

Using task analysis for skill development

Summary

Some students, including those on the autism spectrum, find learning a new skill overwhelming. Breaking these new skills down into smaller steps can remove the barrier to skill acquisition. Task analysis is an evidence-based practice that supports students to learn complex new skills. Task analysis can help by breaking complicated new skills into smaller, more manageable parts so that they can be taught systematically.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 1.6 - strategies to support the full participation of students with disability
- 4.2 - manage classroom activities

For further information, see [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page](#)

Preparing to Teach

Choose and break down the task:

1. Based on your assessment of the student, identify a skill to teach them.
2. Identify the materials needed to teach the task.
3. Break the skill down into smaller, more manageable steps (usually skills that the student can complete independently and are uncomplicated).
4. Double-check that you have fully analysed the task. The skill may seem obvious to you, but may need to be broken down further for the student.

Decide how you will teach the skill and select the appropriate teaching method, e.g.:

- forward chaining: teaching the steps one by one, starting at the beginning
 - For example learning to write a paragraph before writing a report
- backward chaining: teaching the steps one by one, starting at the end. This can be a good strategy when teaching a student who lacks confidence
 - For example teaching a student to dry their hands before teaching them how to use the soap
- total task teaching: teaching all steps at once and providing support when the student gets stuck.
 - For example washing hands may be taught as whole task - turning on the tap, using the soap, drying hands

It works better if the teacher:

- checks the sequence of steps with another student or colleague first and revises based on feedback
- understands how the student learns and processes information (i.e., do they respond better to visuals or verbal instructions?)
- understands how long the student needs to learn this skill (e.g., may require frequent repetitions)
- monitors and records the progress of the student learning the new skill.

It doesn't work if:

- the task is not practiced often enough and in multiple contexts. Without repeated practice in different contexts, students may not generalise the skill, i.e. students will not learn to independently use the skill when needed in a variety of circumstances.

In the classroom

Step 1: Present the steps of the task to students

Use the age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate method you have planned, e.g.:

- forward chaining
- backward chaining
- total task teaching.

Step 2: Help students learn the steps of the task

Use methods such as:

- reinforcement
- video modelling
- time delay.

Step 3: Use positive reinforcement

Positively reinforce the student when the skill is completed correctly (see the [Respond constructively to student behaviour](#) practice).

Step 4: Reflect

Reflect on the task analysis. Was the skill broken down adequately? What alterations may be needed for next time? Did the student understand the task in the whole or do parts need changing/ reinforcing?



inclusion ED
supporting diverse learners

PRACTICE BRIEF

Materials informing this practice

[Task Analysis: Steps for Implementation](#) (2010) National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders

[How to: task analysis](#) video by Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC, YouTube.

