

Tutorial: Instructional Pacing

WHAT IS INSTRUCTIONAL PACING?

Instructional pacing is the rate at which instructional activities occur or at which specific “learning trials” are presented to the student. Teachers often think of learning trials as questions that they ask the student or other types of discrete student performance (e.g., completing a math problem). But learning trials can include any student activity that results in learning. Listening to the teacher talk or discussing issues with peers or working on a project can all be considered learning trials. The rate at which these activities occur is called instructional pacing.

WHY IS INSTRUCTIONAL PACING IMPORTANT FOR MOST STUDENTS AFTER TBI?

Many students with TBI have slowed information processing due to diffuse axonal injury [See  **Tutorial on Diffuse Axonal Injury**] or other types of damage common in TBI. On the surface, slowed processing would seem to require a slow instructional pace. On the other hand, many students with TBI have difficulty regulating their attention. Slow-paced tasks can contribute to losing attentional focus. Furthermore, when the instructional pace is slow, it may not be possible to secure enough learning trials (repetition) for the student to learn.

Fortunately, it is possible to resolve this dilemma. When all aspects of instructional routines are very well understood by the student, it is possible for even slow processors of information to keep up with a relatively brisk pace of instruction. There is an analogy in playing video games. Unfamiliar games seem to move very fast and it is impossible to keep up. But when the game becomes very familiar and much of the activity becomes background that one doesn't need to pay attention to, then the game seems to slow down and it becomes possible for even slow processors of information to play fast-paced video games.

It has been shown that for most students with learning and other cognitive problems, relatively fast-paced instruction is most useful (assuming they are familiar with the instructional routine: (See  **Tutorial on Instructional Routines**)). The students can more easily maintain their focus and they receive the large number of learning trials that they need.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEMES IN INSTRUCTIONAL PACING?

1. Instructional Routines: Instructional routines should be well understood and rehearsed until they become automatic. This includes the materials, the introduction, the teacher's language, the student's roles and response modes, the general progression of the lesson, and the like. Understanding and automaticity are a combined result of explicit orientation to the instructional routine and daily consistent repetition. [See  **Tutorial on Instructional Routines**]

2. Relatively Brisk Pace: Within well understood instructional routines, the pace of instruction should be as rapid as it can be tolerated by the student. When new material is presented, the pace should be slowed to the tolerance of the student, and the new material can be highlighted and repeated as needed. But during relatively routine phases of the instructional routine, the pace should be as brisk as can be tolerated by the student.

3. Slower Pace When Presenting for New Information: Instructional pacing should be slowed when the information is new or when the instructional routine has changed. It may then be useful to proceed fairly rapidly when the information is familiar and repetitive (e.g., review).

4. Modulation in Relation to the Student's Responses: Obviously the pace cannot be so rapid that it leaves the student behind. Teachers must always ensure that the student is keeping up with the lesson. This is determined by the student's attention and responses.

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