

# Enhancing RTI

## How to Ensure Success with Effective Classroom Instruction and Intervention

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# 1

## Choose Your Adventure:

### How RTI<sup>2</sup> Affects the Educational Environment

Remember the series of “choose your own adventure” books that were popular in the 1980s? They offered decision points at key moments in the story, and the choice you made determined the outcome of the tale (and often the fate of the characters). With that in mind, let’s play the school version of *Choose Your Adventure*.

Adam is in the 5th grade in a public school somewhere in the United States. Here are some things to know about Adam: He is an active 10-year-old boy who plays baseball in the local Little League. He has an older sister who generally regards him as a bother (she’s 13, after all) but loves him, nonetheless. Before his mother and father adopted him at the age of 7, he lived in foster care for a time with a member of his father’s family. Adam’s mom and dad first got to know him this way and soon decided that Adam needed to be a permanent part of their family.

Adam’s family is moving to another state because his mother accepted a job offer with better pay and benefits. They plan to enroll Adam in school and prepare him by touring the school with him, introducing him to teachers, and filling out all the forms with emergency contact information, known allergies, and the like. They were delighted to learn that the school system in the new state operates on a year-round schedule, with evenly distributed breaks of three or four weeks each quarter. His parents will be adding their names to the list of school volunteers, and Adam’s dad is willing to be a guest speaker at the school’s career day and discuss his work in the health care field.

Here's the key moment in the story where your choice factors in and may help determine the outcome:

- If you decide to send Adam to a traditional school, your adventure begins here on page 4.
- If you decide to send Adam to a school that offers a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach, turn to page 5.
- If you decide to send Adam to a school that uses a Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI<sup>2</sup>) approach, turn to page 7.

## The Traditional School: "What's Wrong with Adam?"

After meeting the important people in the school (the principal, the custodian, and the lunch staff), Adam settles into his 5th grade class. His teacher, Ms. Riley, is experienced with this age group and has been a staff member at the school for 15 years. Adam likes his new class and soon establishes social relationships with his peers. He is quickly seen as an asset in any recess game and is well liked by other children, who say he is "nice."

The reading block is his least favorite time of day. He stumbles over words when Ms. Riley asks him to read aloud to the class, and his handwritten work is difficult to read. She notices that during some lessons, Adam gets boisterous and calls out to other students. He is scolded frequently for his outbursts and is already becoming a regular visitor to the principal's office—not the relationship he imagined when he first met her. Adam is soon placed in a remedial reading group named the Blasters, and he spends most of the reading block in the company of a paraprofessional who works with this group in another room to minimize distractions. They complete lots of workbook pages and worksheets, but they rarely spend much time with longer books.

Adam's incomplete assignments, missed homework, and mediocre written work soon take a toll. Two marking periods later, Adam is performing well below other students in the class, and Ms. Riley calls in Adam's parents for a conference. She informs them that Adam is in danger of being retained because he hasn't received passing marks in most subjects. Following the district policy, Ms. Riley draws up a learning contract that states that, because retention is a possibility, Adam is required to attend intersession, a mandatory two-week remediation period for struggling students. Adam and his family are discouraged because they won't be able to travel and visit family during this time, but they agree that anything that might help Adam be successful is worth the sacrifice.

Adam's social relationships also begin to fray. Because classmates increasingly view him as a problem (they have, after all, witnessed their teacher dealing with him this way), they begin to avoid him. Even his physical skills are not enough to overcome difficult relationships with peers. As Adam becomes marginalized, his behavior grows more problematic, and despite the attention of the paraprofessional, Adam's reading and writing do not seem to improve. The handwriting worksheets he completes have little effect, and he daydreams more often, missing more instruction. Countless meetings later, Ms. Riley brings Adam's name to the attention of the school's Student Study Team. "I've tried everything," she tells them, and they nod in sympathetic agreement. They've seen Adam on the playground, in the chair outside the principal's office, and taking a circuitous route to the bathroom. "What's wrong with this kid?" she asks.

The team completes the paperwork for special education testing, and Adam's parents sign it. They are concerned that he is not doing well and that their once outgoing boy is withdrawing into himself. Going to school has become a daily battle, and Adam's parents are at a loss as to how to deal with him. In the meantime, Adam must now attend mandatory six-week summer school. If he is unable to do so, he will repeat 5th grade with a new set of classmates.

Adam barely passes summer school and advances to the 6th grade. By this point, his special education testing results are in. Unfortunately, Adam doesn't meet the criteria for a handicapping condition. "I guess he's just a 'flatliner,'" remarks Ms. Riley. "I hope the 6th grade teachers know what to do with him. I tried everything." The 6th grade team members, resentful that he didn't qualify for special education, are bracing themselves. "We've all seen him around school," remarks Ms. Colón. "Wish us luck."

### The RTI School: "How Can We Help Adam?"

After meeting the important people in the school (the principal, the custodian, and the lunch staff), Adam settles into his 5th grade class. His teacher, Ms. Riley, is experienced with this age group and has been a staff member at the school for 15 years. Adam likes his new class and soon establishes social relationships with his peers. He is quickly seen as an asset in any recess game and is well liked by other children, who say he is "nice."

The reading block is his least favorite part of the day. His teacher used some simple screening instruments on his first day, including the San Diego Quick (LaPray & Ross, 1969), a word list that targets decoding skills,

especially true as it relates to monitoring understanding. Without solid examples of how a teacher notices when he or she has lost meaning, and what the teacher does to regain it, students will often simply skip what they don't understand. This practice places students at risk for academic failure and in need of supplemental or intensive intervention.

**Figure 3.5**  
**Common Aspects of Math Modeling**

Cognitive Strategy	Definition	Example
Background knowledge	Activating knowledge that is already stored in the mind for use with the current problem	"When I see a triangle, I remember that the angles add up to 180°."
Relevant versus irrelevant information	Noticing that there is often more information than is required to solve a problem	"I've read this problem twice, and I know that there is information included that I don't need."
Selecting a function	Reviewing the range of mathematics functions and selecting an appropriate one based on the information provided	"This problem says 'increased by' so I know that I'll have to add."
Setting up the problem	Moving from the words in a problem to an equation that can be solved	"The first thing that I will do is ... because ..."
Estimating answers	Making an educated guess about the answer, based on the information provided	"I predict that the product will be about 150 because I see that the number is multiplied 10 times."
Determining reasonableness of an answer	Assessing an answer to determine if it is possible, based on the information contained in the problem	"The problem has two numbers in the hundreds, so I know that the answer has to be over 200, but it can't be over 1,000."

## Guided Instruction

Establishing purpose and modeling learning behavior is a great start for teachers whose students are beginning to assume responsibility for their learning, but learners also require guided instruction to be successful. We define guided instruction as the strategic use of cues, prompts, and questions designed to facilitate student thinking. Guided instruction should be based on assessment information. While guided instruction can be done