> Warm-ups or transitions <i>Why it works:</i> Spaced retrieval improves long-term retention.</p>
<p>Draw It From Memory Students draw a model, diagram, or process based on prior learning. <i>Use:</i> Science, math, or reading <i>Why it works:</i> Visual retrieval deepens understanding.</p>
<p>Whiteboard Recall Students write answers on individual whiteboards and reveal them simultaneously. <i>Use:</i> Mid-lesson check <i>Why it works:</i> Encourages full participation and quick feedback.</p>

Active Recall-Retrieval Practice

Resources

Classroom Activities That Support Active Recall
<p>Cover and Answer</p> <p>Students cover their notes and answer teacher-generated or student-generated questions.</p> <p><i>Use:</i> Independent or partner work</p> <p><i>Why it works:</i> Turns note-taking into an active retrieval routine.</p>
<p>Teach-Back</p> <p>Students explain a concept or strategy to a partner without notes.</p> <p><i>Use:</i> After instruction</p> <p><i>Why it works:</i> Requires retrieval, organization, and elaboration.</p>
<p>Exit Ticket (Recall-Based)</p> <p>Students answer one focused question tied directly to the lesson objective from memory.</p> <p><i>Use:</i> End of lesson</p> <p><i>Why it works:</i> Strengthens retention and informs instruction.</p>
<p>Think–Pair–Recall</p> <p>Students silently recall an answer, then share with a partner, then whole group.</p> <p><i>Use:</i> During instruction</p> <p><i>Why it works:</i> Ensures all students retrieve before discussions</p>
<p>Retrieval Warm-Up</p> <p>Begin class with 1–2 questions from yesterday’s lesson before any review occurs.</p> <p><i>Use:</i> Daily routine</p> <p><i>Why it works:</i> Activates prior knowledge and reveals misconceptions</p>

Title: RACE

One Pager

In One Sentence

The **RACE Strategy** is a structured approach to teaching and learning academic writing and text-based responses. It helps students **answer questions with clarity, evidence, and reasoning** by following four clear steps:

R – **Restate** the question

A – **Answer** the question

C – **Cite** evidence from the text

E – **Explain** how the evidence supports the answer

What Research Says

- Studies show that teaching students how to organize responses with explicit steps leads to more complete, coherent, and academically rigorous writing compared to unstructured prompts. Students using RACE are more likely to include evidence and explanation in answers. (Ferretti et al., 2007)
- Structured response strategies help students connect comprehension with writing. When students seek evidence in the text, they engage more deeply with reading, leading to better understanding. (Graham & Perin, 2007)

What's the Point?

- Clarifies Expectations- Students have a clear road-map for how to answer an open-ended question.
- Links Reading and Writing- RACE requires students to use text evidence to support ideas.
- Promotes Higher-Order Thinking- Students have to explain and justify their thinking, rather than just providing an answer.

How is This Used by Teachers?

- Teach Each Step Explicitly: Teachers introduce each part of RACE with definitions, examples, and anchor charts: **Restate** = Turn the question into a statement **Answer** = Directly respond **Cite** = Find textual evidence
Explain = Connect evidence to the answer
- Model the strategy, provide guided practice, scaffold for struggling students, assess and give feedback.

How is This Used by Students?

R – **Restate** the question- students turn the question/prompt into the beginning of their answer.

A – **Answer** the question- Students clearly write their response to the question.

C – **Cite** evidence from the text- Students find specific evidence to support their answer (quotes, details, etc)

E – **Explain** how the evidence supports the answer- Students explain why their evidence matters (how it relates to their answer, what it proves, why it's important).

Title: RACE

Resources

Overview

1. Restate the Question

Students turn the prompt into the beginning of their answer:

Question: “How does the character change in the story?”

Restate: “**The character changes by...**”

2. Answer the Question

Students clearly write the response to the core question.

3. Cite Evidence

Students find specific text evidence (quotes, facts, details) to support their answer, with proper citations or references to the place in the text.

