

Task Analysis: Analyzing Complex Skills

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A task analysis is a written and/or pictorial list of steps that make up a complex skill. The sequence of steps written in a task analysis indicate the order in which steps should be completed. Task analyses are used every day. For example, chefs and cooks create delicious meals based on complex recipes that include specific ingredients and a specific sequence of tasks. Even a basic recipe for chocolate chip cookies can come out wrong unless you have a list of instructions and ingredients.

Task analyses have been used by the healthcare industry and other industries for a long time. For example, the World Health Organization created a “Surgical Safety Checklist” that designates steps to implement before, during, and after surgeries (World Health Organization, 2009). In aviation, pilots use task analyses in the form of checklists to designate steps regarding pre-flight inspections, take-offs, landings, and several other tasks (BAA Training, 2017).

Task analyses can also be created to teach skills to children and adults. Some examples of skills that can be taught include hand washing, brushing teeth, making a sandwich, and tying shoes. To meet an individual’s developmental needs, alter characteristics of a task analysis, such as the amount of written words, type of pictures, and the number of steps it takes to complete a task. The steps for creating a task analysis and two examples of task analyses for washing hands and brushing teeth are provided below.

Creating a Task Analysis

1. First, identify the skill that needs to be taught.
2. Determine if a client has the skills needed to be able to do the task by themselves (consider fine and gross motor skills, etc.).
3. Make sure materials needed to teach the task are available.
4. Break the skill into smaller steps and determine the sequence of steps. Write the steps down in order and provide pictures of steps as necessary.
5. Double check that all steps are listed. Do this before you work with someone on implementing the skill. You can make sure all steps are listed by:
 - Observing another person perform the skill and writing down the steps you observe.
 - Perform the task yourself using the task analysis you created. Check if there are missing steps.
 - Ask experts or other people skilled in performing the task if all the steps are present. Always contact an expert for anything that is out of your area of expertise.
6. Contact a teacher, behavior analyst, or other specialist with experience using a task analysis to help determine what teaching procedures to use and to help evaluate progress.



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