Response and Stimulus Prompts

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A prompt is something that is added into the environment to help elicit a correct response from the learner. There are two different categories of prompts: stimulus prompts and response prompts. Under the two categories are various types of prompts that can be used, depending on the student and situation.

Response Prompts

Response prompts are used directly in conjunction with the response. The three major types of response prompts are:

Verbal Instructions – Verbal instructions are used in many teaching contexts and can occur as:

- Vocal verbal instruction such as telling a student or providing some oral assistance to help aid the response, or
- Nonvocal instructions such as written words, pictures or signs to help the student with the response.

Modeling – the response or desired behavior can be modeled by an instructor, adult or peer.

- For modeling to be effective the student must have some prerequisite imitation skills and attending skills

Physical Guidance – an instructor will partially physically guide the student through a component of the response or the entire response.

- This type of prompt can be more intrusive than other response prompts and will not be effective with a child who is resistant and averse to physical touch.

Stimulus Prompts

Stimulus prompts are used in conjunction with the antecedent to help elicit a correct response when the discriminative stimulus or instruction is presented. The three major types of stimulus prompts are:
**Movement Cue** – occurs when an instructor identifies the correct response by pointing, touching or looking at the item.

**Position Cue** – occurs when the target item is placed in a different position than the rest of the items to help elicit the correct behavior.

**Redundancy Cue** – occurs when one or more dimensions of the target (such as color, size or shape) are exaggerated and paired with the correct response.

**How to fade the various prompts**

It is often crucial and necessary to use various types of prompts to help a student learn a skill or behavior. It is just as important for the prompts to be eliminated or faded and for the behavior to occur in the natural environment. The fading process should ideally be done without evoking any errors from the student and quickly enough to eliminate any prompt dependency. The four major types of fading procedures are outlined below.

**Most-to-least Prompts:** The instructor physically guides the student through the entire performance and then gradually reduces the amount of assistance needed. A typical fading sequence could be physical guidance to visual prompts to verbal instructions to no prompts.

**Graduated Guidance:** During this fading procedure, the instructor follows the student’s movements closely with their hand without touching the student. As the student is successful, the instructor will change the location of their hand to be less intrusive. An example could be moving the instructor’s hand from the student’s hand to elbow to shoulder to no prompt.

**Least-to-Most Prompts:** During this procedure, the student is given the opportunity to perform the response with the least amount of assistance. The student receives more physical prompting as they make an error.

**Time Delay:** This occurs when a time interval is implemented between the presentation of the direction and the presentation of the prompt.

It is important to note that physical prompts should be used for behaviors that are physical in nature and intended to be independent — for example, teaching a student to dress him or herself. The prompts should be delivered from behind to help fade when appropriate. Similarly, verbal prompts should be reserved for behaviors that are verbal in nature. Keep in mind that it is harder to fade verbal prompts than physical prompts.