



What Is It?

Choice making is the process through which a teacher provides a structured choice to a student in order to facilitate compliance with an instructional or behavioral request.

What Do We Know About This Skill/Practice?

Choice making has been proven effective through many years of research and practical application. Research indicates:

- Choice making is a strategy that offers students increased control over their own learning or behavior by allowing them to select from two or more naturally occurring options in the classroom.
- Choice making can be used to prevent behavior problems as well as to increase specific behaviors.
- Teachers who embed choices are likely to see improvements in student motivation, on-task behavior, and task completion.
- Choice making can be used to proactively reduce problem behavior, especially among students likely to engage in inappropriate behavior as a means of avoiding or escaping from non-preferred tasks.
- Students with a wide range of disabilities (e.g., autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, emotional or behavioral disorder), who often have only limited opportunities to take control of their own learning, can benefit from choice making.

Procedures

1. **Decide when to use choice making:** In situations in which a student does not comply consistently with an instructional or behavioral request, consider allowing her to make a choice.
2. **Decide how to use choice making:** There are two common ways to provide students with choices:
 - a. **Within activity.** Offer students a choice of how to complete a task or comply with a request. This includes choosing materials (e.g., write in a journal or type on a computer), environments (e.g., sit on the carpet or at a desk), or the order of the tasks.
 - b. **Between activities.** Allow students to choose between two or three options (e.g., work on math or writing).
3. **Provide opportunities for choice making:** To avoid overloading the student, limit the number of available choices. Two or three is optimal.
4. **Praise the student:** Praise the student after she makes a choice and again after she complies with the original instructional or behavioral request.

Tips for Implementation

- To increase student compliance, offer choices for non-preferred or challenging tasks.
- Provide explicit, systematic instruction to teach, model, and practice the choice-making procedure.
- Give the student opportunities to practice making choices, offering prompts and guidance as necessary.

Things To Keep in Mind

- If choice making is to be effective, the student must first have the skills necessary to engage in the instructional or behavioral task.
- All choices must match the student's age and developmental level.
- Just as students process information in different ways so, too, should teachers offer choices through various means:
 - Picture cue: The teacher uses pictures to illustrate the choices and asks the student to select one.
 - Written: The teacher lists the choices on the board, on top of an assignment, or in a student's notebook.
 - Verbal: The teacher states the choices orally.
- Students might occasionally take a long time to make their choice. Avoid this by limiting the amount of time they have to do so.
- Choice making can be implemented with an individual student or with a group.

Implementation Examples

The table below illustrates how teachers can provide within-activity and between-activity choices.

Within-Activity Choices
<p>Students choose the order in which they complete a set of activities. Within-activity choices may include any of the following examples below.</p> <p>Material Choice: Let students choose how to complete an assignment. <i>After completing your science lab, you may write your lab report in your journal, write your report on the computer, or dictate your findings into a recorder.</i></p> <p>Environmental Choice: Let students choose the environment in which they will complete an assignment. <i>During journal time, you may choose to complete your work at your desk, on a carpet square, or at the reading table.</i></p>

Order of Tasks: Let students choose the order in which they will complete their assignments.

During language arts, you must complete all of the tasks on the board, but you can choose to do them in any order.

- Create vocabulary cards
- Read Chapter 3
- Complete the spelling assignment

Between-Activity Choices

Students choose between activities. For between-activity choices, provide a student with two to three activities from which to choose.

During math practice, you may choose either to practice your multiplication flash cards with a partner or to play a multiplication game on the computer.

Elementary Video Example

In the video below, Mrs. D. offers Navaeh choices for the alliteration assignment. Note how in the example Mrs. D. correctly implements the procedures for choice making, but in the non-example she unsuccessfully does so.



High School Video Example

Coming soon.



Foundational Research & References

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About the Author

Caitlyn Majeika is a former special education resource teacher for students in elementary and middle school. Currently, Caitlyn is a PhD student in the Special Education Department of Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. Her research focuses on using principles of data-based decision-making to enhance the implementation of behavior interventions for students who display challenging behavior in the classroom.

