



This guide was produced by the Tennessee Behavior Supports Project at Vanderbilt University. This tip sheet was authored by Justine B. Katzenbach, Brooke C. Shuster, Becky H. Shafer, Blair P. Lloyd, and Erik W. Carter. For more information, visit <http://tennesseebssp.org>.



What is a prompting sequence?



A prompting sequence is used when teaching new skills to a student.

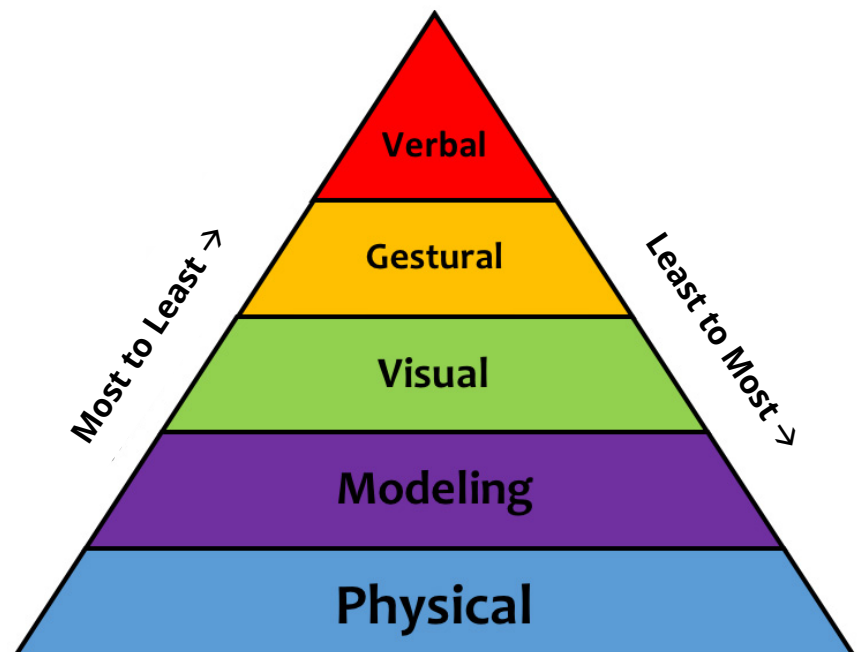
It is a planned progression in which a teacher provides a new prompt after a student responds incorrectly or does not respond at all to a demand. For example, a teacher may provide a verbal prompt (e.g., "touch your head"). After 5-seconds with no student response, the teacher could plan to provide a gestural prompt (e.g., "touch your head" with gesture).¹ The planned prompting sequence ensures students are practicing new material correctly and helps them learn correct responses faster.²

When are prompting sequences most effective?

Prompting sequences can be used for students of all ages with a range of disabilities. However, they are typically used for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.³ There are two main types of prompting sequences: a sequence of **most-to-least** prompts and a sequence of **least-to-most** prompts.⁴

A **most-to-least** prompting procedure is most effective for students who lack necessary skills to complete a task.⁵ This prompting sequence provides the most invasive form of prompting first and fades to lower level prompts as the student masters the skill. A **least-to-most** prompting procedure is most effective for students who demonstrate the pre-requisite skills necessary to complete a task, but are not performing the task.⁶ The teacher gives the student a task directive and provides more invasive prompts after the student responds incorrectly or does not respond. The invasiveness of the prompting is increased if the student responds incorrectly.

Prompting Hierarchy





What are the different types of prompting strategies?

