



CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING ROUTINES WORKBOOK



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Seven Characteristics of a Quality Routine

In her book *Communication: A Guide for Teaching Students with Visual and Multiple Impairments*, Linda Hagood (1997) identifies seven characteristics of a well-developed routine:

1. **The beginning and end steps of the activity are clear to both the teacher and the student.** When you signal the beginning of the routine, you immediately begin the routine; when you signal the end of the routine, you immediately end the routine and move to the next activity.
2. **The sequence of steps should be simple and predictable**, especially during the initial phases of implementing the routine. Once the student begins to demonstrate greater independence and engagement, the routine may be expanded for more complexity.
3. **The student should have multiple opportunities to respond within the routine.** The object of the routine is not only for the student to develop ability and independence within a task, but also to increase communication skills. To address this goal, there should be ample opportunities for the student to practice communication.
4. **Interactions are reciprocal between the adult and the student.** Rather than actions and interactions being primarily teacher-driven, there should be a balance between the number of turns taken by the adult and the student.
5. **Objects and actions are used to cue responses from the student rather than verbal or tactual prompts.** Using your voice or touch to cue a student may result in “prompt dependency” on the part of the student. Focusing on the objects and actions that are a natural part of the routine will enable the student to attend to their own actions within the routine and self-prompt with greater success.
6. **Rather than requiring more complex, multi-step interactions, simple responses that the student is currently able to perform are targeted.** Examples of simple student responses include glancing, reaching, moving toward, vocalizing, performing a step in the routine, requesting assistance or continuation of an activity, handing an object, imitating, taking a turn, continuing



to interact with the person and/or object in the routine. A developmentally appropriate communication assessment can help identify simple responses to be targeted.

7. **All features of the routine should be consistent each time it is implemented.** This includes the people who engage in the routine with the student, the sequence of steps and interactions, the objects that are used, the location in which the routine occurs, and also the time of day that the routine takes place. This consistency will provide greater predictability on the part of the student. On the other hand, while routines should be consistent, they should not be static. A routine should change as the student's skills change. When the student has shown, through demonstration of skills, that he or she is ready for more participation, the routine is modified to accommodate this.

(Kitchen, S. & Baltisberger, S., 2017)



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Creating a Routine: Guiding Questions

What events happen multiple times during the typical day?

- What are the steps involved in the process?
- How does the student know it's time to begin?
- Which steps does the student complete independently?
 - Spectrum of Independence:
 - *Total Assistance* - adult assists with each step
 - *Partial Assistance with Prompting* - student can complete parts of a task, particularly when provided with cues and prompts
 - *Environmental Prompts* - student can complete steps of task with visual/object cues in a predictable setup (such as sequence box)
 - *Complete Independence* - student completes a step/multiple steps on their own with no prompting from their communication partner
- Does the student show anticipation for the steps?
 - Anticipation can look like:
 - Change in breathing
 - Turning body
 - Facial expressions
 - Vocalizations
 - Reaching for the next item in the sequence
- Does the student actively participate?
 - Refer to the above "Spectrum of Independence"
- How does the student know the activity is over?
 - Completion can look like:
 - Each step from the routine has been completed
 - All items have been used and/or placed in the finished basket
 - Verbalizing, "all done," singing "finished" or "goodbye" song
 - Student assisting in cleaning up, if appropriate

What objects are used within this routine?

- Which of these objects does the student touch/manipulate?
- Which of these objects is the student able/responsible for retrieving/putting away?





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Creating Activity Routines

Some students may not be ready for routines centered on learning a skill or completing a task (making a snack, toileting, brushing teeth), but may be able to participate in and enjoy a well-designed activity routine. Activity routines can build skills such as joint attention and turn-taking, as well as help a student to begin to understand that objects have meaning and can be used to communicate.

Using the student's likes/dislikes inventory:

- What activities does the student really enjoy participating in or doing?
 - blowing bubbles
 - banging on the desk
 - playing in water
 - watching a lava lamp
- What are potential steps that could be involved in the process?
 - Beginning - student touches the bubble container
 - Middle - student enjoys joint attention with communication partner while using/watching the bubble gun
 - End - student participates (perhaps coactively) in putting the bubbles in the finished box
- Which steps does the student:
 - actively participate in?
 - show anticipation for?





