TEACH BIG MINI BOOK

Data Driven Instruction and the Next Best Step

A condensed guide to deciding what to teach next

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Welcome to Your MINI Book

Data driven instruction, made classroom ready

This MINI book turns a full length guide into the essentials you can use this week. A score helps locate a question. It rarely answers the teaching question by itself. Two students can miss the same item for different reasons, and two students can answer correctly while showing very different understanding.

The central idea

The most useful outcome of a data conversation is a specific change in what a student experiences next: a clearer explanation, a brief prerequisite lesson, a better example, or a well matched next challenge.

How to use this book

- Start with the question your team needs to answer. Classroom teachers can begin with the decision routine on pages 11 and 12. Leaders can begin with time on page 13.
- Treat each spread as one idea: a short explanation, a table or routine, and a next action.
- Use the one page spreads on pages 3 and 4 in a team meeting. Use the Begin Tomorrow checklist on page 22 on Monday morning.

Inside this MINI book

- Pages 5 to 10: define the learning, collect evidence, and read student responses.
- Pages 13 to 19: time, spacing, transfer, RLA examples, feedback, and groups.
- Pages 20 and 21: people and systems that serve decisions. Page 23: key references.
- Keep this book where you plan. One spread at a time beats reading it straight through.

Six Conclusions to Carry

At a glance: the ideas behind every routine in this book

1. **A standard is a destination, not a complete diagnosis.** Needs work on evidence is too broad to plan tomorrow. Find which part of evidence use is breaking down.
2. **Correctness is only one dimension of learning.** Independence, reasoning, retention, transfer, and efficiency can change the next step even when the score stays the same.
3. **Successful learning still needs a future appointment.** Once students show a skill, reduce extra practice on it and plan a later retrieval or application.
4. **Time follows the instructional problem.** A misconception, a transcription barrier, missing background knowledge, and a single slip do not warrant the same dose.
5. **A useful assessment changes a decision.** Before adding a quiz or field, name the decision its result could change. Evidence can come from normal instruction.
6. **Teacher and student both need a next action.** Raise your score gives neither person a usable move. Explain how this detail supports your claim does.

Try it this week

Pick one conclusion. Ask where current student work already shows it and where the next lesson could show it more clearly.

Four Continuing Responsibilities

At a glance: plan for all four, every week

Plan for four responsibilities at once: develop new learning, repair consequential gaps, maintain previous learning, and extend understanding into new situations. A week that only repairs gaps starves new learning. A week that only moves forward lets fragile skills fade.



Develop: teach what is new

Grade level content with clarity and care. Explicit teaching, rich texts, meaningful writing.



Repair: fix what blocks

Short focused lessons on gaps that block what comes next. One teachable barrier at a time.



Maintain: keep what is secure

Brief retrieval and varied application so secure skills stay available over time.



Extend: stretch what is strong

Secure students compare evidence, explain limits, and use ideas in new situations.

Menu of lenses

Use this book as a menu of lenses, not a list of fields to record for every student. Begin with a small sustainable record. Add information only when it resolves a real uncertainty.

A quick weekly check

- Which responsibility got the least attention last week. What one change restores the balance this week.

Define the Learning First

Data become interpretable when the target is clear

State what students should know or do, the content involved, the conditions, and the quality that would count as success. Identify evidence may mean recognizing a sentence from options, finding it in a passage, explaining its relevance, or weaving details into an argument. Those are different skills and they need different teaching.

Seven dimensions of a full profile

Dimension	Question to ask
Accuracy	Is the answer or product appropriate
Reasoning	Does the student understand why
Independence	What help was necessary
Retention	Can the student do it later
Transfer	Can the student use it in a changed situation
Efficiency	Is effort or time creating a bottleneck
Self monitoring	Can the student notice and repair a problem

- Treat these as a profile, never a single mastery index. A fluent answer can be wrong and a slow answer can show strong thinking.
- Practical mastery language: demonstrated independently on these tasks, retained after this delay, with transfer to this context.