Frequently Used Prompting Strategies ⁷		
Strategy	Description	Example
Verbal Prompt	<p>Direct spoken prompts providing a description of what the student should do.</p> <p>Indirect spoken statements providing an opportunity for the student to respond in a certain way, without directly stating it.</p>	<p><i>A teacher makes an indirect verbal statement to a student, asking, "What snack do you want?" The student does not respond. The teacher provides a direct verbal prompt and says, "Say, more crackers please." The student responds saying, "More crackers please."</i></p>
Gestural Prompt	<p>Nonverbal prompts that include facial expressions, pointing, or physically indicating the correct response.</p>	<p><i>A student is walking around the classroom. The teacher looks at the student and points to his or her seat. The student sits.</i></p>
Visual Prompt	<p>Prompts including objects, pictures, drawings, or symbols that cue a child of what is expected.</p>	<p><i>A teacher asks students to line up. A student remains seated. The teacher hands her a picture card of the student in line. The student gets in line.</i></p>
Model Prompt	<p>Providing a demonstration of the expected student behavior without physical touch. The teacher can fully model or partially model the desired behavior.</p>	<p>Full-Model: <i>A teacher asks a student to open a book and models doing it while making the demand.</i></p> <p>Partial Model: <i>A student has completed a task and is able to ask for a break, but is not asking. The teacher makes the initial [br] sound. The student says, "Break please" and is given a 30-second break.</i></p>
Physical Prompt	<p>Prompts involving manual guidance. The full physical prompting method involves hand-over-hand prompting to guide a student to a correct response. This method is usually used with motor responses (e.g., point to red). In a partial physical prompt, the teacher will use physical touch to indicate a correct response (e.g., touching a hand, touching an elbow), but not fully guiding.</p>	<p>Full Physical: <i>A student is asked to point to the green apple. He does not respond. The teacher takes his hand and points to the green apple.</i></p> <p>Partial-Physical: <i>A student is asked to point to the green apple. The student does not respond. The teacher touches the student's elbow and repeats the directions. The student touches the green apple.</i></p>

MOST TO LEAST

LEAST TO MOST



How should I use prompting sequences in the classroom?

Task Analysis for Preparing to Implement a Prompting Sequence⁸

Step	Task	Least-to-Most Example	Most-to-Least Example
1	Identify the skill/behavior the student will learn.	<i>Jeremy is a 5-year-old boy with Autism who struggles to wash his hands independently. While he has demonstrated some pre-requisite skills, he often does not do it. A prompting strategy may help him learn this skill.</i>	<i>Denise is a 6 year-old-girl with an intellectual disability. She also struggles with hand-washing skills, but has not demonstrated pre-requisite skills. A prompting strategy may help her learn this skill.</i>
2	Break down the skill into a sequence of simple steps.	<i>Steps for handwashing: 1. Turn on faucet 2. Rinse hands 3. Get 1 squirt of soap 4. Rub hands together 5. Rinse hands 6. Get a paper towel 7. Dry hands 8. Throw away towel</i>	<i>Steps for handwashing: 1. Turn on faucet 2. Rinse hands 3. Get 1 squirt of soap 4. Rub hands together 5. Rinse hands 6. Get a paper towel 7. Dry hands 8. Throw away towel</i>
3	Select a cue or task directive to indicate to the student to perform the skill.	<i>Verbally state: "Jeremy, wash your hands."</i>	<i>Verbally state: "Denise, wash your hands" while providing full physical guidance.</i>
4	Identify the teacher or paraprofessional who will use the prompting strategy.	<i>Mrs. Russell, Jeremy's paraprofessional, will provide the prompt.</i>	<i>Mr. Smith, Denise's teacher, will provide the prompt.</i>
5	Identify activities and times for teaching the skill.	<i>Before lunch and snack; After bathroom use</i>	<i>Before lunch and snack; After bathroom use</i>
6	Identify which prompt(s) will be used and in what sequence.	<i>Jeremy has demonstrated this skill before, but he often does not do it independently. For this reason, I will use a least-to-most prompting procedure, starting with a verbal prompt, then a model prompt, and then a physical (hand-over-hand) prompt.</i>	<i>Denise has not demonstrated pre-requisite skills to complete this task independently. For this reason, I will use a most-to-least prompting procedure, starting with a full physical (hand-over-hand) prompt and moving to a model.</i>
7	Decide a prompting procedure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least-to-most: • Most-to-least 	<i>Least-to-most strategy: 1. Verbal prompt 2. Model 3. Full physical</i>	<i>Most-to-least strategy: 1. Full physical 2. Model</i>



How should I use prompting sequences in the classroom?

