

## Considerations When Using Instructional Packets

The purpose of this brief is to provide teachers with research-based information for the effective use of instructional packets as an integral part of remote instruction and learning.

### Description and Rationale:

Instructional packets are paper-based collections of work intended for independent completion by the student. Although much can be done interactively between teachers and students with online tools, certain situations and factors outside the teacher's and student's control warrant the use of instructional packets. This does not diminish, however, the positive impact well designed packets can achieve when best practice is considered (Marzano, 1998; Walberg, Paschal, & Weinstein, 1985).

Instructional packets are essentially “homework” and are governed by the same research and evidence by which homework should be utilized. These assignments are most effective when their primary purpose is to provide the student with practice such that they (Archer, 2020):

- Gain minimum competency
- Improve automaticity / efficiency
- Protect against forgetting
- Improve transfer of skills

Instructional packets are best when they include work that is focused on critical learning, follow a routine, and can be done independently by the student. In the following sections, several guidelines will be presented to help the teacher and student effectively use this mode of interaction.

### Packet Organization:

The following are the elements to consider when constructing instructional packets:

- Cover sheet with completion checklist for student
- Statement (example) or clear learning objective(s)
- Review of needed prior knowledge and / or skills
- Pre-teaching or context provided
  - Worked examples
  - I do, we do, you do guided practice if appropriate
- Standard or repeated format
- Ample and appropriate practice opportunities
- Answers (for self-check or checking with assistance from someone at home)

## Content Considerations:

Instructional packets that are responsive to the various needs of students will increase the likelihood of successful completion as students are away from traditional classroom instruction. Since student motivation and self-regulation serve as key elements of success, consider the following when compiling content for student independent work:

- **Purpose:** Target critical instructional content that requires fluency building and mastery. It is imperative that students have a minimal level of competency before assigning additional skill building tasks. This will reduce the likelihood of practicing errors. (Archer, 2020)
- **Clear directions:** Clarity, cohesion and conciseness is necessary when providing guidance on completing assigned tasks. Consider the general and content specific vocabulary used—does it provide enough clarity for students of varying levels of comprehension?
- **Consistent Routines and Appropriate Practice:** As mentioned previously, consistent routines are important in that they allow the student to give full focus to the content. When developing routines, ensure that the practice is deliberate and contains ample opportunities to retrieve from memory and rehearse to mastery.
- **Overall appearance of the packet:** Visually appealing instructional packets aid in overall student engagement. In addition, a consistent structure throughout the document will support students' ability to focus on the content rather than the aesthetic of the document.

## Communication:

Clarity is key when sending instructional packets home. Consider the following points:

- **Expectations for families:** If instructional support needs to be provided, include explicit instructions for families that are easy to understand and follow. They are not teachers, so do not assume they know what to do, make it clear. Include guidance for how families can provide corrective feedback to their child. Families may need additional support. Providing virtual office hours creates an opportunity for that support. Additional opportunities to connect with parents include email, phone calls, or text.
- **Expectations for the student:** Provide clear expectations for completion with details for dates and how work is submitted. Consider how students can access help whether it be through virtual office hours, phone calls, emails, or texts. Utilize the ability to take pictures of work and share via email or text. If answer sheets are included with the packet, be clear on when and how students should access them to review their work, how errors are noted and corrected.

## Packet Pitfalls:

Unfortunately, as with homework, certain misuses of instructional packets are evident in current offerings and can be counterproductive as well as demotivating for both the student and the teacher (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Some of these common pitfalls include:

- Using instructional packets as a way to teach new information
- Assigning work that is too difficult for the student to complete without support and thus relying on parents or others to serve as a teacher
- Providing busy work not related to critical learning
- Passing along poorly designed lessons from websites or published material
- Not providing routines, connections to prior learning, and adequate practice

To make instructional packets helpful for students' learning, teachers may find the following checklist helpful when developing work for their students to do at home.

## Instructional Packet Checklist

1. Is the focus solely on critical content?
2. Are the learning expectations clear and positively stated?
3. Is the task well organized and broken into appropriate steps?
4. Are instructions easily understood and in student-friendly language?
5. Is the connection to prior skills and knowledge obvious?
6. Is ample practice using a routine required?
7. Are worked examples and an answer key provided?
8. Are expectations of parents and students as well as a way to get feedback and questions answered been provided?

## Additional Resources

[MiMTSS TA Center Covid-19 Resources for Educators and Teams webpage](https://miblsi.org/covid-19-resources) provides briefs on Distance Learning and Online Learning (<https://miblsi.org/covid-19-resources>).

## References:

Archer, A. L., & Hughes, C. A. (2011). *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*. New York: Guilford Press.

Archer, A. L. (2020, April 6). *Explicit Instruction Online Series — The Magic Is in the INSTRUCTION* [Webinar]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0gFga1btN4&feature=youtu.be>

Marzano, R. & Pickering, D. (2007). The Case for and Against Homework. *Education Leadership*, 64 (6), 674-679.

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