

What Is It?

Teachers can use **visual supports** in many ways to provide students with supplemental information about classroom procedures and assignments. This wide category includes photographs, drawings, maps, written words, lists, and organizational tools (i.e., activity schedules and planners).

Visual supports promote self-management behaviors and task completion, and prepare students for times of transition. Common examples of visual supports include schedules, first-then boards, lists of expectations/rules, social contingency maps, emotional regulation supports, and arranging the classroom to decrease distractions.

When to Use It

Visual supports have a wide number of uses:

- To support students who are having difficulties learning what to do during an activity, or to provide students with choices
- To help students remain on-task and complete assignments
- To prepare students for transitions and changes in schedules
- To support one individual student or the entire class

Steps to Implementation / How to Do Its

	1. Determine which activities the student is having difficulty remembering how or what to do.
	2. Select the type of visual support that is needed.
	3. Determine which steps of the task need to be supported visually.
	4. Decide how the student will be reinforced for using the visual support.
	5. Review the visual support with the student.
	6. Implement the visual support.
	7. Review the steps completed with the student and set new goals.

Example

Alex is a 6th grade student who has a difficult time remaining on task and engaged in his school work. Alex often gets out of his seat during instruction and requests constant trips to the restroom. According to Alex's world history teacher, Mrs. Ramirez, Alex often turns in incomplete assignments. She also notices that Alex often becomes agitated and slams his hand on his desk when he feels confused. The FBA determined that Alex is having difficulties remaining on-task and completing assignments as an attempt to escape completing the assignments.

The behavior team creates a behavior intervention plan and decides to implement a visual support to support Alex's in-class independent work. Specifically, Mrs. Ramirez creates an activity schedule that lists the five steps necessary for Alex to complete his assignments in sequential order. Mrs. Ramirez puts a blank check box at the end of each step. She explains to Alex that as soon as he completes five in-class assignments, he will be rewarded with free time on the computer.

After Alex completes a step, he is prompted to raise his hand for the attention of Mrs. Ramirez or the classroom paraprofessional. They check his work and put their initials in the check box to indicate a completed step. The teachers provide verbal praise and encouragement for each completed step, and give directions for completing the next step on the activity schedule. At the end of each class period Mrs. Ramirez checks Alex's work and discusses his progress. Mrs. Ramirez records the percentages of Alex's work completion at the end of each day.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- Keep in mind that visual supports are most effective when they are easy to follow and students understand how to complete each step independently.
- Break down complex assignments or routines into a list of tasks or steps to be completed sequentially. Identify a goal to work toward (i.e., three days of 100% activity completion earns a trip to the prize box).

Resources

Bryan, L., & Gast, D. (2000). Teaching on-task and on-schedule behaviors to high functioning children with autism via picture activity schedules. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *30*, 553-567.

Pierce, K., & Schreibman, L. (1994). Teaching daily living skills to children with autism in unsupervised settings through pictorial self-management. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, *27*, 471-481.