



A Short Guide to Placing Text at the Center of Learning

Essential Question:

You get back the results of an interim reading assessment.¹ Some or most of your kids have done poorly. What do you do now to kickstart students' reading abilities?

Boost Students' Reading Abilities in Weeks or Months

DO THIS:	STOP THIS:
<p>DO tackle fluency <i>daily</i> (15 to 20 minutes) with grade-level texts across your class, school, and system (grades 2-12).</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Research shows dysfluency causes as much as 40% of the variance in students who pass tests versus those who fail. This is true for <i>every</i> testing grade!</p> <p><i>Resources:</i> Achieve the Core grade-band-specific Fluency Resources, including guidance, passages, and audio recordings. Find fun ways to incorporate short, focused fluency activities throughout the day.</p>	<p>STOP ignoring fluency or addressing only at students' measured level. Students who were previously fluent can become dysfluent when text complexity increases.</p>
<p>DO have students select independent reading books based on interest and/or the topic under study. Find and assign texts at a variety of complexity levels connected to what students are reading and learning about in ELA or other classes.</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Research shows students build vocabulary as much as 4x faster when they read a volume of texts on conceptually related topics than when reading a selection of unrelated texts.</p> <p><i>Resources:</i> Achieve the Core Book Basket Project and blog post.</p>	<p>STOP limiting students reading choices based on their current measured "levels."²</p>
<p>DO select (if available) one or more passage(s) from the interim assessment, analyze your students' error patterns, and then go over the passage and items with your students to help students understand where they went wrong and to help you identify the true sources of their confusion.³</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Failure to understand a question or part of a passage is generally due to an underlying reading problem—NOT a skill or strategy mastery problem.</p>	<p>STOP using student assessment results to identify and bear down on specific standards or skills for isolated practice. Practice with specific skills in one text does NOT transfer or generalize to other texts!⁴</p>
<p>DO pick one complex and compelling sentence daily from class readings to deconstruct and reconstruct with your students.</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Regular discussion and word play teaches students how meaning is encoded in words and structures of academic language.</p> <p><i>Resource:</i> Juicy Sentence Protocol</p>	<p>STOP teaching grammar and syntax only through disconnected tasks (such as correcting faulty sentences). The best way for students to learn academic language is in the context of what they are reading and studying.</p>

1. This refers to a reading comprehension assessment, not a foundational skills assessment.

2. Fountas and Pinnell offer guidance here in their blog post, "A Level is a Teacher's Tool, NOT a Child's Label."

3. See "Placing Text at the Center of the Standards-Aligned ELA Classroom" section on *What Approaches to Interim Assessment Could Be Explored?* located on www.achievethecore.org

4. See Daniel Willingham's "[The usefulness of Brief Instruction in Reading Comprehension Strategies](#)"

Essential Question:

Results of an interim reading assessment consistently show some or most of your kids are doing poorly. Knowing that some changes take longer to cultivate, what can you do to solve the problem for good (in addition to the activities above)?

Develop Stronger Readers – Actions to Take Over a School Year and Beyond	
<i>DO THIS:</i>	<i>STOP THIS:</i>
<p>DO spend 45-60 minutes daily⁵ cementing foundational skills for all students; follow a research-based, systematic phonics program (grades K-2).</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Explicit instruction of foundational skills is critical in early elementary school. Numerous studies point to the benefits of a structured program for reading success.</p> <p><i>Resources:</i> Achieve the Core Foundational Skills Resources including the Foundational Skills Guidance Document</p>	<p>STOP teaching phonics as it arises in the texts students are encountering, without a planned scope and sequence.</p>
<p>DO focus whole class instruction on the same rich, grade-level complex text during a discussion-rich close reading lesson multiple times a week. Such lessons should be organized around the text with meaty discussions and tasks/questions that unpack the richness of the text, as teachers adjust scaffolds based on students' needs (grades K-12).</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> The ability to comprehend complex text is the factor that differentiates college-ready readers.</p> <p><i>Resource:</i> Supporting All Learners With Complex Text; Achieve the Core Text-Dependent Question Resources; Achieve the Core ELA Mini-Assessments</p>	<p>STOP having students read leveled texts and practice target strategies, skills, or standards endlessly during their primary time with the teacher. Move leveled text or independent reading to individual student work time.</p>
<p>DO connect writing to what students are reading to deepen comprehension and to ensure all students have equal access to the topic on which they're writing (grades K-12).</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Synthesis of research in cognitive science demonstrates that students understand and remember that which students think about and write about.</p> <p><i>Resource:</i> See the bank of annotated student writing samples that illustrate the integration of content understanding and writing arguments and expository essays: In Common.</p>	<p>STOP disconnecting writing from texts.</p>
<p>DO make sure students are doing the majority of the reading, writing, and talking in the classroom (grades K-12).</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Research has long supported the idea that students benefit from "doing."</p> <p><i>Resource:</i> Limiting "Teacher Talk," Increasing Student Work</p>	<p>STOP taking up all ELA time with structured, teacher-centered activities.</p>
<p>DO adopt content-rich aligned instructional materials (grades K-12).</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Reading content-rich texts and therefore building knowledge about topics has a greater impact on reading comprehension than strategies- or skills-based information.</p> <p><i>Resources:</i> Achieve the Core ELA Materials Alignment Quick Check; Edreports</p>	<p>STOP using a patchwork of materials or a program that leaves students in leveled reading groups with differentiated texts.</p>

5. 20 minutes of fluency strength training throughout elementary grades. For more details, see the [Foundational Skills Guidance Documents](#).