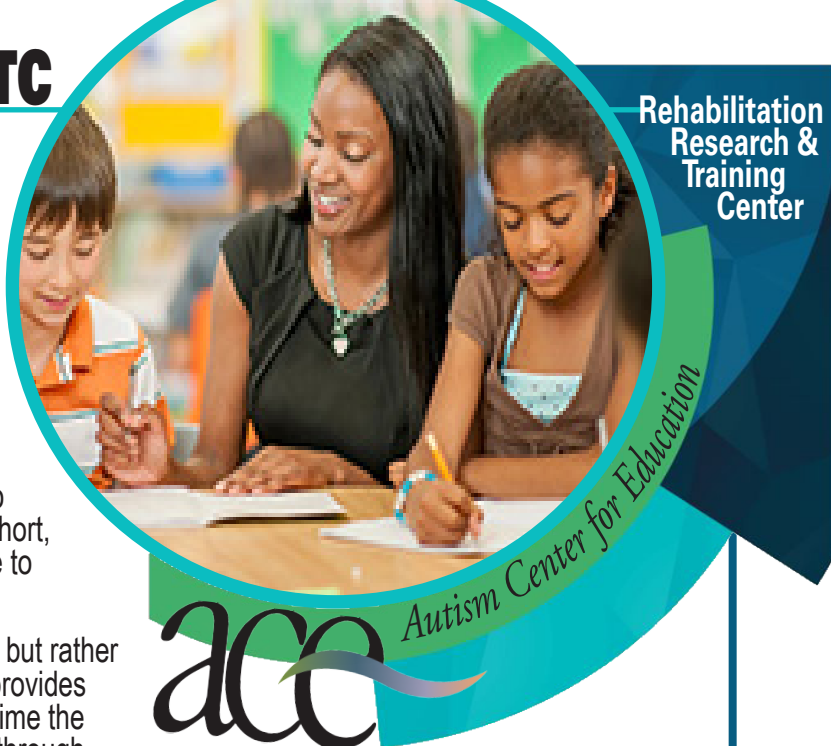


# Creating a Task Analysis for Instruction

For students with autism, a task analysis will be one of the most valuable strategies in the educator's toolbox. Autistic students often benefit from having complex skills broken into small observable behavior steps. A task analysis, or TA for short, is a list of the steps that a student must perform in sequence to successfully complete the skill or task.

A task analysis is not a task list or a checklist for the student but rather a tool for the person teaching the new skill. A task analysis provides structure, ensuring that a skill is taught the same way each time the student engages in the activity or task. It is important to run through the task with student to see how they may choose to complete the task. Using a well-written TA as part of an instructional program can provide the consistency that is needed for skill acquisition and can be used to teach virtually any type of skill!



## HOW TO DEVELOP A TASK ANALYSIS

Follow the steps below to develop a TA today using our [Task Analysis Template](#)

### ***Perform the Skill and Write Down the Steps***

- The best way to develop a task analysis is to perform the skill yourself.
- Write down ONE "behavior" for each step as you complete the task.
- Depending on how complicated the skill is, the TA may be many steps or just a few. For instance, the number of steps for opening a door may be less than for learning how to play a computer game.

### ***Customize to Each Student***

- Writing a TA requires knowing the student's skills and abilities.
- A student with more intensive support needs may need a task broken down into smaller steps.

**EXAMPLE:** The student may be learning to purchase a snack at the snack bar. One of the steps in the task might be, "get your change." During instruction, the data collected shows that the student always needs the most intrusive prompt to complete this step in the task. Break this step down into smaller component steps such as:

|                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Reach in your back pocket | 3. Open the purse      |
| 2. Take out your coin purse  | 4. Select two quarters |

### ***Plan Data Collection Method***

- When designing an instructional strategy, it is important to plan data collection methods.
- Easily collect data on the frequency of correct or incorrect responses and intensity of prompts for each step on the TA (Gesture, Verbal, Model, or Physical).
- Look for any areas the student is having difficulty learning specific steps in the task. Break down steps as needed to better facilitate skill acquisition.
- Collecting data on the student's progress helps the teacher know when they have learned the task and ready to move to the next skill.