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Choosing Symbols to Represent Routines

When choosing symbols to represent a student's routine, especially while building the understanding that one object can represent an entire activity, it is important to select objects that the student directly touches during the routine. For example, using a calculator to represent "Math Time" may not have much meaning to a student who does not actually use a calculator during Math. Instead, thinking about what activities make up "Math time" for this student and then using objects from those activities will likely carry more meaning and help the student better understand what is happening next.

- **What steps will the student perform in the routine?**
 - To help the student build correlation between objects and the activity it represents, use an object that the student routinely touches and/or uses during the routine. An object that is only used by an adult or another student during the routine will not necessarily carry meaning for the student if they do not use it themselves.
- **What objects does the student have physical contact with during this routine?**
 - Consider which object the student seems to recognize most consistently in connection with the routine. This would likely make a good choice for a representative symbol.
- **Are there multiple backups for the original object?** (Is it easy to replace with an identical object?)
 - If the object is very unique or specific, and there is only one, this could be problematic if the object becomes lost or misplaced.
- **Is the family using something similar at home?**
 - What objects do the family use in their hygiene routine? Mealtime? Using consistent objects and steps in the routine when possible helps the student generalize concepts and skills across environments.





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Sequencing Tools for Routines

Routines are a great way to introduce and expand concepts such as sequential order and time, working from left to right, and beginning, middle, and end. The way a routine is set up and presented to a student helps create anticipation for how many steps are involved in the routine, how many steps are left, and how long it will take until they are finished. It is a logical and incidental way for a student who is a tactile learner to observe the objects, the number of steps, and the order involved. There are many different ways to set up and organize a routine - and what works for the same student in one routine may need to be a little different for another. The following are some examples of ways to structure and sequence your routines.

One-step Routines:



For students who are emerging in their ability to meaningfully participate in routines, or who are working on completing a one-step task, having only one object or a one-slot sequence box may be beneficial. This allows the student to understand where to focus their visual or tactile attention.



In this chocolate milk routine, the object the student will be using is the pre-made bottle of milk and chocolate syrup. The empty bottle can serve as the object symbol for the routine, while also being used within the routine when the student shakes the bottle. As the student begins to anticipate and participate more within the routine, this one-step routine can be transitioned into a multi-step routine, where the student starts to engage in more steps of making the chocolate milk.



Multi-step Routines:

For routines that involve multiple steps, it may be beneficial to use a sequence box initially to help the student learn the steps of the process and the purpose of the various objects within the routine. As the student becomes more familiar with the objects and the steps of the routine, it may become appropriate for the student to begin assisting with setup by placing them in order within the sequence box. Eventually, as the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the objects and their use within the routine and other activities, using the sequence box may not be needed.



For this cooking routine, the student's apron hangs on the back of the chair, and the finished box waits behind the sequence box. The ingredients and utensils needed for the routine have been pre-loaded into the slots in the order that the student will use them. With consistent setup and use of this routine, teachers can provide a functional way for a student to acquire skills and learn about the ingredients needed to create the recipe.



This hygiene routine is set up in the bathroom, where one would naturally do grooming activities. The items needed for this routine have been preloaded into the sequence box.

A sequence box is a great way to teach the concept of completing routines, but it is not the only way to teach working from left to right to set up or complete the steps of a routine. In the following examples, the symbols are displayed from left to right and mounted using Velcro. The student is still able to preview the number of steps in the routine by exploring the symbols on the board and to work from left to right to completion.





The tactile symbols for the steps of the student's morning routine are placed from left to right, in order, on a whiteboard with horizontal Velcro strips. Below the whiteboard, a small clear shelf with a small container is used as a finished box for the student to place the symbols after completing

the steps of the routine.



Perhaps the student would benefit from having access to a portable routine; in this case, the Velcro is attached to a cookie sheet. This allows the teacher or student to move the cookie sheet to multiple areas in the classroom for different routines. It can also travel easily to different parts of the building.



For this assembly routine, the student works from left to right to gather the objects needed to fill the bags. The objects are placed in different colored baskets. Rather than using a sequence box to assist the student in moving from left to right, the baskets themselves are placed next to one another.

Routines help students attach meaning to objects which supports their development of key foundations of literacy. Routines are one way to help a student begin to understand that objects have meaning and that one object can represent an entire activity, eventually helping the student to progress to more abstract representations such as



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partial objects, photographs, tactile symbols, and braille and/or print. The student's learning media can be incorporated into the routine, building the student's literacy skills as they are supported in following directions and participating in completing routines.