Evidence Worth Collecting

Products plus the processes that produced them

Collect both products and the processes that produced them, using selective observation rather than trying to document every thought. A completed assignment shows only that something was completed. It does not show who did the thinking, how much support was given, or whether the student could do it again.

Form of evidence	What it can reveal
Item responses	Accuracy and possible confusions
Short and extended responses	Claim, evidence, explanation, organization
Oral reading sample	Decoding, fluency, word level barriers
Oral explanation	Strategy choice and interpretation
Drafts and revisions	What the student can improve and why
Delayed retrieval	Whether prior learning remains available

What not to collapse

Keep reading comprehension separate from handwriting difficulty when that changes instruction. Keep a well developed idea separate from weak spelling. Keep oral reasoning separate from independent writing. An annotation is not proof of comprehension until the student can justify it.

Opportunity First, Then the Tool

Check conditions before labeling the learner

Ask what students had a chance to learn and demonstrate before treating a pattern as a student deficit. Record observable conditions: needed the directions read twice is more defensible than does not care. The intervention met twice of five planned sessions is more actionable than not responding.

- Team question: what in our instruction, materials, schedule, environment, or assessment could we change before attributing this pattern to the learner.
- Avoid collecting sensitive personal information a system can store but teaching cannot use. Keep educationally relevant observations and the support needed.

Match the assessment to its purpose

Purpose	Question it answers
In lesson checking	Should we proceed or adjust now
Diagnostic inquiry	Why might this difficulty be occurring
Progress monitoring	Is the support producing adequate growth
Delayed assessment	What remains available after time
Transfer assessment	Where else can the learning be used

Collection rule: if two possible results would lead to exactly the same action, reconsider whether the assessment is needed. Sometimes the right move is to teach and observe.

Check Evidence Quality

Five questions that prevent expensive mistakes

1. **Is the target actually represented.** A label on an item is a claim to examine, not proof of alignment. Check the skill, text demands, and thinking required.
2. **Is there enough evidence.** One correct response is 100 percent of one opportunity. Two of three and twenty of thirty give the same percent with very different information.
3. **Are the tasks comparable.** A rise from 60 to 80 may reflect learning, easier items, added support, or a familiar passage.
4. **Were scoring and directions sound.** Review stems, distractors, rubric wording, and rater agreement. An apparent class pattern can come from one ambiguous item.
5. **What is missing.** Separate not attempted, not reached, absent, and invalid. Missing evidence should never automatically become a zero.

Confidence	Meaning	Action
Tentative	One task or conflicting notes	Investigate, try a reversible move
Developing	Pattern across several tasks	Focused plan, then recheck
Stronger	Consistent and independent	Fade support, maintain, extend

What an Incorrect Answer Means

A missed item is an event plus a hypothesis to test

The missed answer identifies an event. The next lesson needs a plausible explanation of that event. Treat each possibility below as a hypothesis to test, never an automatic diagnosis. Careless is an especially weak stopping point.

Possible explanation	Try this	Then teach
Concept not understood	Ask for an example and a nonexample	Explicit contrasting cases
Missing prerequisite	Isolate one essential component	Brief prerequisite, reconnect
Wrong strategy chosen	Ask why this approach was chosen	Compare when each applies
Language obscured task	Clarify one key word only	Vocabulary or sentence support
Not retrieved	Offer a neutral cue, retry later	Spaced retrieval with feedback
Single slip	Ask for a fresh attempt	A checking routine, not a lesson

Use a small diagnostic contrast: change one condition. Compare selecting evidence with explaining evidence, or an oral explanation with a written one. Never give away the target during the investigation.

What a Correct Answer Means

Correct work can hide fragile learning

Correct answers deserve analysis because they can reveal strengths worth extending and fragile learning likely to disappear. Ask students to mark sure, partly sure, or unsure before feedback on selected items, paired with an explanation.

