

# FACT SHEET

## DISCRETE TRIAL INSTRUCTION (DTI)



DTI is an instructional approach to teaching that is found under the Applied Behavior Analysis umbrella with an extensive and strong base of empirical support. DTI has proven very effective for learners who need repeated trials as well as reinforcement of the learned behavior before it effectively enters their repertoire.

### 1 What are the components of a DTI program?

There are three major components within a DTI program:

- the antecedent - the directive or request given
- the behavior - the learner's response after the antecedent
- the consequence - reinforcement for a correct response or corrective feedback for an incorrect response

A good DTI program includes different types of prompting, task analysis, reinforcement, and modeling. DTI **always** has a strong data collection system in place to track student data on each skill. If you are setting up a program, then you must set up a data collection system to go along with it.

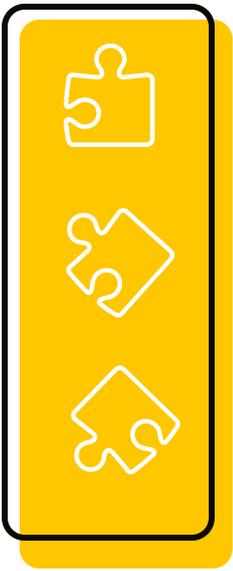
Lastly, all instructional programs should be written to include the desired behavior, the instruction that will be given, prompts, prompt fading, a criterion for when the new skill is considered mastered, and a plan for generalization. Once a skill is considered mastered it should go into maintenance, where you revisit the skill periodically to make sure that it is still in the individual's repertoire.

### 2 What can I teach using a DTI program?

DTI programs are highly individualized! The program should be detailed specifically to the student's needs and the program development should be a collaborative effort from all members of the student's team, especially their families.

Deciding what to teach is also a team responsibility. **DTI can be used to develop many skills.** There are resources (see Additional Resources) available that have prewritten programs, however, it may still be necessary to individualize the curriculum to meet the individual's needs. Furthermore, experiential training is crucial for individuals implementing the program ensuring more than just a working knowledge of the instructional strategy.

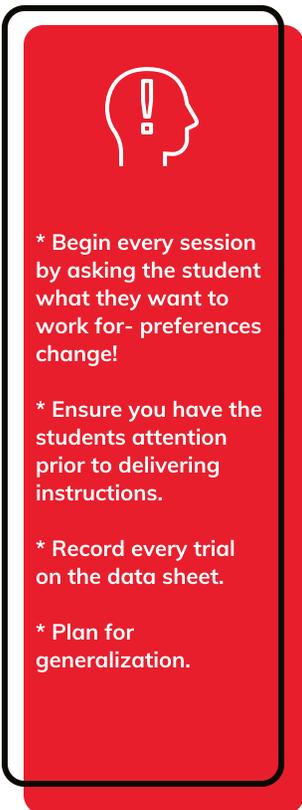
Remember, all skills that are taught should be designed with the functional or natural environment in mind. Initially, the program may seem somewhat rigid; however, as you begin programming for generalization the program should become more flexible. The individual should be able to perform the new skills with different people, in multiple settings, in different situations, and with alternate or different instructions or cues.



### 3 Getting Started:

Prior to beginning DTI, you will want to identify what is reinforcing for the student. Remember, reinforcers are not reinforcing unless selected **by** the student. Select reinforcers that are small. Edibles are particularly easy to start a program with because the individual can eat the reinforcer and be prepared for the next trial in a short period of time. If you have an individual with a feeding issue, use a toy that has a time limit embedded or an activity that is adult-directed so you will not have to pry the object or toy away from the individual.

Select a designated work area that is quiet and distraction-free. Initially, you may select to have the individual in a small environment that is away from the classroom or the family's main living areas. However, the goal is to work on training in the functional or natural environment. You should also select a table that is clean and free of extraneous materials.



### 4 Steps for implementation:

**Step 1:** Conduct a preference assessment and have the student select a reinforcer(s) to work for.

**Step 2:** The individual should:

- Be sitting in a chair, facing the appropriate direction of the task.
- Be attending to you (eye contact if possible)
- Have hands in lap

**Step 3:** Place the reinforcers on your lap or beside you so they can be quickly accessed.

**Step 4:** Get the individual's attention.

**Step 5:** Give a short, clear instruction once (antecedent)

**Step 6:** Wait 2-5 seconds (depending on the individual) to allow the individual to respond.

**Step 7:** If the individual responds correctly, give immediate reinforcement and record a correct response on the datasheet.

**Step 8:** If the individual does not respond or begins to respond incorrectly, immediately use prompting as needed to get the individual to respond correctly, then reinforce the prompted correct response. Record students' responses on the datasheet.

**Step 9:** Move to the next instruction, repeating steps 3-7

**Step 10:** Provide repetitions of each skill.

#### Skill Example-Motoric Imitation

1. "Do this", instructor touches the head with the right hand (antecedent)
2. Once the instruction is presented, immediately and manually physically prompt the correct response by taking the individual's right hand with your right hand and assisting them in touching their head. (behavior)
3. Reinforce the correct response (consequence)

## Additional Resources:

### Books:

Lovaas, I. (2003). *Teaching Individuals with Developmental Delays*. Pro-Ed, Inc.: Austin, TX  
Maurice, C., Green, G., & Luce, S. (1996). *Behavioral Intervention for Young Children with Autism*. Pro-Ed, Inc.: Austin, TX  
Leaf, R., McEachin, J., & Harsh, M. (1999). *A Work in Progress*. DRL Brooks, Inc.: New York, NY

### Websites:

[www.lovaas.com](http://www.lovaas.com): Official site for O. Ivar Lovaas