

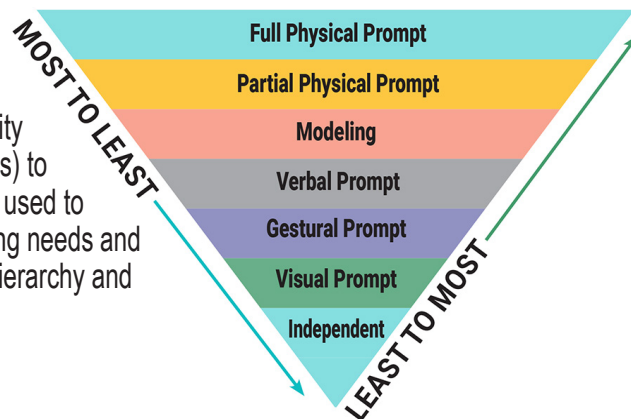
Prompting

Prompting is an evidence-based practice and an integral component of effective teaching. Prompts are instructional cues that provide additional support within a learning environment. Prompts help reduce errors, foster independence, and build student confidence. While educators and families often use these cues naturally to promote success, a thoughtful, systematic approach to prompting ensures consistency across the team. Whether used in a group setting or tailored for a specific student, prompts provide support needed when learning new skills.

To use these supports effectively, we must first establish a foundation of high expectations. When teaching students with autism and other disabilities, it is essential to presume competence. This means believing that all students are capable of learning, thinking, and understanding. Part of presuming competence is giving students an opportunity to try a new skill independently, rather than assuming they will need support.

● The Prompt Hierarchy

A prompt hierarchy organizes prompting strategies based on their intensity of support. Prompts exist on a continuum from least intrusive (no prompts) to most intrusive (physical prompts). Aiming to promote independence, it is used to teach skills by selecting an initial prompt level based on individual learning needs and gradually fading prompts. The table below defines levels of the prompt hierarchy and provides examples using the handwashing process.



LEAST TO MOST ↓	Hierarchy of Prompts	Description	Handwashing Example
	Independent	No guidance is needed; task is completed alone.	Student washes hands without any instructor support.
	Indirect Verbal	Verbal instruction that gives a hint about how to do a task or what comes next.	Saying, "Check the schedule."
	Gesture	Nonverbal cues such as pointing, tapping, or head nodding, to motion towards an item or location.	Pointing to the faucet to signal turning off the water.
	Direct Verbal	Verbal instruction that tells the student exactly what to do.	Saying, "Get the soap."
	Model	Showing what to do by demonstrating part or all of the task.	Instructor scrubbing their own hands.
	Partial Physical	Light touch that guides the student to complete part of the task.	Touch on the student's elbow to reach for a paper towel.
	Full Physical	Hands-on assistance to help the student complete the step or task.	Instructor guides the student's hands to use the paper towel to dry off.

**Always honor assent and assent withdrawal for partial or full physical prompts*

● Least-to-Most Prompts Teaching Strategy

Least-to-most prompting is a key element of Systematic Instruction, an evidence-based practice designed to foster student independence. Using a least-to-most prompting strategy allows the student to attempt the task on their own before being provided a more intrusive prompt. To implement a least-to-most prompts teaching strategy:

1. **Provide Direction:** Give direction for the task you want them to complete.
2. **Provide Wait Time:** Watch to see if they complete the task.
 - a. If the student completes the task, reinforce them for a job well done and record the task as completed independently.
 - b. If the student does not complete the task or completes the task incorrectly, begin a least-to-most prompting procedure.

3. Use Least-to-Most Prompting Strategy

- Repeat the direction for the student, while providing the least intrusive prompt (see flow chart). For example:
 - a. If the direction was presented verbally, the next prompt is a gestural prompt.
 - b. If the task was presented using a natural cue, such as handing the student a worksheet, the next prompt would be a verbal prompt, "Write your name on your paper."
- If the student does not respond or responds incorrectly, provide instruction with a higher level prompt.

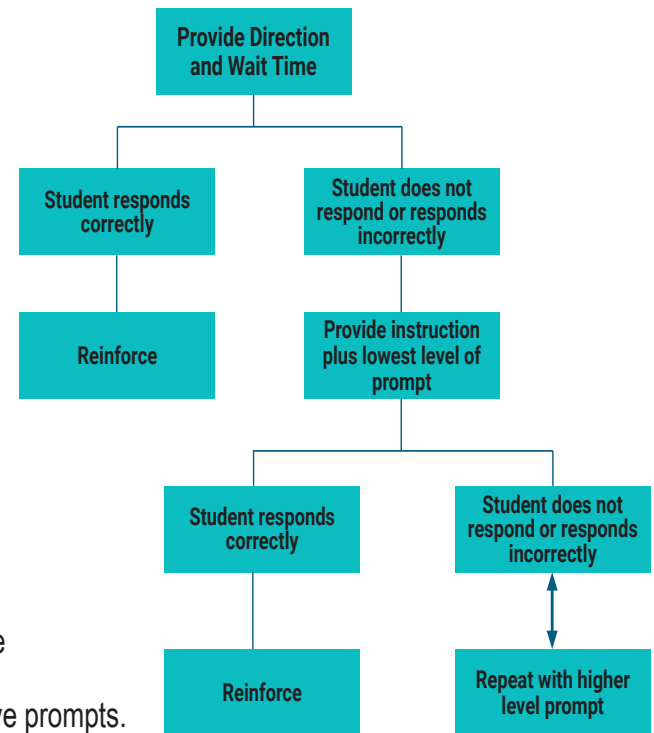
NOTE: If a student finds it hard to "unlearn" a mistake, try using errorless learning. This means providing enough help right away so the student is guaranteed to get it right. By preventing mistakes from happening in the first place, you ensure they practice and learn the skill correctly.

4. Collect Data and Monitor Progress

- Establish clear criteria for fading to less intrusive prompts.
- Record the current prompt level required for task completion to ensure the educational team provides coordinated and consistent support.
- Monitor student progress and adjust instruction to provide less intrusive prompts.

5. Fade Prompts

The ultimate goal of using prompts is to provide just enough support to ensure success without creating "prompt dependency." Fading is the systematic process of reducing or removing prompts as a student's skills improve. By reviewing data collected on the prompt level, teams can determine if the student is making progress and requires less intrusive prompts. Having a plan for fading prompts is essential in building student independence.



● Resources

- [Systematic Instruction Factsheet](#)
- [Systematic Instruction Learning Path](#)
- [Data-Informed Decision Making for Educators](#)
- [Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules \(AFIRM\): Prompting](#)

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