Pattern	What remains uncertain	Next step
Convincing explanation	Will it last and transfer	Delayed varied application
Uncertain reasoning	Understanding or guessing	Fresh example plus rationale
Correct after a cue	Independence	Fade the cue, check again
Only on practiced item	Generalization	New passage or format
Effortful but correct	A consuming component	Find bottleneck, build fluency
Correct every time	Right challenge	Compact practice, extend

A practical response to success

Say: show me how you knew. Now use that idea in a different situation. The first request checks the basis of success. The second creates a meaningful next challenge.

Choose the Next Best Step

An eight move routine for any data moment: moves 1 to 4

The next best step is the smallest consequential instructional change likely to improve the next independent performance. Smallest refers to a manageable focus, never a lowered expectation.

1

Name the destination

State the standard, the knowledge and reasoning it needs, and the performance conditions. Include what success looks like under those conditions.

2

Describe the evidence

Record the student response or work itself, never an adjective about the student. Quote the work when you can.

3

Check the conditions

Review opportunity to learn, access, the support given, and the quality of the task. Note anything the student did not get a chance to learn.

4

Generate competing explanations

Name two plausible hypotheses so one favorite does not decide too early. Write both down before you choose.

Choose the Next Best Step

An eight move routine for any data moment: moves 5 to 8

5

Resolve what matters

Choose the shortest diagnostic task that could change the teaching choice. One question, one comparison, or one retry is enough.

6

Choose an instructional move

Select the example, explanation, practice, scaffold, or challenge the student needs. Match the move to the explanation you confirmed.

7

Set the dose and next check

Decide when teaching happens and what will count as improvement. Name the date you will look at new evidence.

8

Return to the decision

From new evidence: continue, adapt, fade support, maintain, or extend. Keep what works and change what does not.

Prioritize by consequence

Give greater attention to a difficulty that blocks several upcoming tasks, concerns a foundational component, or keeps recurring. Never rank standards by lowest percent alone: a rarely sampled standard can look low because of one difficult item.

Allocate Time by Need

Correctly answered content shifts toward maintenance

Four meanings of time

Meaning	Question
Duration	How long is one session
Frequency	How often do sessions occur
Total dose	How many sessions and practice chances
Spacing	What gaps sit between encounters

For a narrow misconception, a teacher might begin with an 8 to 12 minute small group lesson and recheck on a fresh task. That is an illustrative planning range, never a research dosage. There is no universal split such as a fixed percent of repair time that fits every group.

One possible 60 minute RLA block

Minutes	Purpose
5	Maintain: retrieve two or three prior ideas, check and correct
15	Develop: grade level content with explicit teaching
15	Respond: focused group while others apply or extend
20	Integrate: read, discuss, or write in a meaningful task
5	Review: one brief check plus one feedback action

- Three uses of a 100 minute weekly response budget: targeted teaching, maintenance, and application with extension (for example 35, 25, and 40 when readiness is mixed). Move minutes when the evidence changes.
- Review question: what learning would we sacrifice by spending another day on this target, and is that tradeoff justified.

Space It, Retrieve It, Keep It

Spacing and retrieval protect learning over time

Success during practice and lasting learning are different things. A student can complete a supported task today and still lose the skill by next month. Add two questions to any success record: when was the skill last used successfully, and what happened after a delay.

Encounter	Example using evidence	Decision
Day 0	Teach relevance, compare two details	Was the distinction understood
Day 1	Explain why one detail supports a claim	Can the routine be retrieved
Day 3	Fresh short paragraph, less support	Is independence increasing
Day 7	Select and explain in a new topic	Has it lasted and generalized
Day 14	Apply within a longer response	Can it be coordinated
Day 28	Use it in science or social studies	Is it available broadly

- After success, lengthen the gap or raise the demand. After partial success, correct and retry soon. Never space unsupported failure: teach first, then space.
- Track successful encounters, never exposures. Hearing an explanation six times differs from six occasions of recalling, applying, receiving feedback, and retrying.

Practice That Transfers

Change the design as learning develops

New learners need models, clear examples, and close guidance. As understanding firms up, reduce prompts and ask students to decide, compare, and apply. Change one major demand at first: a new topic, longer passage, unfamiliar genre, greater independence, or extended writing, never all five at once.

Design	Purpose
Model plus guided attempt	Build a usable understanding
Focused practice	Stabilize one specific component
Retrieval after a delay	Strengthen availability
Varied application	Broaden use to a new genre
Authentic performance	Coordinate learning for a purpose

Diagnose reading with connected evidence

- A missed inference is never automatically an inference deficit. The student must read the words, know vocabulary, build a representation, bring knowledge, and navigate the task.
- Practical sequence: inspect the actual response, ask for a short account of the paragraph, listen to a carefully chosen oral sample, then connect a detail to a claim.
- Check whether difficulty clusters around one topic or genre rather than every text. Build knowledge with coherent science and social studies reading.

RLA Example: Using Evidence

One passage, four responses, four different needs

A short teaching passage

A class planted seeds in two trays with equal water and sunlight. One tray had deep soil, the other a thin layer. After three weeks the deep tray plants were taller. Task: explain why deeper containers were suggested, using evidence from the passage.

Four responses to the same task

Response	What is visible	Next focus
Because plants need water	A general fact, not the passage reason	Background knowledge versus evidence
Both trays got sunlight	Accurate detail that explains nothing	True details versus supporting details
Deep tray plants grew taller	Relevant evidence, link unstated	Explaining how it supports the idea
Roots had more room, so plants grew taller	Evidence plus causal link	Fresh passage, independent use

Teaching move: present two details, equal sunlight and taller plants in deep soil, and ask what each detail helps explain. Then change the claim (the class kept some conditions the same) and watch the sunlight detail become useful. Relevance depends on the claim.

Same Miss, Different Next Steps

Group by the next action, never by the score

Three students miss the same evidence target. Grouping them by the standard alone would hide three different teaching needs. The whole class studies the same passage while each student gets a different next move.

Student	Working hypothesis	Next action
Emsy	Understands the link, does not express it in writing	Model one explanatory sentence, then fade the frame
Luis	Uses word overlap instead of relevance	Contrast same word distractors with meaning based evidence
Harper	Word reading may limit comprehension	Investigate decoding, support alongside rich text work

Use writing data beyond the total score

- Two essays with the same total can need very different teaching. Keep an authentic whole piece judgment while analyzing the component most likely to improve.
- Before: the plants in the deep soil were taller. This is my evidence. After: the plants in the deep soil were taller, which supports deeper containers for the next planting. The gain is the expressed relationship.
- Choose one development target and one manageable conventions target per conference. Check transfer in the next independent piece.

Revising, Editing, and Progress

Separate the performances, then track both levels

Revising and editing call for related but distinct judgments. For one punctuation target, collect three performances: recognize a correct sentence, correct a flawed one, and produce one unaided. Success on one never guarantees the others. Always edit with a denominator: four errors in four sentences and four in a long draft are different patterns.

Two kinds of evidence

- A targeted measure shows whether the taught component is improving. A broader outcome shows whether that gain matters in real reading or writing.
- Record the date of any instructional change and whether the plan was actually delivered. An upward trend after a change is useful evidence, never proof on its own.

Read level and growth together

Pattern	Likely meaning
Below goal, improving rapidly	Stay the course, confirm with fresh tasks
Below goal and flat	Revisit hypothesis, design, and dose received
Above goal and declining	Investigate before celebrating
Above goal, ready for more	Compact practice and extend

Practical decision rule: after at least three weeks and six data points, compare the latest four points with the goal line, following the measure guidance. A two reds in a row convention is an alert to investigate, never an automatic placement or label.

Feedback That Moves Learning

Name the move, allow the move, check the move

A practical feedback sequence

1. **Name the target.** State the goal in plain language.
2. **Point to one feature.** Identify a specific place in the work.
3. **Give one action.** Less actionable: add details. More actionable: explain how this result supports using deeper containers.
4. **Let the student act.** Provide time and support matched to readiness.
5. **Inspect later work.** Look for the action in an independent performance.

