

Guidelines for Universal Screening-- Teaching the Test or Teaching Skills?

As teachers, we naturally want to do what we can to help our students succeed. However, there is a difference between teaching the test and instructing the skills. When we teach the test to our students, we are not helping them learn; instead we are artificially inflating their scores. Instructing the skills on the other hand will not only help students to improve their scores but also help them learn the necessary skills to succeed and be life-long learners. Keep in mind--we help children to succeed by teaching skills (e.g. reading, writing, mathematics) not by helping them “beat the test.”

Teaching the Test	Instruction of Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing “insider trading” info on how students can obtain a higher score (e.g. telling the students to skip over the words/problems they don’t know how to do or to only use words that are easy to spell.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to give their best effort • Make every minute of your instruction count. Eliminating just a few minutes of “down time” each day will have a big impact by the end of the year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling students to write, read, or solve problems as fast as they can 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to do their best writing/reading/math
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling students to copy the prompt over and over if they do not know what to write 	<p>Teach students to always start their answer with part of the question and encourage them to write anything they <i>or someone else</i> might know about the topic</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining the vocabulary to the student and providing ideas for what to write 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate difficult or unfamiliar vocabulary into your instruction everyday. Ensure that your students understand the vocabulary used in the progress monitoring probes <i>weeks in advance</i>.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructing the student with the steps needed to solve a problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students mnemonics for remembering steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending universal screening/progress monitoring materials home to practice (e.g. nonsense word lists, prompts from probes, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide parents with information about the skills their child is lacking (“Sara is struggling with sounding out words with the short e sound. Please help her practice reading this book using the strategies on this handout” not “Help Sara read at least 15 of the words on this page in 1 minute”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructing students to only write short simple sentences or use words they know are spelled correctly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students practice sentence combining activities to create a more complex sentence

These are only a few of the major concerns with fidelity in universal screening and progress monitoring. In addition, make sure that those administering and scoring the measures use the standardized instructions, use a digital timer that counts down to ensure correct timing, use standardized scoring procedures (**do not let students score their own probes**), and remember to progress monitor Tier 2 students at least once per month and Tier 3 students at least every two weeks.