

Structured Work Systems



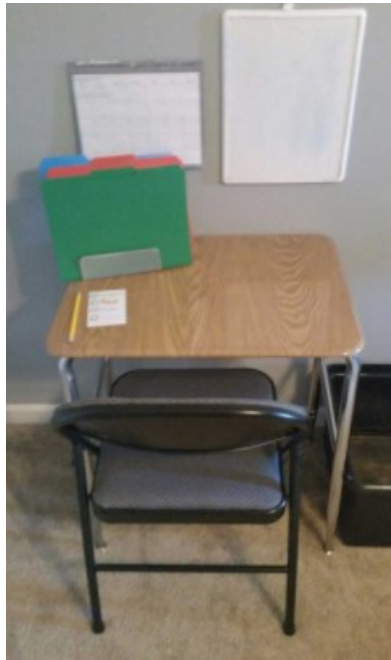
What are Structured Work Systems?

Structured work systems are a way of presenting multiple tasks so that the student or worker knows what to do, how much to do, when the work is complete, and what's next. It organizes that material to reduce potential confusion or stress in the individual. Using the work system, the student/worker can move between tasks more independently and can track his or her progress through the work. Work systems are set up with a system of work to do, a place to do work, and a place to put completed work. They also, often, include a schedule to clarify the order in which to complete the tasks.

Sample Work Systems

Sample older student work system

Work tasks are in colored folders in the file holder on left, organized front to back. There is work space in the center and a finished bin on the right. Work files contain all needed materials. A color coded schedule matches the files and is checked off as work is completed.



Sample younger student work system

Work tasks are in labeled drawers on the left arranged top to bottom. There is work space in the center and a finished bin on the right. Drawers contain all needed materials. The schedule has images matching the drawer labels so students can place the picture on the appropriate drawer to find the materials.



Sample pre-vocational student work system



Materials for work task are arranged left to right. A finished box (clear bin) is on the right for completed work. There is work space located in the center of the work space.

Why Work Systems are Important

1. Individuals with autism often struggle with organizational skills and may, as a result, have difficulty knowing where to start their work. Often behaviors occur because individuals are confused or overwhelmed, so having a work system in place that explains what the work is and where to begin can reduce the frequency of inappropriate or work-avoidant behaviors.
2. Individuals with autism may become frustrated about having to complete non-preferred activities during work time. Seeing their progression through tasks can help them understand that they are nearing the end and feel less frustrated, as a result.
3. Individuals with autism generally have strengths in visual, rather than verbal, processing. Work systems provides a great deal of information in a visual manner, which reduces the need for verbal prompting. Given its visual nature, the use of work systems may help individuals with autism better understand their expectations.
4. Individuals with autism may struggle to generalize information learned from one activity to the next, which can make work time difficult because they may not generalize their work skills from one task to the next day's tasks. Using a work system helps students see that although the work itself may change, the routine around getting and completing the work is the same, thus helping them generalize work skills between tasks.

Materials used in Work Systems

Bookshelves or **clear plastic drawers** in or on which to place tasks to do (younger students), OR plastic or metal **in-box shelves** on which to place tasks to do (older students).

A **table or desk** to use as a work space

A **large bin** in which to place completed work

A **schedule** of work to be completed that matches the labels on the tasks/drawers/shelves

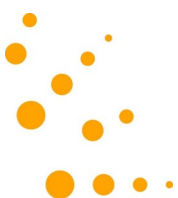
How Can I Learn More?

Articles and Websites

- Carnahan, C.R., Hume, K., Clarke, L., & Borders, C. (2009). Using Structured Work Systems to Promote Independence and Engagement for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 41 (4), 6-14.
- Edelson, S. (n.d.) *Structured Teaching--The TEACCH Method*. Retrieved from https://www.autism.com/treating_TEACCH
- Hume, K. (n.d.). *Structured Teaching Strategies: A Series Article 3: Work Systems in the School Setting*. Retrieved from <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/styles/iidc/defiles/IRCA/Structured%20Teaching%20Strategies%20Article%203.pdf>
- Reeve, C. (n.d.) *Structured Work Systems: What Are They and Why Use Them?* Retrieved from <https://www.autismclassroomresources.com/structured-work-systems-what-are-they/>
- Hume, K., & Carnahan, C. (2008). *Steps for Implementation: Structured Work Systems*. Chapel Hill, NC: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, The University of North Carolina. Retrieved from: http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/sites/csesa.fpg.unc.edu/files/ebpbriefs/StructuredWorkSystems_Steps_0.pdf

Videos

- <http://www.unl.edu/asdnetwork/virtual-strategies/work-system>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjsooRCG428>



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