4. Explain the Evidence

Students explain *why* the evidence matters:

- How it relates to their answer
- What it proves
- Why it is important

Topic/Video/Infographic

[RACE Poster](#)

Evidence-Based Practices

- Sentence Frames- help students improve writing quality and support English Learners
- Explicit Modeling (Think Alouds)- Teacher models the RACE strategy by thinking aloud while reading and writing
- Gradual Release of Responsibility (I Do, We Do, You Do)- Teacher think-aloud/model, Class does one together, students practice in pairs and/or independently
- Annotating Text for Evidence
- Use Anchor Charts/Visuals to support
- Turn and Talk before writing
- Practice across content areas

Instructional Elements

- ✓ Display a RACE anchor chart in the classroom
- ✓ Use consistent language when teaching RACE
- ✓ Provide sentence starters for each step
- ✓ Practice RACE frequently, not just on big assignments
- ✓ Celebrate strong student writing with exemplars



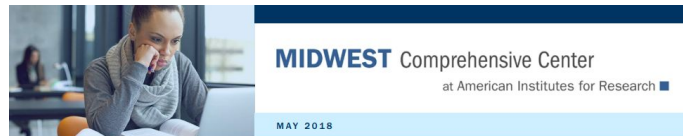
Title: Goal Setting

Resources

Overview

Goals help students become more self-directed and focused. Educators and authors Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey explain that goals help develop a growth mindset when they are (1) specific, (2) challenging, and (3) compare growth to the student's own baseline or past performance. Goals also increase student metacognition, help students redefine personal success, increase motivation and engagement, and encourage students to take more ownership for their learning. Want students to be more persistent, resilient, and harder working? Have them set meaningful goals that motivate and inspire them. Hoping for an increase in student self-efficacy this year? Have your class set individual personal goals that challenge them to achieve their own personal best, not tracking their progress against that of their peers.

Evidence-Based Practices



Student Goal Setting: An Evidence-Based Practice

Student Goal Setting

The act of goal setting is a desired competency area for students associated with the "learning-to-learn" skills students need to engage in deeper learning (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2013). The act of goal setting, therefore, is a practice that educators can use to help fuel students' learning-to-learn skills, such as a sense of agency, intrinsic motivation, and capacity to manage their own learning. As an educational practice, teachers interested in promoting learning-to-learn skills ask students to engage in goal setting within group advisories, during one-to-one advising sessions, and as an integral component of the students' personalized learning plans.

Table 1. Four Tiers of Evidence

Tier	Evidence Description
Strong Evidence	At least one experimental study that shows a statistically significant and positive effect without being overridden by other statistically negative evidence. Study must have a large, multisite sample with overlap in both setting and population.
Moderate Evidence	At least one quasi-experimental study that shows a statistically significant and positive effect without being overridden by other



Helping Students Set Goals in 5 Easy Steps



Pam Tupy
September 4, 2024

Topic/Video/Infographic



Instructional Elements



Professional Learning Community (PLC)

One Pager

In One Sentence

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are structured, ongoing collaborations where educators work together to improve teaching practices and increase student learning through shared goals, data analysis, and collective responsibility.

What Research Says

DuFour et al. (2024) emphasize high-fidelity implementation of collaborative teams focused on four critical questions to shift school culture from talk to action. Additionally, research by Hattie (2023) highlights that PLCs are effective only when they foster Collective Teacher Efficacy, focusing on evaluating the direct impact of teaching strategies on student learning. Across studies, successful PLCs consistently share key characteristics such as a shared purpose, a collaborative culture, a focus on learning rather than teaching, and a commitment to continuous improvement informed by evidence.

What's the Point?

The purpose of PLCs is to ensure high levels of learning for all students by fundamentally shifting how schools operate through continuous, data-informed teamwork that leads to improved outcomes for every student. Rather than maintaining isolated classroom autonomy, educators embrace collective responsibility for all students, define essential learning outcomes, and measure mastery. This work is guided by four critical questions: What do we want students to learn? How will we know if they have learned it? What will we do if they don't learn it? And what will we do if they already know it?

How is This Used by Teachers?

Teachers in PLCs:

- Collaboratively unpack standards and define essential learning targets.
- Develop common formative assessments.
- Analyze student work and data to identify trends and gaps.
- Share instructional strategies and interventions.
- Plan targeted supports and extensions.
- Reflect on effectiveness and adjust instruction collectively.

How is This Used by Students?

Students benefit when PLCs are functioning effectively because:

- Learning expectations are clear and consistent across classrooms.
- Assessments are aligned and purposeful.
- Struggling students receive timely, targeted interventions.
- Advanced students receive enrichment rather than repetition.
- Instruction improves because teachers continuously refine practice based on evidence.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Resources

Overview

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are a critical element for student success that bring together small groups of educators regularly to improve student outcomes. They provide a space for educators to collaborate rather than simply cooperate through task division. PLCs create a structure for using formal and informal data in meaningful ways that inform planning and practice. In a PLC, teachers work together to continually improve student growth and achievement by focusing on enhancing instructional knowledge and skills. (Discovery Education, 2026).

