

What is Time Delay?

Time delay is a prompt fading strategy. With time delay prompting, you fade instructional prompts by inserting a delay between giving an instruction and stepping in and prompting. There are two types of time delay prompting:

- *progressive time delay*: the time between giving the instruction and giving a prompt is gradually increased
- *constant time delay*: a fixed amount of time is always used between the instruction and the prompt.

Time delay is considered to be an error-minimizing prompting method. That is, we use this method to prevent a child from making a lot of errors while learning a new skill.

What types of skills can I teach using Time Delay?

Time delay can be used to teach almost any type of skill, including:

- ✓ Communication skills
- ✓ Imitation
- ✓ Academic skills (e.g., number identification or sight word reading)
- ✓ Daily living skills (e.g., grocery

- shopping)
- ✓ Leisure Skills
- ✓ Social Interactions

How do you do it?

A detailed description of how to correctly use time delay can be found in the books listed under resources. We present a brief description of how to use time delay here.

Step 1: Find your controlling or effective prompt.

With both progressive time delay and constant time delay, you first have to decide on a “controlling prompt.” This is a prompt that ensures a correct response. For example:

- *learning sight words on flashcards*: the controlling prompt might be telling the child the word on the flashcard.
- *imitation*: the controlling prompt might be to physically guide the child to imitate the action.

A controlling prompt should be the least amount of prompting necessary to ensure a correct response.

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Time Delay:

A prompt fading strategy where instructional prompts are faded by inserting a delay between the instruction and the prompt..

Step 2: 0-second delay trials

In both types of time delay, you start out by immediately prompting the child (we call this a 0-second delay). You give the child the instruction or present the stimulus, like a flashcard, and then immediately prompt the child to respond correctly, using your controlling prompt. You then reinforce this response.

After a few trials of this (it may vary from child to child), you start adding a delay between the instruction and the prompt.

Step 3: Delaying the prompt. This is where progressive and constant time delay differ. With *progressive* time delay, you gradually increase the time between the instruction and the prompt. Thus, you might do five teaching trials with a 2-second delay before prompting. You then might start waiting 4 seconds before prompting, again giving the child a chance to respond independently before the prompt. Typically, once you get up to a 5 or 6-second delay, you stop increasing the delay and continue teaching with that delay until the child has mastered the skill. With *constant* time delay, the delay is

fixed throughout the prompt fading. After doing your 0-second trials, you immediately start using a fixed delay – typically 4-5 seconds. Thus, you give the child the instruction or present the stimulus, such as the flashcard, and then wait 5 seconds. If the child does not respond within the 5 seconds, you prompt him, using your controlling prompt.

Are there any prerequisites?

Waiting for the prompt: With constant time delay, it is important that a child knows to wait to be prompted if he is uncertain of the correct response.

Are there any cautions?

Yes. To use this instructional strategy successfully, the child must respond consistently to the controlling prompt and be able to wait. Otherwise, he may start to make lots of errors. If that happens, use a different instructional strategy.

For information on the research behind time delay, see Research Brief #1: Time Delay.

Resources

Wolery, M., & J.S. Wilbers, eds. (1994). Including children with special needs in early childhood programs. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

For video clips of progressive time delay:
<http://www.spiesforparents.cpd.usu.edu/>

M. Snell & F. Brown, eds. (2005). *Instruction of students with severe disabilities*. Merrill Prentice Hall

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