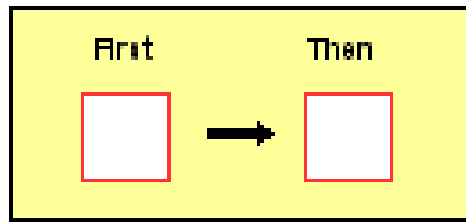


FIRST-THEN STRATEGY



A first/then board is a visual aid that can provide students with information about instructions without having to rely on others to repeat directions. It can also be used to clarify expectations and give information on the sequence of events in a logical and structured way. A first/then board can be a tool for reinforcement and to assure students about when reinforcement will occur. Unlike most students, students with an ASD may not be intrinsically motivated to please their teacher or their parent, guardian and caregiver. For these students, it may be necessary to use the promise of an external motivator or reinforcer for completing tasks the student may not engage in independently. If students have the expectation clearly represented for them to refer to, they are more likely to complete non-preferred activities. Using a first/then board can also be the first step towards learning to follow a visual schedule. This is a very flexible visual tool that can be used with a variety of tasks, motivators and environments.

Things to Consider

- Have you identified strong motivators for the student?
- Does the student already respond to symbols, pictures or text?
- Have you identified activities or tasks that the student has challenges completing?
- Does the student constantly ask questions about when they will be able to access a preferred item/activity, about when a scheduled event will occur or what's next?
- Does your student have a limited number of activities they will readily engage in?
- Does the student resist certain activities?

Materials

- First/then board (laminated paper, card paper, etc.)
- Visuals of motivators and tasks and activities that the student has to complete
- Motivator(s)/ Reinforcers (toy, activity, game, etc.)

How to Teach

1. Begin by introducing the board with two preferred items or activities. The goal at this point is to teach that activities depicted follow a structured and predictable sequence. Give the verbal explanation of what the board depicts as you point at the pictures.
For example: “First cutting, then story”
2. After the student appears to understand the order of the activities/items on the board, introduce an activity/item that is not as preferred prior to a preferred activity/item.

Tips and Strategies

- Only give the verbal instruction once. If the student becomes distracted or resistant, silently redirect them back to the first/then board (point to the board, etc.) to remind them of what to do.
- You will need very powerful motivators for the activities that are less preferred by the student. Similarly, if the activity is neutral you can use “smaller” or less powerful motivators.
- Follow through with expectation. Do not allow access to the motivator if the student hasn’t completed the first activity. If the task you are asking the student to do is particularly difficult or non-preferred consider modifying it so the student only has to complete a part of it before accessing the motivator.
- For example, if writing their name is particularly challenging for the student, only require them to write the first letter of their name before accessing the motivator. Over time you can increase the demand.
- Make sure the first/then board is readily available for the student to refer to while completing the activities.

Variations

- The visual depictions of the activities and motivators can be removed from the board by the teacher or student after completing each task. This will make the completion of activities more salient.
- Concrete materials could be used if the student is unable to use pictures of print.
- Similarly, written words can be used for the student who is reading.ⁱ
- For more advanced students, you may be able to put more than one activity under the “first” portion of the board. Introduce this only after working through the steps described in the “How to teach” section above.