PLCs are drive by 4 Key questions

- What do we want students to learn? (Essential standards/skills)
- How will we know if they have learned it?
(Common formative assessments)
- What will we do if a student does not learn it?
(Intervention)
- What will we do if a student already knows it?
(Extension/Enrichment)

Topic/Video/Infographic



Evidence-Based Practices

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: BEST PRACTICES RESEARCH REPORT

July 2023

Instructional Elements

- Focus on Learning over Teaching
- Collaborative Inquiry
- Collective Teacher Efficacy
- Data-Driven Instruction
- Common Formative Assessments
- Targeted Interventions and Extensions
- Result-Oriented Focus
- Shared Norms and Goals

[Solution Tree](#)

[Creative Leadership Solutions](#) [Discovery Education](#)

Jigsaw Learning

One Pager

In One Sentence

Jigsaw is a cooperative learning structure in which each student becomes an “expert” on one part of the content and then teaches it to peers so the group builds understanding together.

What Research Says

Foundational field studies found that interdependent jigsaw-style learning improved students’ self-esteem, peer relationships, and liking for school, and later cooperative science studies found stronger academic outcomes than individualized approaches. More recent systematic reviews suggest jigsaw can support both academic and psychosocial outcomes, but the results are mixed and depend heavily on how well teachers structure interdependence, accountability, and collaboration.

What’s the Point?

The purpose of jigsaw is to make every student necessary to the learning of the group. Instead of a few students doing the thinking and talking, jigsaw creates shared responsibility, deeper processing, accountable student talk, and a stronger sense of belonging. It is especially useful when teachers want students to learn multiple perspectives, sections of a text, steps in a process, or parts of a concept and then synthesize them into a bigger understanding.

How is This Used by Teachers?

These implementation moves reflect the official jigsaw process and core cooperative learning elements such as positive interdependence, individual accountability, social skills, and group processing.

- Break a lesson, text, problem, or concept into 3–6 meaningful parts.
- Place students in home groups and assign each student one part to learn.
- Give students time in expert groups to read, discuss, clarify, and rehearse their teaching.
- Provide supports such as note-catchers, visuals, sentence stems, and clear discussion norms.
- Monitor groups for accuracy, equitable participation, and productive collaboration.
- Use an individual check for understanding, synthesis task, quiz, or exit ticket after peer teaching.

How is This Used by Students?

- Learn one part of the content deeply enough to explain it to others.
- Collaborate with an expert group to clarify ideas, ask questions, and prepare a clear explanation.
- Return to a home group and teach their section while listening and taking notes on others’ sections.
- Ask questions, connect ideas across sections, and synthesize the full lesson.
- Practice speaking, listening, summarizing, perspective-taking, and accountability.

Jigsaw Learning

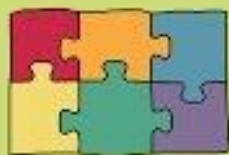
Resources

Overview

Jigsaw is a structured cooperative learning routine that moves students through two phases: expert groups and home groups. In the expert phase, students learn one part of a larger text, topic, problem, or process. In the home-group phase, each student teaches that part to peers so the whole group can assemble the “big picture.” Jigsaw works best when the content can be divided into meaningful chunks and when teachers explicitly teach collaboration expectations, provide accountability, and debrief both the learning and the teamwork.

Topic/Video/Infographic

THE
JIGSAW
METHOD



[Aronson's Jigsaw Infographic](#)

Evidence-Based Practices

- Structure positive interdependence so each student holds an essential piece of the learning.
- Build individual accountability through note-catchers, a quiz, exit ticket, or synthesis product.
- Teach and model collaboration routines, listening norms, and peer explanation before expecting students to work independently.
- Use heterogeneous groups and intentionally assign meaningful parts.
- Give students rehearsal time in expert groups before peer teaching.
- Debrief both content learning and group process.

Instructional Elements

- Chunking content
- Using structured practice sessions
- Providing resources and guidance
- Organizing students to interact
- Increasing response rates
- Reflecting on learning

High Frequency Words:

The words that occur most often in text. A **SIGHT WORD** is any word that can be retrieved from memory instantly because it has been orthographically mapped. High frequency words eventually become sight words.