## TIPS FOR WRITING TASK ANALYSIS

1. **State steps as observable behaviors.** Begin steps with an action verb. The student must do something in each step resulting in a visible change that can be easily observed.

**EXAMPLE:** The teacher is developing a TA for a student to leave the cafeteria and go to class, which includes finding an empty seat in the classroom. The teacher includes a step in the task to, "look for an empty seat." The student may turn his head however, it may be difficult to observe if the student is actually scanning the room for an empty seat. A better option for this step might be, "walk to an empty seat."

2. **Word steps as verbal cues.** Use the wording from the step on the TA as the verbal prompt. Writing steps as verbal cues can assist with providing consistent prompting during instruction. This is useful if a system of least prompts is being used as the instructional strategy.
3. **Keep concise with only one behavior per step.** Some Autistic students may respond better to short, concise verbal cues. Long verbal cues as steps may be confusing and actually slow down progress rather than facilitate learning. In addition, longer verbal instructions are likely to include more than one observable behavior per step.
4. **Consider efficiency.** When writing a TA, consider how the student can efficiently and quickly complete the task. Examples of this would include using both hands with the least amount of movement and sequencing steps for optimal completion. If the student is performing a step more efficiently/effectively as written, modify the TA to match the student's abilities and use the revised TA for instruction.

**EXAMPLE:** A student is putting away toys after a leisure activity. If the toys are small, the student could pick up a toy in each hand and place them into the storage area completing the task more efficiently. Picking up one toy at a time would lengthen the amount of time it takes to complete the task as well as require more physical effort than using both hands simultaneously.

5. **Build natural cues and compensatory strategies into the TA.** Students with ASD may not pay attention to cues that can help them learn a skill or complete a task. This is true for naturally occurring cues, such as the school bell ringing to go to the next class, or compensatory strategies, such as color-coded text used in an activity to sequence the steps. Cues and strategies should be explicitly stated as a step in the TA and incorporated into instruction so the student learns to attend to cues as he or she learns to perform the skill.

6. **Build quality requirements into the steps.** Some tasks require a specific quality standard. In this case, the student should be required to perform the task exactly as the steps are in the TA. It may be tempting to accept an approximation of the step if the student performs without prompting. However, even if the result is the successful completion of the task, the student may learn the error instead of the correct way of completing the task. If a step is not completed correctly, the teacher needs to provide instruction as specified in the instructional program.

**EXAMPLE:** A student learning how to brush her teeth may not know how to complete the task so that the end result is clean teeth. The steps in the task analysis could be written so that if completed successfully, the student's teeth are clean to a quality standard. For example, teach the student a specific pattern of brushing each area of her mouth.

- Top right (outside then inside)
- Bottom right (outside then inside)
- Top left (outside then inside)
- Bottom left (outside then inside)
- Top front (outside then inside)
- Bottom front (outside then inside)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A TA is a tool or component of an instructional program. The teacher will also want to incorporate visual supports such as a written/visual checklist for the student, identify prompting and reinforcement procedures, as well as data collection methods to use. Please refer to these resources from VCU-RTTC-ACE.

- [Preschool How To: Visual Supports](#)
- [How To: Visual Supports](#)
- [How To: Visual Prompting](#)
- [Designing Instructional Programs for Skill Acquisition](#)
- [Using Prompts to Promote Skill Acquisition](#)
- [Using a Least to Most Prompts Teaching Strategy](#)

For additional information, visit the ACE website:  
[www.vcuautismcenter.org](http://www.vcuautismcenter.org)

**Reference:** Brooke, V., Inge, K.J., Armstrong, A.J., & Wehman, P. (1997). Supported Employment Handbook: A customer driven approach for persons with significant disabilities. Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center.

