

## How Much Time Should Intermediate Classrooms Devote to Reading Instruction?

By Peter Dewitz

*Learn how much time is recommended for reading instruction in the intermediate grades and how much of that time students should be actively reading, according to the research and science of reading.*



Reading is highly valued in education and typically what we value receives the most amount of time allocation within the school day. Across most schools in the nation, teachers set aside anywhere from 50 – 150 minutes for reading instruction. But what does the research say? How much time should be devoted to reading instruction, and how much time should students actively read within the school day?

There are two ways to answer the question of time. First, we can ask the question: What would a teacher need to accomplish each day to develop students' reading skills and interests? Second, we can consult the research literature to see what has been recommended.

### List of Must-Do's for Reading Instruction (3-6)

To determine how much time to allocate to reading instruction, let's assemble a list of

what needs to be done.

1. **Read Aloud:** Reading aloud to students exposes them to difficult text, models fluent reading, increases their comprehension and vocabulary, and builds their interest in reading. Use an instructional framework to increase student engagement. **Suggested Time:** 30 Minutes
2. **Differentiation:** Reading instruction is stronger when it is differentiated and delivered to small groups of students and not to the whole class.<sup>1</sup> As students increase in fluency, small group instruction can be provided less frequently. Plan on providing differentiated instruction 2-3 days per week for your lowest readers and check in with your stronger readers 1-2 days per week. As you provide this support, the students in your classroom can read alone or with a partner (see #3).
3. **Scaffolded Silent Reading & Responding:** The best predictor of how well elementary students achieve in reading is influenced by how much time they spend in meaningful silent reading each day.<sup>2</sup> Silent reading can be made more meaningful by providing high-interest and appropriately challenging books and support mechanisms to increase fluency and comprehension.<sup>3</sup> Such mechanisms might include partner reading, comprehension monitoring, discussion, and writing in response to reading. While students silent read, the teacher can meet with differentiated groups as needed (see #2). **Suggested Time:** 45 Minutes
4. **Vocabulary Instruction:** Plan to spend about 10-minutes a day explicitly teaching vocabulary. Follow this with time for students to practice reading the words and

using the words in their oral and written responses.

5. **Phonics Instruction:** In the primary grades, students need direct instruction on reading words – phonics. The National Reading Panel<sup>4</sup> revealed that strong word recognition instruction in the primary grades takes about 30 minutes a day.<sup>5</sup> For students in the intermediate grades who still struggle to decode words, provide phonics instruction within your differentiated time (see #2), or as an intervention.

### **The Sweet Spot: 90 Minutes of Reading a Day!**

While researchers give strong hints of how much time should be spent teaching reading, they give no specific prescriptions. Ultimately, when teachers devote more time to reading instruction, their students achieve higher levels of achievement.

Our recommendation: Create a 90-minute reading instruction block and ensure that time is used well.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Sample Schedule**

35-minutes: Read-aloud

45-minutes: Differentiated Instruction & Meaningful Silent Reading

10-minutes: Vocabulary

### **Reading is the Top Priority**

The strongest predictor of reading achievement is the number of minutes students spend reading each day.<sup>7</sup> This means teachers must make reading the top priority, even when the disruptions of weather, illness, and testing make allocating the time more difficult.<sup>8</sup> A student's reading skill influences success in social studies, science, and the content areas.

In fact, when reading instruction extends to the content areas, achievement soars, especially for students from low-income homes, non-English speaking homes, and for girls.<sup>9</sup> To maximize your time, engage students in meaningful reading across the school day. You will no doubt get positive results!

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**About the author:** *Peter is an educational researcher and consultant who has taught at the University of Toledo, the University of Virginia, and Mary Baldwin University. He has worked as a visiting researcher at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His major research interests are the efficacy of reading programs, reading comprehension, and assessments.*

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Connor, Carol McDonald, Mercedes Spencer, Stephanie L. Day, Sarah Giuliani, Sarah W. Ingebrand, Leigh McLean, and Frederick J. Morrison. "Capturing the complexity: Content, type, and amount of instruction and quality of the classroom learning environment synergistically predict third graders' vocabulary and reading comprehension outcomes." *Journal of educational psychology* 106, no. 3 (2014): 762.

<sup>2</sup> Allington, Richard L. "What I've learned about effective reading instruction: From a decade of studying exemplary elementary classroom teachers." *Phi Delta Kappan* 83, no. 10 (2002): 740-747.

<sup>3</sup> White, Thomas G., and Kim, James S. "Teacher and Parent Scaffolding of Voluntary Summer Reading." *The Reading Teacher* 62, 2 (2008): 116-125.

<sup>4</sup> Allington, Richard L. "What I've learned about effective reading instruction: From a decade of studying exemplary elementary classroom teachers." *Phi Delta Kappan* 83, no. 10 (2002): 740-747.

<sup>5</sup> National Reading Panel (US), National Institute of Child Health, and Human Development (US). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Shanahan, Timothy. Shanahan on Literacy, <https://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/blog/what-about-the-new-research-that-says-phonics-instruction-isnt-very-important> 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Leinhardt, Gaea, Naomi Zigmond, and William W. Cooley. "Reading instruction and its effects." *American Educational Research Journal* 18.3 (1981): 343-361.

<sup>8</sup> Allington, Richard L., and Patricia M. Cunningham. *Schools that work: Where all children read and write*. Allyn & Bacon, 72 Arlington Street, Boston, MA 02116, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Tyner, Adam, and Sarah Kabourek. "Social Studies Instruction and Reading Comprehension: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study." *Thomas B. Fordham Institute* (2020).

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