What Research Says

For words to be instantly retrieved while reading a text, their **GRAPHEMES** (letters), **PHONEMES** (sounds), and meanings need to be linked to long-term memory. Memorizing words by whole units inhibits how the brain learns and stores them (Miles & Ehri, 2019; Yoncheva et al., 2015). Rather, most words' letters and sounds must be presented and analyzed (even those that are irregularly spelled).

What's the Point?

High frequency words are important because they are the bridges to becoming a fluent reader, which then affects comprehension. As words become stored in long-term memory, the reader has more capacity for applying meaning to the text as a whole. The goal of reading is comprehension, thus spending time learning high frequency words, strategically, improves comprehension.

How is This Used by Teachers?

Teachers need to explicitly teach both regular and irregularly spelled words by anchoring the letters to sounds; this process is called orthographic mapping.

- Say the word and use it in a sentence
- Segment and count the sounds
- Map the phonemes (sounds) to the graphemes (spellings)
- Point out the irregular parts
- Cover the word and have students rewrite from memory
- Uncover the word and check students' spelling
- Have students generate sentences that contain the word

How is This Used by Students?

Using explicit instructional routines, students move toward automatic word recognition. Cognitive focus is then placed on comprehension.

High Frequency Words

Resources

Overview

High frequency words, such as those on the Dolch lists, are often taught as a whole unit, relying on a student memorizing the appearance of the word. Orthographic mapping of high frequency words places an emphasis on using a word's spelling/sound correlation in order to make the word part of a student's long-term memory. When high frequency words become sight words, automaticity occurs and the student can focus their cognitive load making meaning.

Orthographic mapping for high frequency words can be done with regularly spelled words (e.g. d-o-g), and irregularly spelled words (e.g. t-h-e). When a student maps words, they use both phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle to decode. As students gain more knowledge about the phonemes of the English language, mapping words with advanced spelling patterns becomes easier. For some irregular sounds in a word, using repetition and explicit instruction will also benefit students.

Evidence-Based Practices

[Prioritize high frequency words](#) for instruction based on urgency, decodability, or alignment to phonics.

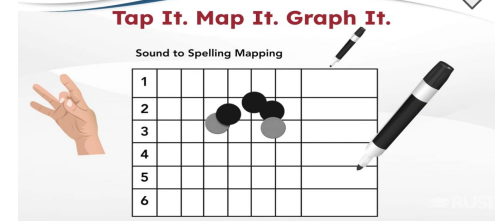
Table 1: 10 Sight Words for Pre-Readers to Learn

Word	Dolch Frequency Rank	Fry Frequency Rank
the	1	1
a	5	4
i	6	20
to	2	5
and	3	3
was	11	12
for	16	13
one	7	6
is	22	7
of	9	2

Dolch words are from: Dolch, E. W. (1936). A basic sight vocabulary. *The Elementary School Journal*, 36(6), 456-460.

Several Resources and videos exist for educators!

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8c07nTDhV0A>



Topic/Video/Infographic



REALLY GREAT READING

The website Really Great Reading is your friend when learning about orthographic mapping of high frequency words! **[Don't miss this site!](#)** Videos, resources, research and more.

Instructional Elements

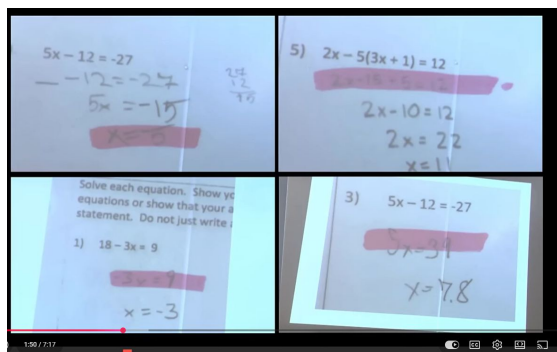
- ❖ Identify words to teach.
- ❖ Model stretching words, listening for each sound.
- ❖ Use visuals and auditory cues to map words.
- ❖ Point out high frequency words in multiple texts throughout the day.
- ❖ Practice reading high frequency words in authentic texts.

My Favorite Mistake or My Favorite No Protocol

Create a mistake friendly classroom while uncovering misconceptions in real time! Normalize making mistakes in the classroom as part of a growth mindset. “Every time a student makes a mistake...they grow a synapse.” -Carol Dweck author of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*

Goal: Regularly engage in mistake analysis to support critical thinking skills, boost engagement through discussion, and encourage productive struggle.

