

# What Works Clearinghouse **WWC**

A central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS about PRACTICE GUIDES

### **What is the What Works Clearinghouse?**

The **What Works Clearinghouse** (WWC) was established in 2002 by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to be a central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education. The WWC synthesizes rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of education interventions and develops practice guides with research-based recommendations for educators.

### **What is a practice guide?**

Practice guides provide practical recommendations for educators to help address everyday challenges in classrooms and schools. Each recommendation includes concrete implementation steps and strategies for overcoming common roadblocks. Each guide's recommendations are developed by a panel of nationally recognized experts. The panel also rates the level of research evidence supporting each recommendation.

### **How are practice guide topics and panels selected?**

Practice guide topics are selected to address current challenges facing educators. The WWC solicits practice guide topics from formal surveys of researchers and practitioners, and through the WWC website at:

[whatworks.ed.gov/help/webmail/index.aspx?SuggestTopic=1](https://whatworks.ed.gov/help/webmail/index.aspx?SuggestTopic=1)

Each practice guide panel consists of a mix of researchers and education practitioners. The WWC selects researchers and practitioners with nationally-recognized expertise about the topic.

### **What evidence supports a practice guide?**

Practice guides draw on a wide array of research to identify effective educational practices—from rigorous experiments to case studies. For a recommended practice to receive a “strong” evidence rating, a body of high-quality research must exist, isolating this practice and demonstrating that it has consistent, positive impacts in typical settings. Other types of research (“quasi-experimental” and even some non-experimental research) can be used to support a “moderate” evidence rating, suggesting that there is some evidence that the practice is effective, but it may not be effective in every setting or by itself. Other types of research can be used to identify promising practices, but if the research does not make a strong causal link between the practice and educational outcomes, it is considered a “low” level of evidence.

For each practice guide, the WWC reviews dozens and often hundreds of studies. This review process is designed both to identify high-quality research demonstrating practices are effective, and to ensure that recommended practices have not been proven ineffective—or even detrimental—in some studies. Practice guides also receive rigorous peer review from the Institute of Education Sciences.

Practice guides merge rigorous research evidence with real-world experience. Often, when research has demonstrated that a general practice is effective, practice guide panels will use real-world experience to develop specific implementation steps and roadblock solutions for carrying out that practice.

**Does a “low” level of evidence mean educators should ignore the practice?**

Each practice guide recommendation is based on the view of the panel of experts that the recommendation is likely to be beneficial. The highest rating—“strong”—tells educators that there is strong research evidence demonstrating the recommended practice will lead to educational gains. The lowest rating—“low”—tells educators that, while it is the panel’s expert judgment that this practice will lead to educational gains, research evidence has not yet accumulated to a point that clearly indicates the practice is effective.

**How do I use the practice guide in my district/school/classroom?**

Practice guides target recommendations at a range of educators, such as teachers, principals, curriculum specialists, and district administrators. These educators can use the how-to steps and examples to identify ways to implement the recommendation in their schools and districts. Educators also can use the roadblocks and solutions sections for tips on overcoming common obstacles to implementation. Additional resources, such as templates and video demonstrations, are available on our partner website, Doing What Works ([dww.ed.gov](http://dww.ed.gov)).

Each practice guide also includes a summary of the research supporting each recommendation. This summary informs educators about the specific practices that were researched and about the characteristics of the schools and students participating in the studies.