

Using First-Then

A Simple and Powerful Approach

First-Then: What Is It?

Many of us have heard of the First-Then strategy and have most likely used it at some point in our work or personal lives.

What exactly is this strategy and how does it work?

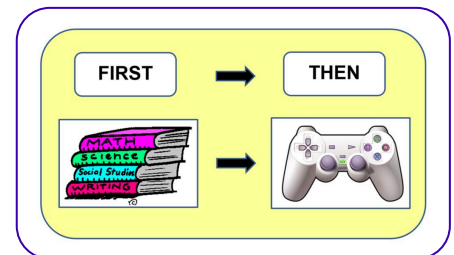
The First-Then strategy is another term to describe the Premack Principle. This strategy is one way to motivate someone to complete a task, by following that task with a preferred item or activity. By structuring a task in this way, a person is more likely to complete the non-preferred task if they know that a preferred item or activity will come after. The next time you say, "First clean up your toys, then we can go outside and play," the person is more likely to clean up their toys since they know a favourable activity will follow.

Why Use First-Then?

- ◆ to create motivation to complete a non-preferred task
- ◆ to increase independence
- ◆ to provide predictability in what will come next
- ◆ to give clear instructions
- ◆ to assist with transitions between activities, locations, tasks or events

Depending on the person's strengths and learning style, you can present First-Then:

- ◆ visually using a First-Then board with pictures or text
- ◆ verbally by saying "First put your plate in the sink, then dessert."
- ◆ visually and verbally together



How to Use First-Then

Determine the task that has to be completed FIRST. Ensure the task is reasonable and matches the person's ability. Start simple to set up for success.

Determine the preferred item or activity that will come next. This item or activity must be motivating enough to increase the likelihood of completing the FIRST task.

If using a visual, put the picture or words on the first-then board to represent the 'first' and 'then' activities.

Show the first-then board by labelling and pointing to the sequence. Say: "FIRST homework THEN videogames".

Once the first task is completed, immediately allow access to the activity or item.

Considerations

- ◆ Limit access to preferred THEN items when they are used to motivate completion of FIRST tasks.
- ◆ Remember to work towards independence by moving through the sequence with minimal assistance.
- ◆ Ensure the FIRST-THEN board is visible to the person so they can refer to it as needed.
- ◆ Consider if the THEN item is readily available and can be provided. If it is not, choose a different item.

Lentini, R, Vaughan, BJ & Fox, L. (2005). Teaching Tools For Young Children with Challenging Behavior. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida

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