



INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE

# IF Rubric Tips

For Teachers and School Leaders

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# Why Use the IF Rubric?

The IF Rubric clearly defines the best practices for teachers that are embedded within The Instructional Framework. These eight research-based practices are ones that teachers can refer to when planning, instructing and assessing their students. The IF Rubric indicators and look-fors provide guidance for teachers seeking to grow in their profession and they set a standard school leaders can use for setting schoolwide professional development goals. Resources such as pictures, articles, training videos showing the look-fors in action and PowerPoint trainings are available on [www.instructionalframework.org](http://www.instructionalframework.org).

## Indicator 1: Teachers are actively reflecting on their practice.

### Why is this indicator important?

Active ongoing reflection is the key to improving skills. How do you *know* a strategy or practice is working? How do you *know* if students are learning? Good teachers know there is always room for improvement. Teachers should actively reflect on their practice because by doing so they can see what's working and what's not working, and make adjustments as needed to maximize learning and mastery of skills.

### Tips for Teachers:

- After teaching a lesson, take a few minutes to jot down what worked, what didn't and what should be remembered for next time.
- Record yourself teaching (you can use your cellphone). Watch the video and take notes on your initial observations. Use an observation checklist for your goals and the specific behaviors you want to see.
- Apply a "reflective learning cycle" to your practice with the help of an instructional coach or a peer coach who can provide objective feedback and accountability. This should include learning specific IF indicators and look-fors, applying these practices, reflecting on application using data and refining practices to apply lessons learned.
- Join a professional learning organization for educators to study and apply new information about focus indicators.

### Tips for School Leaders:

- School leaders should complete an initial data collection of teachers' knowledge and current level of understanding of the IF Rubric indicators.
- When planning for the school year, build in time for teachers to use a reflective learning cycle by having them share goals, review data, reflect and apply action steps based on objective feedback (ideally with a peer or coach).
- If using a coach, identify a regular routine for meetings and use a coaching log to document goals, action steps and progress. Keeping this on a shared platform helps all parties access and add notes to the log.

## Indicator 2: Teachers use backward planning addressing multiple standards.

### Why is this indicator important?

Backward planning helps teachers create lessons starting with the standards, then determine what assessments show progress to the standards, and lastly choose the lesson activities that will help students learn these new skills. This is important because teachers who apply backward planning are intentional about how they plan, teach and assess students to standards instead of activities. The ability to use backward planning to multiple standards is an essential skill for teachers to successfully teach all the grade-level standards for the school year.

### Tips for Teachers:

- Ask yourself, “What *skills* am I trying to teach, how will I *know* my students have these skills (what will it look like), and what *steps* do I need to take to get them there?”
- Familiarize yourself with the IF terms and how they are used (standard, learning target, “I Can” statements, objectives, essential questions).
- Read through all the standards and learning targets and notice any patterns within them (you’ll see some learning target skills use the exact same language).
- Highlight learning target skills that have the same or similar language from different standards across the ELA content areas.
- Familiarize yourself with the big picture and main ideas of the standards.
- Organize standards by unit, quarter, etc.

### Tips for School Leaders:

- A baseline of understanding of what it means to *teach to standards* needs to be established to set the foundation for instructional planning, teaching and assessing to the Common Core Standards (i.e., how they are very similar from grade to grade but increase slightly in rigor and how they are designed to be taught consecutively).
- Clearly explain and model what it means to “backward plan” using The Instructional Framework terminology. Refer to trainings in the IF Rubric resource tab on The Instructional Framework website and reference [Backward Design](#) for more information.

## Indicator 3: Teachers create individual lesson objectives that guide students toward mastering the larger standards.

### Why is this indicator important?

If students can see the larger standard broken down, they are much more likely to maintain a growth mindset. Through creating individual lesson objectives, teachers can meet students where they are and increase their knowledge and skills by designing objectives that build from lower-order to higher-order critical thinking. Lesson objectives that focus on skills, such as Bloom’s taxonomy, provide clear expectations for what students will be able to do to get closer to mastering the standards. They give purpose and structure to lessons for students and help teachers pace their instruction.

### Tips for Teachers:

- Ask yourself the following:
  - ▶ What are the standards I need to teach?
  - ▶ What *skills* do students need to understand the standards?
  - ▶ What are my students' current levels of understanding related to these skills?
- Start with what they *can do* and create objectives that slowly build in complexity.
- Think of objectives as small skills that build upon each other in a logical progression. Start with the verb that describes the skill you want students to do. Then ask yourself if that verb accurately reflects the task.
- Study [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) and become familiar with lower-order skills and higher-order skills.