Printed directions combined with photographs and print support this student in delivering drinks to school staff.



The ingredients and coffee pot are ready on the countertop, and the instructions outlining the steps for a common morning coffee-making routine are available in the book for the student using tactile symbols. It is important to remember that the routine's written steps, whether in print, braille, or tactile symbols, provide a static way for the student to look back and confirm the order if needed. No matter how familiar,

sometimes we all need a reminder of what comes next in a recipe or how much of an ingredient to use. Step-by-step written instructions for any routine provide the same support to a student while supporting literacy.





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Options for Organization

Organizing your student's work area is one of the best ways to set up both your student and sensory team for success. When a space is systematically and intentionally organized, it becomes an anchor that helps your student anticipate what comes next and supports consistent instruction. Having the written steps and right materials within arm's reach ensures the routine is implemented with fidelity, directly driving student progress and success while encouraging active participation.

Using and Storing Routine Sheets:

Documenting the steps in a routine encourages each staff member to complete the routine in the same way, using the same language. This is particularly important if new staff, such as a new hire or substitute, must step in to support the student. In addition to using consistent language and materials, documenting the steps also ensures consistent expectations of the student's role within the routine. Any staff member will now know which item is used, in what order, and to what extent the student can participate in each step of the routine.

Just like teacher lesson plans, there are a variety of ways to store these sheets to maintain accessibility to all staff. Some options include:

- printing a paper copy and having it in the student's work area in a binder or folder;
- printing, laminating, and posting the steps to the routine on the wall or table in the area where it is to be completed;
- storing a shared electronic copy in a Google folder for the entire team and family to access and keep updated.





In this example, the student's toileting routine is printed and posted next to the toilet. The steps are outlined in order, with the staff's verbal prompt or script and the observable action expected from the student. This ensures consistent vocabulary and prompting from the staff, as well as consistent expectations for the student throughout the routine. While the student does not currently read braille, the routine has a braille overlay to provide exposure should the student touch the instructions. This approach also makes it simple for anyone to record

data to show the student's progress toward independence within steps of or the entire routine.



This student's calendar area includes their calendar system (the black now basket and the larger green finished basket, which are labeled by pink post-its), as well as the student's symbols (a mixture of tactile symbols and real objects), a posted dictionary of the student's known symbols and their corresponding routines and activities, and a green folder with the routines printed and in the order they occur throughout the day. A clearly labeled,

simple area ensures access for both staff and the student.

Setting up Student Work Areas:

A designated area for the student to complete certain routines can help increase anticipation and predictability, while also expanding conceptual understanding. For example, it would make sense for certain routines to occur in the kitchen (snack-making, washing dishes, sorting silverware), but perhaps not in a bathroom or at the student's desk. Likewise, performing the steps of a hygiene routine in the bathroom could help the student to understand that there are also different reasons that people use the restroom.

Storing items for specific routines in consistent areas also helps both students and staff know where to locate items when needed. Some items, such as food or dishes, may naturally be stored in predictable locations, such as a cabinet or closet, but it may



benefit everyone for items used in more arbitrary routines to be stored in a labeled bag or container.



In this student work area, the symbols are labeled and hanging against a high-contrast background. In an orange seven-slotted sequence box, the student's daily calendar is available. At the front of the table, a blue four-slotted sequence box contains the objects needed for the next routine in the student's day.



The opportunity to practice routines in their naturally occurring environment helps a student build context and understanding. While chairs and shelves may not normally be in a bathroom, they create an organized and predictable way for the student to access the materials needed for routines centered around grooming and hygiene. The materials for each student's unique routine are stored in differently colored Tupperware containers labeled with each student's name and tactile symbol.



As a student's anticipation for and understanding of the objects needed during a routine increases, it may be possible for them to begin to rely on the items needed for a routine in their naturally occurring places, rather than in a container or sequence box. In this example, some students are still using a labeled container or bag, while others locate their items when they are consistently stored on a bathroom shelf near the sink.





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Implementing Routines

When do I introduce a new routine?

Almost any activity can be structured into a routine. Some students need routines to learn and acquire new skills and concepts, while others may benefit from the structure of multiple routines across the school day (Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired [TSBVI], n.d.)

