Structure tasks using work systems

Summary

Work systems provide a means for teachers to structure tasks or elements of a task for every student, including those on the autism spectrum. Work systems can help students to understand:

- what task or activity they are expected to complete
- how much work they have to do and how much time they have
- if they are making progress on a task and when it is finished
- what they should do next.

Work systems share some common elements with Using visual schedules, which provide a means to sequence tasks or elements of a task.

By developing appropriate work systems and supporting students to use personalised work systems, students are empowered to become more independent in completing tasks and activities.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 3.2 - plan, structure and sequence learning programs
- 4.2 - manage classroom activities

For further information, see Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page

Preparing to Teach

When to use work systems

The aim of work systems is to help students stay on task, complete tasks, and work independently. Work systems are used to provide structure to an activity or task when students are unable to focus on and complete tasks independently.

Work systems can be developed for tasks that are:

- academic
- games or physical activity
- self-help activities
- choice activities
- in the playground
- at lunchtime.

Work systems can include activities that are to be completed:

- individually
- on group rotation
- as a whole class activity.

Begin to plan your structuring by assessing the scope of the task

Clearly identify what task the students are expected to complete:

- look at the goal of your task or activity.
- think about the format of the task – written, multi-modal, oral, creative, or active.
- break down the task into smaller, manageable sections with more detailed scaffolding.
- be mindful of the range of ability of the students who will use the system.
- how many different actions or steps are in the task?
- what is achievable in the lesson?
- how long should the activity take?

Use this to develop a checklist for your work system. See the related videos under the *In the classroom section.*

Structure the task into a work system

1. Present the task steps to students in a logical order.
2. Identify to students a clear finished area for their tasks.
3. Determine whether your work system is fixed or mobile.

Present the order of task steps in a **left to right* sequence** and/or **top to bottom sequence**. Start the work on the **left (or right*)**.

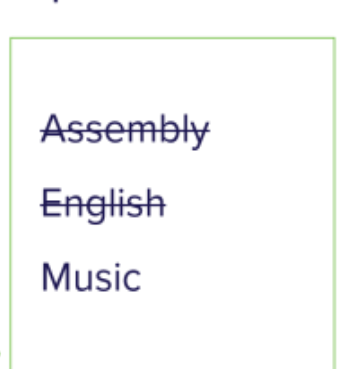**This is dependent upon cultural viewing of text from left to right OR right to left.*

Left to Right*

Activity	☑
Activity	☐
Activity	☐
Activity	☐
Next Activity	

Top to Bottom

■ 1
■ 2
■ 3
■ Next

Top to Bottom

~~Assembly~~
~~English~~
Music

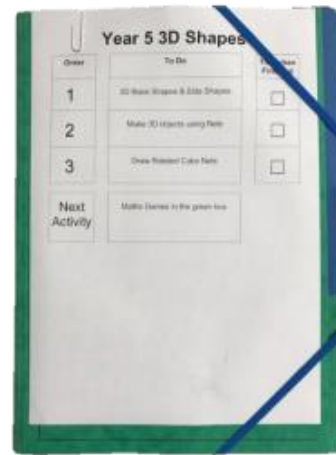tick a box   move images   cross off a word

Include a way to monitor progress: **tick, move or cross off**

Try to use same format and routine for manipulation that the student uses to manipulate their visual schedule (if they use one).

Identify a clear **Finished** area

Work Systems may be **fixed** or **mobile**

Clearly identify how much work the students will have to do:

- Think about what the different actions or parts of the task or activity are.
- The students' range of abilities will determine how much work they can complete.
- Is there a specific order in which each part of the task is done? If so, consider sequencing the information.
- Determine what equipment students will need to complete each section of the task. The types of materials needed may impact how and what type of work system you create, and how it is delivered.
- Have the necessary equipment ready for students.

Clearly identify how the students will know they have completed a task from start to finish.

What action do the students take to start part of a task? E.g. students:

- read the work system steps from top to bottom
- match a Velcro image to a box, container, or folder
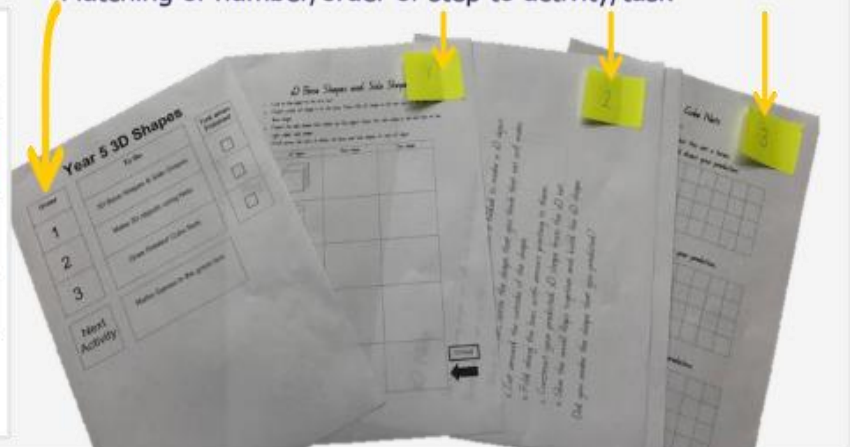- match a number on a step to a box, container, folder, or paper.

What happens when students finish part of a task? E.g. students:

- tick a checkbox
- cross off words or text
- circle a star or image
- continue with another work system, if necessary.

Work systems can be used for one small task or activity, or for a series of two or more larger tasks.

Clearly identify what task students are expected to complete next:

- Advise student what to do next on the work system.
- Incorporate students' personal interests in the work system, e.g. for an individual consider a reward activity, or for a group or whole class consider using images for each activity that appeal to the students.

In the classroom

Introduce the work system

You will need to introduce the work system to the student. Students will require different levels of scaffolding based on their personal needs. After introducing the work system, begin to gradually fade out prompts and scaffolds while supporting the student to use the work system to complete tasks independently.