### Tips for School Leaders:

- Take time to build an understanding of what is meant by “lesson objectives.”
- Provide specific trainings on lesson objectives, Bloom's taxonomy and the steps teachers should take when creating objectives.
- Model for teachers how to build lessons based on student data.
- Model how to create objectives that build from lower-order to higher-order critical-thinking skills.

## Indicator 4: Teachers differentiate lessons by applying strategies that support students' learning needs and styles.

### Why is this indicator important?

To help all students progress toward mastering their grade-level standards, teachers need to know their students' current level of understanding to the standards, their strengths, their challenges and their learning needs. This information informs all lesson plans and should be used to decide the most effective approaches for teaching. It is essential for educators to approach students as individuals with individual learning needs so they can decide how to differentiate lessons to best support student learning. Using multiple ways of presenting material and multiple ways for students to show learning helps more students learn.

### Tips for Teachers:

- Start building in a Daily 5 routine in the younger grades on the first day of school. It takes a few months, but it is worth it in the end because students learn to monitor themselves and work independently.
- Regularly check in with students' families and other staff members, like specialist teachers, to gather any observed behavior or specific needs of students.
- Take anecdotal notes on a pre-created chart with students' names and dates to track any noticings related to students' learning needs.
- Watch the IF videos for inspiration and try a new strategy designed to reach all learners (see a list of research-based strategies at the end of the Unit Overview document).

- Learning new strategies takes time. Apply a reflective learning cycle to learn, apply, reflect and refine new strategies.
- Allow the time needed to model and establish rotation routines by slowly increasing small-group rotation times. Make sure students master classroom routines *first* before moving to individual instruction.

### Tips for School Leaders:

- Train teachers on Guided Reading and Daily 5 practices that provide daily opportunities for differentiation. Set expectations for using these practices schoolwide.
- Train teachers on how to use a mix of groupings daily such as whole-group, small-group and independent practice.
- Model for teachers how to differentiate lessons for their students. Refer to the [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#) for suggestions on how to use multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression schoolwide.
- Help teachers develop a system for tracking data on student outcomes to pinpoint which differentiation strategies will best serve individual students.

## Indicator 5: Teachers explain and students understand the context for learning.

### Why is this indicator important?

Explaining the context for learning at the beginning of each lesson shows students how daily lesson objectives lead them to reach their “I Can” statements for the week, which in turn get them closer to mastering their grade-level standards. It gives a clear understanding of the expectations and learning outcomes of the lesson. To provide clear instruction, teachers need to know the content they are teaching, and how it applies to students’ lives, so they can explain the *reason* students need to learn the information. Students are more invested in their learning when they understand what is being asked of them and why it will benefit them. This is especially true for disengaged learners. Explaining the context for learning shows students how their previous learning, present learning and future learning are all connected. It provides the purpose for their learning.

### Tips for Teachers:

- Learn and practice backward planning. It will help you clearly identify and align the context for learning if you create weekly lesson plans that have the essential questions, “I Can” statements with standard codes, and objectives aligned.
- Collate a list of standards, learning targets and “I Can” statements in a spreadsheet for easy access.
- Get in the habit right away to show and explain the context for learning at the beginning of each lesson. Students tend to do better with this daily structure.
- Read the objectives aloud to the class and refer to them throughout the lesson to monitor class progress. If you don’t finish them all, reflect on students’ learning and adjust the next lesson as needed.

- Teach students how to use a self-rating scale (such as Marzano’s 1-4 scale) to show where they are in relation to their “I Can” statements during the lesson.

### **Tips for School Leaders:**

- Train teachers on the IF terminology and definitions for standards, learning targets, “I Can” statements and objectives.
- Set schoolwide expectations for posting and explaining the context for learning but allow teachers some autonomy in the look of their signs (as long as all students can read them).
- Provide grade-level “I Cans” with standard codes printed in a large font for each teacher so they can easily find the ones they need, and post them weekly according to their lesson plans.
- Model and observe. After modeling, do scheduled walk-throughs to observe teachers explaining the context for learning and students’ responses. Continue to do scheduled and unscheduled walk-throughs during the year.