Some things to keep in mind when implementing a new routine are:

- **What is the student's communication mode?**
 - The key vocabulary and steps of the routine must be taught in a way that is accessible to the student.
- **What activities are preferred?** What are hobbies or things the student chooses to do? (Likes/Dislikes Inventory)
 - Structuring preferred activities into routines can be a great way to begin introducing routines. This allows the student to learn how to work through a routine while doing an activity they enjoy. It also provides opportunities to practice vocabulary associated with the activity. Similarly, this structure can help support introducing or working through non-preferred tasks or transitions. Again, the structure of the routine provides predictability and an opportunity to learn and use associated vocabulary, while also giving students a way to practice the task with support from an adult.
- **Where does the student prefer to go, and who does the student prefer to be with?**
 - Including preferred people and locations in routines is another logical way to gain the student's interest in the routine and learn and use the names of preferred people and places.



How do I introduce a new routine?

Initially, the student should be able to observe you completing the steps to better understand the purpose of the routine and the objects that are associated with it. For a student who is a tactile learner, this can be done through hand-under-hand observation. Initially, the expectations for the student's participation may be only joint attention and observation. If a student is unable to independently complete some or all of the steps of a routine initially, this does not mean that the routine is not appropriate. Instead, the student may begin by only participating in certain steps of the routine, and expectations for the student's participation level can increase as the student begins to learn and understand the routine.

It is important to be very consistent in the language and steps of the routine. Routines should be repeatable. Doing a routine once and never repeating it with the student is not a routine; that is simply an activity. When implementing routines, it is important to do the same repeatable steps, using the same language, in the same place, and with the same materials. Consistency in the way a routine is completed is critical - and consistency across home and school environments can also help to build and generalize skills.

When can I change the routine?

The student should clearly anticipate the steps in a routine, and there are other signs that a student is ready for changes. As the student begins to show signs of anticipation for what is next in the routine, if the student has become bored or is ready for the opportunity to problem-solve, or if the teacher is introducing a new skill, it may be an appropriate time to begin to change the routine. Small changes made one at a time are best.

Some considerations for how to begin to adjust a familiar routine are:

- **Change the staff member** who completes the routine with the student, adjust the time of day, or switch the location in which it occurs, if appropriate.
- **Switch the order** of two steps within the routine - for example, if the student always applies deodorant before brushing their hair in the morning hygiene routine, what happens if the deodorant and hairbrush are switched?



- **Add another step** to the routine. Perhaps the student can choose a new or additional ingredient to add to a familiar trail mix routine?
- **Increase the student's participation** level in an appropriate step of the routine. Is the student able to help retrieve an object for the routine? Could they assist in cleaning up a part of the routine?

(Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired [TSBVI], n.d.)



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Evaluating Your Routine

Once you have established a routine with your student, you can re-evaluate the effectiveness of this routine by thinking of Linda Hagood's seven characteristics and asking yourself:

1. Is there a clear beginning and ending to the routine?
2. Is the sequence of steps simple and predictable?
3. Does the student have ample opportunities to participate and/or respond?
4. Are interactions between adult and student reciprocal?
5. Are there opportunities to increase student independence by using object or action prompts rather than voice or touch cues?
6. Are simple student responses targeted?
 - Is the student able to perform the expected responses?
7. Has the routine been implemented consistently over time?
 - Are there modifications to your schedule or organization that could increase consistency?
8. Were the student's interests incorporated into the routine?
9. Did the adult and student enjoy the routine?
10. Will the teacher be able to document progress based on the student's participation in the routine?

(Kitchens, S. & Baltisberger, S., 2017)



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Glossary

- **Activity routine** - a repeatable series of actions used to build a skill (such as joint attention, visual attention, reaching, etc.), rather than complete a task
- **Communication partner** - a person engaging in interactions and conversations with the deafblind individual
- **Cue** - a hint about what the student should do (tapping the soap dispenser when the student is washing their hands)
- **Joint attention** - shared focus between the communication partner and the student on a specific object or activity
- **Natural Cue** - the environment or objects within the routine serve as the cue
- **Prompt** - a directive about what you would like the student to do ("It's time to use soap.")
- **Routine** - a repeatable series of actions or events
- **Symbol** - an abstract representation (object, word, tactile symbol, picture) of a concept
- **Tangible symbol** - objects, partial objects, 2-D symbols (pictures or line drawings) used to represent a concept and communicate (Rowland & Schweigert, 2000)
- **Turn-taking** - back and forth exchange





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