Video example:



Quick Tips:

- Be intentional by choosing to highlight mistakes that *advance learning*
- Keep tone positive and curious, not corrective
- Use the strategy regularly!
- Support student engagement with visible sentence stems:

“Something I did differently was...”

“Another strategy for solving this problem is...”

“I think the mistake happens when they ____ because...”

How to do it:

1. Collect data

As you circulate or review student work look for:

- A common misconception
- An error that can lead to a meaningful discussion
- A productive mistake the class can learn from

2. Choose a “Favorite Mistake” to highlight

- Copy onto the board or project using a doc camera
- Keep it neutral—no names or judgmental language
“Here’s a response I want us to talk through.”
“__ out of __ groups are making this same mistake. Let’s take a look at it together.”

1. Guide students to do the thinking

Utilize turn-and-talks and small group discussions to correct the mistake together

- “What did this student do well?”
- “Where did their thinking start to go off track?”
- “Where does the mistake occur?”
- “What did you do differently?”
- “How did you know to ____?”
- “Is there another way to solve this?”

2. Reinforce the learning

- Summarize the key takeaways:
“What should we remember for problems like this moving forward?”
- Have students revise any mistakes to their own work



Restorative Practices

One Pager

In One Sentence

Restorative practices build relationships, strengthen community, and repair harm through respectful dialogue, accountability, and empathy rather than punishment.

What Research Says

Research highlights that restorative approaches improve school climate, reduce suspensions, and increase students' sense of belonging and responsibility. Studies by the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) and Gregory et al. (2016) show that when students are engaged in reflection and relationship-building, behavioral incidents decrease and academic engagement rises.

What's the Point?

The purpose of restorative practices is to shift discipline from being punitive to being relational. The focus moves from “Who broke the rule?” to “Who was affected, and how can we make it right?” This promotes accountability, empathy, and stronger student–teacher trust.

How is This Used by Teachers?

Teachers use restorative conversations, class circles, and check-ins to build trust and community before conflicts arise. When issues occur, they guide students through reflection and problem-solving rather than immediate punishment. Teachers model calm communication, active listening, and mutual respect to help students internalize these behaviors.

How is This Used by Students?

Students learn to reflect on their actions, express their feelings, listen to others, and take responsibility for repairing harm. Over time, they become more self-aware, empathetic, and able to resolve conflicts independently, contributing to a safer and more respectful classroom culture.

Restorative Practices

Resources

TLAC Connection:

- **Technique 43 – Warm/Strict:**

Balancing warmth and high expectations to maintain strong relationships and accountability.

- **Technique 44 – Positive Framing:**

Correcting behavior by focusing on solutions and growth rather than blame.

- **Technique 46 – Precise Praise:**

Reinforcing positive choices in a way that builds students' self-worth and responsibility.

Clear Expectations and Routines

One Pager

In One Sentence

Clear expectations and consistent routines help create a structured, predictable environment where students know what to do, how to do it, and what is expected of them every day.

What Research Says

Research shows that students thrive in classrooms with well-established routines and clearly communicated expectations. According to Marzano (2003) and Emmer & Evertson (2013), consistent procedures reduce off-task behavior, increase instructional time, and promote student independence by minimizing confusion and anxiety.

What's the Point?

The goal is to build a classroom culture where students feel safe, focused, and responsible. When expectations are clear and routines are practiced regularly, students can spend more time learning and less time guessing what they should be doing.

How is This Used by Teachers?

Teachers explicitly teach, model, and reinforce routines for all parts of the day, from entering the classroom to transitioning between activities. They use visual reminders, verbal cues, and positive reinforcement to help students internalize these routines and maintain consistency.

How is This Used by Students?

Students follow established routines with increasing independence. They understand what is expected, take responsibility for their actions, transition smoothly between tasks, and contribute to a calm, productive learning environment.

Clear Expectations and Routines

Resources

TLAC Connection:

- **Technique 33 – Establishing Routines**
Teachers explicitly teach, model, and practice routines until they become automatic. Predictable procedures make transitions smooth, reduce downtime, and maximize instructional time.
- **Technique 36 – 100 Percent**
Teachers expect and insist on full compliance from every student, every time. Directions are clear and firm, and teachers follow through until everyone is participating, ensuring consistency and accountability.
- **Technique 37 – What to Do**
Instead of telling students what not to do, teachers give specific, actionable directions that describe the exact behavior expected. This clarity eliminates confusion and sets students up for success.
- **Technique 11 – The J-Factor**
Teachers intentionally bring joy and enthusiasm into learning through humor, routines, or friendly competition. Making students want to participate while maintaining structure and respect.