Task Analysis for Preparing to Implement a Prompting Sequence⁸

Step	Task	Least-to-Most Example	Most-to-Least Example
8	<p>Determine mastery criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Least-to-most: Choose the wait time between each prompt; Determine mastery for the completion of the entire task Most-to-least: Determine mastery criterion for fading (reducing) a prompt. Determine how many mistakes will occur before returning to the more supportive prompt. 	<p><i>Wait time between each prompt:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Verbal prompt (wait 5-seconds)</i> <i>Model (wait 5-seconds)</i> <i>Full physical</i> <p><i>Mastery criterion:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Jeremy must complete the each handwashing step 2 consecutive times requiring only a verbal prompt to demonstrate mastery.</i> 	<p><i>Mastery Criterion:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fade: <i>Denise must demonstrate mastery of each handwashing step for 2 consecutive trials before fading to a less invasive prompt (e.g., full physical to model) for each sequential step.</i> Return to More Support: <i>If Denise demonstrates 2 consecutive errors or does not respond, return to the more restrictive prompt for that step of handwashing.</i>
9	Select the reinforcement procedure to be used (e.g., praise, tokens) for each level of prompting.	<i>Jeremy will receive a token for completing the entire handwashing task independently following a verbal prompt or a model. He will not receive a token if he requires a full physical prompt.</i>	<i>Denise will receive a token at the completion of the entire task for each prompting level (full physical and model).</i>
10	Begin the prompting sequence.	<p>Applied Example:</p> <p>Task Directive: <i>Mrs. Russell states the task directive, "Jeremy, wash your hands." 5-seconds pass and Jeremy does not do anything.</i></p> <p>Verbal Prompt: <i>She states, "Jeremy, turn on the faucet." 5-seconds pass with no response.</i></p> <p>Model Prompt: <i>She states, "Jeremy, turn on the faucet like this" and models turning on the faucet. Jeremy touches the faucet, but does not turn it on.</i></p> <p>Full Physical: <i>She states, "Jeremy, turn on the faucet like this" while placing her hand over his hand and guiding it to turn on the faucet.</i></p> <p>Next Step in Handwashing: <i>This process continues for each handwashing step if Jeremy does not respond after 5-second or responds incorrectly.</i></p>	<p>Applied Example:</p> <p>Task Directive: <i>Mr. Smith states the task directive, "Denise, wash your hands" and immediately provides full physical guidance for each step of handwashing.</i></p> <p>Fade: <i>After 2 consecutive trials of completing full physical guidance for each handwashing step, Mr. Smith uses a model for the first step, "turn on faucet." Every other step of handwashing will continue with full physical guidance until reaching mastery.</i></p> <p>Return to More Support: <i>Denise is completing step 1 ("turn on faucet") and step 2 ("rinse hands") with only a model. When introducing step 3 ("get 1 squirt of soap"), Denise does not respond for 2 consecutive trials. Mr. Smith returns to a full physical prompt for step 3 ("get 1 squirt of soap").</i></p>



Helpful tips for using prompting strategies in the classroom:

- Remember to provide reinforcement (e.g., praise, token) following the correct response at the predetermined prompting level. This will help students learn the skill more quickly.
- Find or create a data sheet to record the student's progress. This will help keep mastery information clear and organized.
- As the student makes progress, use a prompt fading procedure to systematically increase independence.

For Further Reading

www.appliedbehavioralstrategies.com/basics-of-aba.html

www.bbbautism.com/prompting_and_fading.htm

Endnotes

¹Meadan, H., Ostrosky, M. M., Santos Milagros, R., & Snodgrass, M. R. (2013). How can I help? Promoting procedures to support children's learning. *Young Exceptional Children*, 16, 31-39.

²*Ibid.*

³Wolery, M., Holcombe, A., Cybriwsky, C., Munson Doyle, P., Schuster, J. W., Jones Ault, M., & Gast, L. D. (1992). Constant time delay with discrete responses: A review of effectiveness and demographic, procedural, and methodological parameters. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 13, 239-266.

⁴Seaver, J. L., & Bourret, J. C. (2014). An evolution of response prompts for teaching behavior chains. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 47, 777-792.

⁵Striefel, S., & Wetherby, B. (1973). Instruction-following behavior of a retarded child and its controlling stimuli. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 6, 663-670.

⁶Cronin, K. A., & Cuvo, A. J. (1979). Teaching mending skills to mentally retarded adolescents. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 12, 401-406.

⁷Meadan et al. (2013)

⁸*Ibid.*

Graphic services supported in part by EKS NICHD Grant U54 HD083211 to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development. vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu