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# Research in Developmental Disabilities



## Using simultaneous prompting to teach independent living and leisure skills to adults with severe intellectual disabilities

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### ABSTRACT

The acquisition of independent living and leisure skills enables adults to experience an enhanced quality of life by increasing competence, self-reliance, and the development of autonomy. This study examined the effectiveness of simultaneous prompting to teach behavior chains (i.e., independent living and leisure skills) to adults with SID individually in their home environments. Participants included two adults with SID receiving services from a not-for-profit agency that provides community-based services and supports to persons with disabilities. The results of this study are the first to indicate the effectiveness of simultaneous prompting to teach independent living and leisure skills to adults with SID using a one-on-one format in their home environment. Both participants learned three different skills within 12–28 sessions and maintained each skill 1, 2, and 4 weeks after mastery.

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## 1. Introduction

The acquisition of independent living and leisure skills enables adults to experience an enhanced quality of life by increasing competence and self-reliance (Canella-Malone et al., 2006; Jerome, Frantino, & Sturmey, 2007). These skills contribute to an awareness of strengths for persons with severe intellectual disabilities (SID) and to live a more self-supporting lifestyle and to achieve greater independence in living environments. The more skills adults acquire, the more enhanced their quality of life. Specifically, adults who gain leisure skills increase their activity level and social interactions (Jerome et al., 2007) and learning independent living skills increase opportunities to access least restrictive environments (Canella-Malone et al., 2006). Therefore, adults with SID should learn and make use of a variety of independent living and leisure skills to increase their independent functioning and their participation in living environments.

A variety of response-prompting strategies using nearly errorless learning approaches have been used to teach independent living and leisure skills to individuals with developmental disabilities. These strategies include video modeling, video prompting, and constant time delay (CTD). Video modeling includes showing a video with a person performing the task prior to each training session. After watching the video, the individual is given the opportunity to perform the entire task. Video prompting involves showing a video clip with a person performing one step of the task that is then practiced. CTD initially simultaneously delivers (i.e., 0-s time delay) the task direction and controlling prompt, minimizing errors and

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increasing student success. Once success is achieved with the 0-s delay, a predetermined length of time (i.e., 3–5 s) is inserted for responding prior to the controlling prompt allowing demonstration of transfer of stimulus control.

Research on adults with intellectual disabilities has examined video modeling (Mechling, Gast, & Gustafson, 2009), video prompting (Canella-Malone et al., 2006; Graves, Collins, Schuster, & Kleinert, 2005), and CTD (Wall & Gast, 1997) to teach behavior chains. These procedures were effective in teaching leisure skills, such as accessing the internet (Jerome et al., 2007), listening to a walkman (Wall, Gast, & Royston, 1999), and playing games such as checkers, UNO, and croquet (Wall et al., 1999; Wall & Gast, 1997). These procedures also successfully taught independent living skills, such as food preparation (Graves et al., 2005), table setting (Canella-Malone et al., 2006), and home safety (Mechling et al., 2009).

Video modeling and video prompting require the ability to operate the technology and may quickly increase the expense incurred. The additional time and money required of these two procedures warrant a more efficient means of teaching new behavior chains. When using CTD, instructors differentially reinforce responses before and following the response prompt. Because the delivery of the controlling prompt is delayed, participants must be taught to wait which may add to the total instructional time. Simultaneous prompting may be more efficient for teaching these skills.

Simultaneous prompting is an abbreviated form of CTD. Much like CTD, the task direction is followed immediately by a controlling prompt (i.e., 0-s time delay). However, unlike CTD, this 0-s delay never increases. That is, the 0-s delay is used until the behavior is mastered. Probes are conducted prior to each instructional session to measure independent responding and to assess for transfer of stimulus control. Simultaneous prompting reduces the number of prerequisite skills for instruction (e.g., waiting and operating technology), minimizing the time required to teach a new task. Additionally, implementation is consistent and uncomplicated which reduces presentation and fidelity error (Morse & Schuster, 2004; Waugh, Fredrick, & Alberto, 2009; Waugh, Alberto, & Fredrick, in press).

Only 2 studies in the simultaneous prompting research include adults as participants (Maciag, Schuster, Collins, & Cooper, 2000; Palmer, Collins, & Schuster, 1999). The first study used a small group format and taught receptive manual sign identification within an adult day habilitation program environment (Palmer et al., 1999). The second study taught a chained task (i.e., constructing shipping boxes) in dyads within a community vocational center environment (Maciag et al., 2000). This study examined the effectiveness of simultaneous prompting to individually teach adults with SID chained tasks (i.e., independent living and leisure skills) in their home environments.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants included two adults living with host families and receiving services from a not-for-profit agency that provides community-based services and supports to persons with disabilities. Pam was a 24-year-old female with SID who suffered from epilepsy, required 24 h monitoring, and took medications for her seizure disorder. She lived with her host family for six years prior to the study and attended a day habilitation facility five days a week. Pam communicated vocally, but was prompt dependent for tasks, such as making her bed and cleaning her lunch box. Don was a 62-year-old male with SID who was verbal, but unable to engage in conversation. He had lived with his host family for eight years prior to the study and attended a day habilitation facility about one day a week. Don was not on any medications.

### 2.2. Settings and materials

All probe, instructional, and maintenance sessions were conducted in multiple settings using a 1:1 teaching approach, and materials for each participant were task specific. All of Pam's sessions were conducted in her own bedroom. Materials included an iPod sound dock, iPod nano, CD and DVD players, a variety of CDs and DVDs, and a television. Don's sessions were conducted in two settings: (a) his home living room and (b) the day habilitation facility. Materials included T-shirts, underwear (briefs), jeans, and hangers. Don folded his clothes on a 2 ft × 2 ft end table at home and on a dining table at the facility.

### 2.3. Experimental design

A multiple probe design across 3 behaviors for each participant was used to demonstrate a functional relation between simultaneous prompting and steps of a chained task completed correctly (Kazdin, 2011). This design revealed an estimation of performance during baseline to help control for potential methodological problems (e.g., maturation).

### 2.4. Task analysis

Simultaneous prompting was used to teach independent living and leisure skills using total-task chaining. General task analyses were written after each step in the behavior chain was documented by the first author and then performed by several individuals. However, modifications were made during the study as needed. Nonessential steps were identified when the participant independently completed a task with fewer steps. For example, it was not necessary to press the stop button on the DVD player prior to opening it. Opening the DVD player stopped it. The order of steps in some of the task analyses was

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