Discrete Trial Instruction (DTI) programs are individualized to each learner’s specific needs and skills. Although prewritten programs exist, it is often necessary to create an individualized curriculum that addresses the learner’s specific needs. Development of a DTI program should include input from all team members, including the learner’s family. DTI should be provided by staff who have received specific training in DTI strategies. DTI can teach a variety of skills including:

- Academics
- Communication
- Play/leisure
- Social skills
- Vocational skills
- Self-help skills

When is DTI useful?

DTI programs are individualized to each learner’s specific needs and skills. Although prewritten programs exist, it is often necessary to create an individualized curriculum that addresses the learner’s specific needs. Development of a DTI program should include input from all team members, including the learner’s family. DTI should be provided by staff who have received specific training in DTI strategies. DTI can teach a variety of skills including:

Helpful Tips

- Data collection is essential to DTI; most data collection will be event recording.
- DTI programs should be written to include the goal behavior, the initial prompts, prompt fading, criteria for mastery, and a plan for generalization.
- Remember to help generalize skills across people, not just settings. The end goal is for the learner to use these skills across people, places, situation and prompts.
- Once skills are mastered, they should go into “maintenance”, which means reviewing the skills to ensure continued mastery.
- Reinforcers must be selected by the learner to ensure s/he will find them reinforcing. Sometimes learners struggle with giving up their reinforcers to start the next trial, so it is important to select reinforcers that have clear endpoints. Edibles or toys/activities with clear time limits built in (e.g., a toy that activates then turns itself off) often work better than materials that could be used for long periods of time.
- It is also important to identify a quiet work area without distractions; be sure to limit access to extraneous materials. Initially, the work area may need to be away from other people, but over time the work area can be gradually faded back into more natural environments.
What are the Steps in DTI?

1. The learner should be sitting facing the task, attending to the instructor, and should be in a place free of distractions.
2. The instructor should have the reinforcers within reach (but out of reach of the learner) for immediate reinforcement, when earned.
3. The instructor should
   a) get the learner’s attention
   b) give a simple instruction one time
   c) wait a few seconds to allow the individual to respond
4. If the learner responds correctly, the instructor should provide the reinforcer immediately. If the learner doesn’t respond or starts to respond incorrectly, the instructor should prompt the learner to the correct response to build on success.
5. Once the learner makes the correct response, the instructor should provide reinforcement.
6. The process then repeats, with data being taken throughout.

Example Skill

1. Set up the learner at the work space.
2. Have reinforcers ready.
3. Get the learner’s attention (e.g. tap, call name, etc.), then say “Do this”, instructor drives a car across the table.
4. If the learner either doesn’t drive the car or starts to do anything else with the car, the instructor uses hand over hand prompting to drive the car.
5. The instructor then provides the reinforcer.
6. The instructor notes the trial on the data sheet and moves on to the next trial.

How Can I Learn More?

Books and Articles

Websites
- [www.ku.edu/~ican/modules/behavior/dti/lecture01.html](http://www.ku.edu/~ican/modules/behavior/dti/lecture01.html):
- [www.lovaas.com](http://www.lovaas.com)

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