2023 CA Math Framework

Overview

Why a new framework?

California and the United States need a new approach to teaching math because many students struggle, and achievement gaps remain. US students score below many other countries in math, and California students score below the national average, especially students from low-income families and historically underserved groups. The 2023 Mathematics Framework gives teachers updated, research-based strategies to help students think deeply, stay engaged, and better understand math. Its goal is to help all students succeed, prepare for STEM careers, and use math confidently in everyday life.

What about the CCSS?

The CA Common Core State Standards for Mathematics remain, the new framework is a new way to organize the standards.

Focus - Your grade level content

Coherence - links across the grade levels

Key Takeaways

- Creating an **equitable learning environment**
- **Revisiting rigor** with intensity
- Focusing on **access and equity**
- Teaching the **Big Ideas**
- **Professional learning** and continuous improvement

What are the Big Ideas?

The framework organizes mathematics around connected **Big Ideas** that help students see relationships across topics and grade levels, while emphasizing reasoning, problem solving, equity, real-world application, and deep conceptual understanding.

Some examples:

3rd Grade:

6th Grade: viability in data, fraction relationships, relationships between variables

Want to learn more? Explore the full [2023 CA Math Framework](#) here.

Building Thinking Classrooms

One Pager

In One Sentence

Building Thinking Classrooms (BTC) is a research-based approach to teaching that restructures classroom practices so students spend more time thinking, collaborating, and problem-solving, and less time mimicking procedures.

What Research Says

Research by Dr. Peter Liljedahl found that many traditional classroom routines unintentionally reduce student thinking. BTC identifies 14 teaching practices that increase engagement, persistence, participation, and mathematical thinking. Studies show that when students work in visibly random groups on vertical non-permanent surfaces using rich thinking tasks, they are more likely to take risks, discuss ideas, stay engaged, and develop deeper understanding.

What's the Point?

The goal of BTC is to create classrooms where thinking becomes the norm. Instead of focusing primarily on getting correct answers, BTC emphasizes reasoning, collaboration, productive struggle, and sense-making. The approach helps students build confidence, agency, and independence while developing stronger conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills.

How does this look in the classroom

In a BTC classroom, students work in visibly random groups at vertical non-permanent surfaces such as whiteboards, windows, or chart paper. Rather than beginning with direct instruction, teachers verbally launch rich thinking tasks that encourage exploration, discussion, and multiple solution paths.

Teachers circulate and respond with “keep thinking” questions instead of immediately giving answers. Students collaborate, test ideas, revise their thinking, and learn from one another publicly. Mistakes are treated as part of learning, and students are encouraged to take intellectual risks.

As lessons progress, teachers facilitate consolidation conversations that help students connect strategies, compare approaches, and build understanding together. Assessment focuses not only on correct answers, but also on reasoning, communication, persistence, and collaboration.

Building Thinking Classrooms

Resources

Overview

Building Thinking Classrooms (BTC) is a research-informed framework developed by Dr. Peter Liljedahl that identifies classroom practices that increase student thinking, engagement, and participation. BTC focuses on creating learning environments where students actively solve problems, collaborate, and make sense of ideas together.

Toolkit #1

- Thinking Tasks
- Visible Random Grouping
- Vertical Non-Permanent Spaces (VNPS)

Toolkit #2

- Defront the Classroom
- Ask Keep Thinking Questions
- Verbally Launch the Tasks
- Use Check Your Understanding Qs
- Mobilize Knowledge in the Classroom

Toolkit #3

- Give Hints + Extensions to Keep Students in Flow
- Consolidate the Learning
- Use Meaningful Notes

Toolkit #4

- Evaluate What You Value
- Give Navigation Tools
- Grade Based on Data (not Points)

Not Just for Mathematics!

Although BTC began in mathematics education, its core practices can be adapted across subjects and grade levels. Here are some examples:

- Science students modeling and testing explanations collaboratively
- English students analyzing texts through group reasoning and evidence gathering
- Social studies students debating historical interpretations using visible thinking routines
- World language students solving communication challenges in groups
- Arts and CTE students iterating, critiquing, and refining work publicly

Want to learn more?

Engage with this [BTC Chatbot!](#)

