

Progress Monitoring Q & A

1. What is the purpose of progress monitoring (PM)?

The purpose of PM is feedback to the instructor. PM works like a GPS, telling you if you should keep instruction the same or make a change.

2. Who should get progress monitoring?

A common mistake is mandating PM directly from screening results: “Teachers must monitor every student who scores below benchmark every other week.” It isn’t that simple.

Scores on screening measures don’t trigger PM. Scores on screening trigger instruction, and possibly diagnostic assessment. Instruction triggers PM.

The sequence should be:

1. Screening
2. Instruction
3. Progress Monitoring

If you aren’t changing instruction there isn’t much of a reason to monitor progress.

3. Should I monitor progress with grade-level materials?

Maybe. Maybe not. PM materials should match the point of instruction, which is not necessarily grade level. Frequent monitoring should be at instructional level. Grade level monitoring is done with universal screening three times a year.

5. What progress monitoring goal should I set?

Set a PM goal that closes the gap and catches students up to the grade level expectations. Spend time discussing what instruction needs to look like to get the student to that goal.

If you are monitoring with grade-level material, use the next benchmark goal as your progress monitoring goal. If you are monitoring in below-grade-level material, use the end-of-year goal for the measure you are monitoring with, but cut the timeline in half.

6. How often should I monitor progress?

How soon do you need to know if your instruction is working or not? The frequency of progress monitoring should be determined by the intensity of the support. You need about 5-7 data points on a graph to see a trend. For students who are working on

below-grade skills, you don't have a day to waste, and weekly progress monitoring will be needed so you can see the trend in 5-7 weeks.

7. How can I find time to monitor all of these students?

Maybe you shouldn't monitor them all. If more than 20% of your class or grade score below expectation on the screening assessment, analyze and improve Tier 1 curriculum and instruction first before trying to intervene with individual students. Administrative mandates requiring PM frequency based on universal screening results rob teachers of Tier 1 planning and instruction time and put the emphasis on the measurement rather than the instruction.

Even while you focus on improving core instruction, you might select a student or two to monitor, as exemplars of students you are working with in small groups. This will allow you to get into the groove of doing some monitoring, see how the data can be helpful for informing instruction, but not leave you overwhelmed.

8. Should I use small group time on Fridays to do PM?

No. If you take all of the small group time on Fridays doing progress monitoring, you will have reduced your instructional minutes by 20%. Instead, monitor one student each day of the week at the end of small group time. Use that time when students are packing up their supplies and transitioning to the next activity.

9. What do I do with the data?

Progress monitoring is a powerful instructional tool. But simply putting dots on a graph isn't the important part. Students could be monitored every day and reading skills won't necessarily improve. Student performance increases when looking at the graph causes changes to instruction. Be sure to schedule time to review the graph of any student you are monitoring. Don't be afraid to reach out for support if you don't see sufficient growth.

10. What if I don't see growth? Here are some questions to ask yourself:

Did you do what you said you would?

- Were you teaching the right skill (the lowest one the student hasn't mastered)?
- Can you break the task down into smaller steps?
- Can you increase opportunities to respond by reducing group size?
- Can you increase the length and/or frequency of small group instruction?
- Can you present instruction more explicitly?
- Are you using an evidence-based instructional approach?

11. What should I look for in a PM assessment?

PM is not like a unit test or pre-test/post-test assessment. PM is repeatedly checking in with the same reliable indicator so decisions about instruction can be made with ongoing data over time. Look for PM assessments that are:

- Indicators of an essential early literacy skill
- Brief
- Standardized
- Reliable and valid
- Sensitive to small amounts of learning over time
- Alternate forms at the same level of difficulty

Acadience Reading K-6 is an excellent example of a free progress monitoring tool.

<https://acadiencelearning.org/acadience-reading/k-grade6/>

Remember...PM isn't what is teaching the student to read. It is just the measurement – like stepping on the scale. You could weigh yourself every day, but you won't lose weight unless you move more and eat less.

Keep PM in the proper perspective – as a feedback loop, like a GPS – to tell you if you should change instruction, and it will be a powerful tool for improving reading outcomes.