RBT® CHEAT SHEET · BEHAVIOR ACQUISITION · C.7

Prompt levels and prompt fading

Prompts get a learner to the right answer so you can reinforce it. Fading them is how the skill becomes the learner's own.

A common prompt hierarchy

Full physical	Hand-over-hand guidance through the whole response. Usually the most intrusive.
Partial physical	A light touch or partial guidance. Graduated guidance gives only as much contact as needed.
Model	You show the response.
Gesture	A point, nod or other movement toward the answer. A quiet gesture is one of the least intrusive.
Verbal	Words or sounds that tell the learner what to do.
Independent	The natural cue alone: the instruction, the materials, the situation. The goal.

Plans differ on which comes first. Follow the hierarchy in your client's plan.

Two kinds of prompts

Kind	What changes	Examples
Response prompt	You act on the response: tell, show or guide	Verbal, gesture, model, physical
Stimulus prompt	The materials change	Correct card bigger, brighter or closer; an added color or picture cue

Some textbooks call a point at the correct item a stimulus prompt. The test: if the materials change, it is a stimulus prompt.

Least-to-most vs. most-to-least

	Least-to-most	Most-to-least
What comes first	A chance to respond with little or no help	The most help the plan calls for
Then	More help only if the response does not happen within the wait time	Less help as the learner meets the criterion at each level
Errors	Possible before help arrives, so it is **not** errorless	Few or none: an errorless procedure
Example	"Put on your shoes." Wait 5 seconds, then "Shoes on feet," then a model, then physical help only if needed.	Mr. Okafor folds towels: hand-over-hand, then partial physical guidance, then a model, as he meets each criterion.

Time delay

- A pause between the instruction and the prompt.
- **Constant:** 0-second trials first, then the same fixed delay on every trial, such as 4 seconds.
- **Progressive:** the pause grows gradually: 0, 1, 2, 3 seconds and so on.
- Success looks like answering before the prompt.

Stimulus fading

- Gradually remove an exaggerated feature of the materials until only the natural stimulus remains.
- Grace traces dotted letters that get lighter and fewer until she writes on a blank line.
- The response stays the same; only the materials change.

Your part

- Deliver prompts the same way every time.
- Record the prompt level on each trial.
- Stuck at one level for many sessions? Share the data with your supervisor; do not change the procedure.
- **Errorless learning** prompts early (most-to-least, 0-second delay, stimulus fading) so errors are unlikely.

Exam traps

Least-to-most or most-to-least? Ask what comes first: a chance to respond, or the most help.

Least-to-most is not errorless. The learner can make an error before help arrives.

Constant or progressive? If the delay grows across sessions, it is progressive.

Accidental prompts: glancing at the correct card or always placing it in the same spot can become the cue the learner follows.

Never fading leads to prompt dependence: the learner waits for help they no longer need.

Stimulus fading or shaping? Stimulus fading changes the materials. Shaping changes which form of the response is reinforced.

Read the free lesson

C.7 Prompt and fade prompts: errorless, least-to-most, stimulus fading, and time delay

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