## **Indicator 6: Teachers create, monitor and use assessments during planning and instruction.**

### **Why is this indicator important?**

Assessments should be created or chosen as part of the backward planning process. Once the standards and learning target skills have been narrowed down, consider how you’ll know that a student has learned the skills — what will it look like? Creating or selecting assessments that are directly aligned to learning target skills ensures teachers are effectively measuring progress to those skills. Using different types of assessments throughout instruction provides teachers with the evidence needed to adjust lessons in the moment based on student learning.

### **Tips for Teachers:**

- Find/create a system that helps you monitor and analyze the data you’re tracking, for instance, a spreadsheet on sheets or in Excel or within your student information system.
- Create assessments that connect to specific skills, not tasks or activities.
- Include the specific learning target skills and standard codes on assessments to intentionally create alignment.
- Ask students to demonstrate their understanding and why they know something rather than just asking if they understood the reading with a thumbs up or thumbs down.
- Use multiple types of assessments (observation checklists, anecdotal records, oral responses or presentations, videos, written reports, etc.).

### **Tips for School Leaders:**

- Train teachers on formative and summative assessments.
- Have teachers anonymously share some of their assessment approaches in a group training and ask colleagues to add feedback and ways to enhance the assessment for better alignment and differentiation.

- Provide schoolwide expectations on what data should be collected, how often and how it should be used to inform instructional decisions.
- Set unified data collection plans and protocols such as using binders for students with dividers for specific standards and evidence of progress.
- Have teachers use the Learning Target Checklist included in the grade-level documents.

## **Indicator 7: Teachers apply an understanding of the *shifts* in ELA/Literacy Instruction within the Common Core.**

### **Why is this indicator important?**

With the Common Core came three main *shifts* in ELA instruction that all teachers need to know and apply to help students master the standards: 1) building knowledge through the use of nonfiction; 2) practicing skills with complex texts that provide opportunities for deep discussion and inquiry, including analyzing academic language; and 3) supporting new understandings using evidence from the text. Applying these shifts to classroom instruction will help students master the larger ELA standards.

### **Tips for Teachers:**

- Explicitly teach vocabulary using multiple examples, non-examples and opportunities for students to discuss words and their meanings with each other.
- Model for students how to find evidence in text to support their claims by using strategies such as the Fishbowl and Question-Answer-Relationship (QAR) strategy.
- Have students bring words to life, when possible, by using their senses. What does it look like, sound like, feel like, taste like, smell like, move like?
- Work with fellow teachers across different subject areas to teach the same academic language.

### **Tips for School Leaders:**

- Report on creative thinking. Change the mindset of how we communicate by changing the way we communicate. Make multiple channels of communication and presenting skills available for the students and teachers.
- Use a professional learning community (PLC) time to have teachers look at the language used in their standards to identify the most-used academic language. Make a list to teach schoolwide, across subjects, over the course of the year (e.g., infer, compare, evaluate, synthesize).

## **Indicator 8: Teachers promote students' real-world application.**

### **Why is this indicator important?**

Helping students make connections between what they're learning in school and their everyday lives provides purpose for learning and creates meaningful learning opportunities. Lessons are enhanced further when students see their cultures, experiences and interests included in a positive way. And including strategies that promote communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking helps prepare students with the skills they need inside and outside school.

### Tips for Teachers:

- Seek and use resources that utilize the five senses.
- Use strategies daily that require all students to speak and listen, ask students open-ended questions, and use technology such as Flipgrid that allow students to creatively express themselves.
- Connect with the local community for opportunities for students to create project-based learning experiences.
- Intentionally seek and incorporate opportunities for students to have “windows” or “mirrors” of other experiences, perspectives and backgrounds. These opportunities can be found in books, graphics chosen as visual aids and any other content shared.
- Connect learning to other subject areas to make them more engaging and to show students that learning is not done in isolation.

### Tips for School Leaders:

- Ask teachers what additional resources would be helpful for making real-world connections with students. Provide resources when possible.
- Look into schoolwide programs that encourage real-world connections such as participating in a “pen pal” program with students from other countries.
- Consider existing schoolwide programs and resources that are underutilized that teachers could use in lesson plans (a school garden or kitchen, art supplies, music connections, science, etc.).
- Provide opportunities for field trips and expert guest speakers to talk with students about what skills they apply on their jobs.
- Promote schoolwide clubs and programs such as plays, assemblies, broadcasting opportunities and debate teams for students to work on their communication, collaboration, creativity and critical-thinking skills.