



BRIEF RESEARCH REPORT

MOST TO LEAST PROMPTING

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Support Needed

Learners with disabilities may require prompted support to successfully learn a new skill, or perform a newly acquired skill, before performing the skill independently.

Proposed Intervention

Most-to-least (MTL) prompting involves the use of the most-to-least intrusive prompt hierarchy to deliver prompts across sessions. MTL prompting is a fading strategy that is commonly used to teach new skills where the most intrusive prompt is used until the learner demonstrates success with that prompt. Then the next most intrusive prompt is used until all prompts are faded out entirely. For example, a prompt hierarchy can progress from a physical prompt, to a verbal prompt, to a gestural prompt, before the prompt is no longer required.

Theoretical Rationale

MTL prompting is an effective procedure to support learner acquisition of novel skills or mastery of newly acquired skills through the use of prompts, positive reinforcement, and corrective feedback. MTL prompting is an example of a limited error learning strategy that fades prompt intrusiveness as long as the learner meets set task criteria during trials. Ongoing monitoring of learner progress is required to make treatment decisions (e.g., when to use a less intrusive prompt) to avoid prompt dependency and to ensure that the feedback delivered, either positive or corrective, is appropriate to the learner and the skill being learnt.

Research Evidence

A large proportion of the research on the effective use of MTL prompting has been conducted on learners with autism and developmental disabilities. MTL prompting has been shown to be effective in teaching a diverse range of skills to learners across various ages; from teaching numeracy in early childcare settings to teaching vocational skills and life skills to adolescents. Research comparing the system of least prompts and MTL prompting has shown that although mastery can take longer when using MTL prompting, it can also result in lower error rates, is more suitable when the instructor is unfamiliar with the learner's history or current level of performance, and supports the maintenance of skills once prompts are removed. There is also some research to show that the use of MTL prompting can be combined with time-delay instruction as a way to improve its efficiency and allow the learner to respond independently before the delivery of the prompt.

Conclusion

When selecting a prompting procedure to support learners with disabilities, MTL prompting is considered to be a suitable first choice, or default. However, MTL prompting needs to be adjusted according to the individual progress of each learner and may vary depending on the skill being learnt. Therefore, learners need to be assessed regularly when this prompting strategy is used.

Verdict

Special educators can confidently use MTL prompting to teach new skills to learners with disabilities, even when they are not yet familiar with the learner's history or current level of performance.

Relevant Reference

Foran-Conn, D., Hoerger, M., Kelly, E., Cross, R., Jones, S., Walley, H., & Firth, L. (2021). A comparison of most to least prompting, no-no prompting and responsive prompt delay procedures. *Behavioral Interventions*, 36(4), 1024–1041. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bin.1808>