How to...Conduct a Task Analysis & Create a Behavior Checklist

Consultants sometimes find that the positive 'behavior' they would like to target for an intervention plan is actually a global term that refers to a cluster of related behaviors. For example, the goals "participates in discussion groups", "solves math word problems", and "is prepared for classwork" each contain multiple smaller behaviors that must all be done successfully in order for the larger goal to be accomplished.

A *task analysis* is the procedure that consultants can use to convert a comprehensive goal into a series of discrete, specific, teachable behaviors that can then be formatted as a convenient checklist. This article outlines best practices (Kazdin, 2013) for conducting and making use of a task analysis.

How to Approach the Task Analysis? There are several ways that you as a consultant can proceed in conducting a task analysis.

- *Use common sense.* First, you can adopt a common-sense approach and simply help the educator you are working with to divide an overarching behavioral goal into its logical skill-components.

- *Observe successful models.* Alternatively, you can observe successful behavior models that match your behavior goal and convert your observations into a task-analysis. For example, if you need to create a checklist for a 4th-grader on how to join a play group appropriately during recess, you might observe several typical students on the playground who have mastered that skill and use your resulting notes on their techniques to task-analyze positive group-joining behavior.

- *Ask an expert.* Finally, for behaviors that are more specialized, you can ask an expert to assist you in defining and organizing those behaviors into a sequence. For example, if you need to task-analyze proper hand-washing for a student's behavior plan, you might first consult with the school nurse about a recommended protocol for washing one's hands.

Conducting the Task Analysis. The process for converting a larger behavioral goal into a list of sub-skills via task analysis can seem simple and straightforward. But it does require attention to ensure that no important skill components are omitted, that those components are sequenced in the proper order, and that the client is capable of mastering the requirements of each component. Here are the steps to conducting the task analysis:

1. *Break the larger behavioral goal into component elements.* The initial step in carrying out a task analysis is to divide the more global behavior into its skill components. Each sub-skill should be specific and stated in clear, observable terms. Here is a good question to ask as you write each sub-skill: "*Is this component defined so clearly that I can verify through direct observation that the client is or is not performing it?*"

2. *Sequence the skill components .* When you have listed each of the sub-skills that make up the larger behavior goal, place them into the order or sequence in which the client is to engage in them.

3. *Adjust the units of behavior as needed.* After a checklist has been generated, you can adjust its components to encompass larger or smaller units of behavior--depending on such factors as the client's age, cognitive ability, and familiarity with the behavioral expectations contained in the checklist. For example, a task analysis for the global goal ""is prepared for classwork" might include a component for maintaining a neat work area. For an older student, you might phrase this skill component more generally as "the student has cleared the desk and laid out work materials". However, for a younger student who has not yet learned how to set up a neat work

area, that task analysis might instead present the orderly-workspace requirement in 3 smaller behavior units: "The student has (1) cleared the desk of unnecessary materials; (2) placed the course textbook on the desk; and (3) arranged pen and paper for note-taking."

Putting Behavior Checklists to Use. As a consultant, you will find many uses for behavior checklists. Both students and educators can employ checklists as an aid before, during, and after any situations in which they should be using a sequenced set of behaviors.

For example, *students* may:

- preview checklists as a pre-correction strategy just *before* they transition to settings or situations in which they must conform to a specific set of behavioral expectations;

- use checklists to evaluate their behaviors periodically *during* activities to record in real time the degree to which they are following behavioral expectations;

- rate their behaviors on a checklist *after* an activity to provide a summary evaluation of the degree to which they were able successfully to display those behaviors.

Adults too can benefit from behavior checklists. For example, educators may:

- use checklists as a concise means to train students in behavioral expectations;

- look over checklists that outline the intervention elements that they are to use with students-- just *before* they move into an activity, setting, or situation in which they must deliver that intervention. This prompting strategy can help them to remember to correctly implement all intervention elements;

- rate their behaviors on a checklist *after* an activity to track their success in implementing a student intervention;

- create checklists that script the steps of a student's behavioral intervention plan and use those checklists to train other adults who work with the student to follow that plan with integrity.

Reference

Kazdin, A. E. (2013). *Behavior modification in applied settings* (7th ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

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Task Analysis Example: Class Presentation Checklist

Checklist Item
❑ TO PREPARE FOR A CLASS PRESENTATION:
❑ I have determined the overall purpose and specific objectives of my presentation.
❑ I have selected a specific topic.
❑ I understand my audience and what it knows about the topic.
❑ I have arranged my material in a way that makes sense for my objectives.
❑ I have outlined my presentation.
❑ I have created visual aids.
❑ I have practiced (and timed) my presentation.
❑ I have checked out the room in which I will be giving my presentation (set-up, sight lines, equipment, etc.).

Task Analysis Example: Math Word Problem: 7-Step Self-Check

Checklist Item
1. **Reading the problem.** I read the problem carefully. When I do not understand part of the problem (such as a vocabulary word), I try to figure it out before going forward.
2. **Paraphrasing the problem.** I put the math problem into my own words--and keep at this step until I feel that I am describing the problem correctly.
3. **Drawing the problem.** I make a drawing that presents the problem as one or more pictures.
4. **Creating a plan to solve the problem.** Now that I understand what the problem is asking me to do, I make a plan to solve it.
5. **Predicting/Estimating the answer.** Using my estimating skills, I come up with my best guess for what the answer will be.
6. **Computing the answer.** I solve the problem, showing all of my work so that I can remember the steps that I followed.
7. **Checking the answer.** I check my work for each step of the problem to make sure that it is correct. I also compare my actual answer to make sure that it is close to my estimate.