Give students a role in the evidence

- Students should state the goal, inspect relevant work, choose a next action, and notice what changes. A three minute conference: what were you trying to help your reader understand, show one strong place and one to strengthen, try the change, plan how to check the next piece.
- Correct promptly when a student practices an inaccurate rule. Allow think time when the learner can reason through it. Record which support actually enabled success.

Small groups with an exit plan

- Use temporary skill based names such as explaining the link, never fixed ability labels. Give each group a clear exit condition and a review date.
- Think alone before partner talk so the teacher can tell personal understanding from a strong partner contribution.

Organize People and Systems

Frameworks, tools, and meetings that serve decisions

Four comprehension questions keep a team talking about the same thing. Match the support to the question the student is actually missing.



TAUGHT: recall the taught content

Can the student recall what was taught. If not, reteach with clarity before asking for more.



TAP: locate and use evidence

Can the student find and use evidence. If not, teach evidence routines directly.



THINK: explain why

Can the student explain why and make reasoning visible. A student who succeeds at TAP but struggles at THINK needs help with the relationship, not more evidence hunting.



TOGGLE: compare contexts and connect

Can the student compare contexts and connect ideas. If yes, extend into new situations.

Dashboard that serves decisions

A teacher facing dashboard starts with a small action view: needs investigation, teaching in progress, independent on current tasks, retention check due, ready for extension. Keep the deeper record one tap away.

These descriptors illustrate evidence use. They do not establish a validated scale or match official state performance categories.

Meetings That Change Teaching

End with a change, an owner, and a return date

A productive 30 minute team meeting ends with a teaching change, an owner, and a return date. Closing prompt: what will students experience differently, and what evidence would convince us the change helped.

- Bring one question, a few responses that show the range, and two competing explanations. Leave with one teaching move and a date to look at new evidence.
- Protect the agenda from activity counts. Time spent discussing quiz totals is time not spent deciding what students will experience next.
- Send the record to everyone who teaches the same students before the next meeting.

Judge the system, not just the student

- Judge the system by learning, opportunity, and usefulness. More quizzes, more dashboard visits, and more intervention assignments are activity counts, never proof of better learning.
- Ask what students had a chance to learn before treating a pattern as a program failure. An upward trend after a change is useful evidence, never proof on its own.

A usable meeting record

Write down the teaching change, who owns it, and when the team will look at fresh evidence. File anything longer where the next teacher can find it.

Begin Tomorrow

A one page checklist for Monday morning

Pick one recurring decision and walk it through the routine once with your team. One target, one week, one check.

1. **Pick one target.** Choose one recurring decision, such as what to teach after an evidence check.
2. **Clarify the demand.** Agree with your team on what the task truly asks.
3. **Collect a few responses.** Include some success and some uncertainty, never only the weakest work.
4. **Test two explanations.** Use one small diagnostic contrast before choosing the teaching move.
5. **Teach the barrier.** One focused lesson with a model, a guided attempt, and an independent check.
6. **Plan the next encounter.** Schedule retrieval on a fresh task, then a delayed application.
7. **Protect the rest.** Keep new learning, rich texts, and writing time intact for every student.

Monday morning tip

Do this checklist with one team and one target first. Add information only when it resolves a real uncertainty.

One target. One week. One check. Then repeat.

Learn More

Key references behind this MINI book

Numbers match the full guide. Start with the first two for the big picture, then follow the question your team is working on.

[1] Hamilton et al. (2009). Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making. IES practice guide. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguide/12

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[11] Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie (2020). The power of feedback revisited. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6987456/

[14] National Center on Intensive Intervention (2024). Decision Rules for Analyzing Academic Progress Monitoring Data. https://intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/apm-decision-rules.pdf

[17] Graham et al. (2012, rev. 2018). Teaching Elementary Students to Be Effective Writers. IES practice guide. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguide/17

Schedules, examples, and routines in this MINI book are practical design suggestions, and the cited studies do not independently validate them.

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Start with the student, not the score.

The most useful outcome of a data conversation is a specific change in what a student experiences next.

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