



## Teaching Positive Behaviors: The Power of Checklists

Educators frequently need to define positive student behaviors so that they can teach the student to perform them; take data on them; communicate with others about them; and/or encourage the student to monitor them.

**Making Behavior Checklists.** One useful way to define a goal behavior is to break it down into a series of steps in checklist format. The process of breaking down a larger behavior goal ('task') into individual steps is called a 'task analysis'.

Creating a behavior checklist is straight-forward. Often, you can just analyze the larger task and use common sense to break it down into smaller steps. Sometimes it is also helpful to get the advice of an expert as you prepare your behavior checklist. For example, if you want to create a checklist that a student will follow to solve a math word problem, you might ask the math teacher for guidance in constructing the steps. Or, if you are developing a checklist to train a student to wash her hands, you might consult the school nurse for expert advice on the sequence of steps to include.

The sample tasks analysis below shows how the behavior goal ("The student is ready to learn at the start of class") can be converted into more specific steps that can be taught, observed, and measured.

*Behavior Checklist Example: The student is ready to learn at the start of class.*

At the start of class, the student:
<input type="checkbox"/> has a sharpened pencil.
<input type="checkbox"/> has paper for taking notes.
<input type="checkbox"/> has cleared his/her desk of unneeded materials.
<input type="checkbox"/> has homework ready to turn in.
<input type="checkbox"/> has put his/her cellphone in backpack.
<input type="checkbox"/> is sitting quietly.
<input type="checkbox"/> is working on the start-of-class assignment.

**Teaching Positive Behaviors Using Checklists.** Positive behaviors must be taught. This direct-instruction sequence can help your students to both correctly master and actually engage in expected behaviors. This framework includes four major stages:

1. **Show Them.** Using your behavior checklist as a guide, you explain and explicitly model expected ("target") behaviors.



2. **Watch and Praise Them.** Students practice target behaviors under your supervision--and you give frequent corrective feedback and praise.
3. **Practice, Practice, Practice.** Students engage in behaviors independently with your encouragement and reinforcement.
4. **Prompt Behaviors Across Settings.** With your prompting and feedback, students are able to display target behaviors appropriately across a variety of settings or situations ("generalization").

**Making Behavior Checklists.** You can use a free web-based app, the Self-Check Behavior Checklist Maker, to create customized behavior checklists. This app is available at:

<http://www.interventioncentral.org/tools/self-check-behavior-checklist-maker>

#### Reference

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