



## AUTISM CLASSROOM RESOURCES PODCAST EPISODE 54: 3 REASONS TO USE MINI SCHEDULES

URL: <http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode55>

Mini schedules are a type of [visual schedule](#) that often get forgotten in the classroom. We have so many [visual supports](#) that we sometimes think just the daily schedule is enough. We sometimes talk about mini-schedules as task analysis schedules or teaching schedules.

If you have followed the blog or podcast for any length of time, you know I'm a huge fan of visual supports of all kinds. I also think that when things are changing rapidly, as they are in Fall 2020 when this was recorded, that increasing visuals can reduce stress.


### What Are Mini Schedules?

Mini-schedules break down activities within the daily schedule. They can break the activities down in 2 primary ways. It could be breaking down the individual steps. So, a mini-schedule to wash hands that we use in many of our classrooms serves as visual support for the [task analysis of the skill](#).

A mini-schedule could also be used to depict shorter activities within a larger scheduled activity. For example, a morning meeting schedule that shows we are going to sign in, sing a song, and read a story so the student knows what to expect and how much he has to do before he is finished.

### Why Use Visual Schedules?

First, let me say that I don't think visuals are just for students with autism. In fact, if I had more time, I have a whole beginning of a presentation about how we all use visual schedules. I write notes to myself, priorities my daily list of things to do, and make checklists of steps to tasks I don't complete frequently. Those are all examples of visual supports.



# Why Mini Schedules are Important in Your Classroom

I think that most teachers, especially those working with students with autism, are told they need visual schedules. However, they aren't always told WHY the visual supports are so important. The full explanations are longer than I can cover in a podcast. However, these are 3 primary reasons that mini schedules, in particular, improve your instruction.

## I. Mini Schedules Encourage Nonverbal Prompting

Many of our students become easily dependent on verbal prompts, or prompts in general. For students with autism, this is because they may not attend to the relevant information in their environment. So they may attend more to the prompt than the cues of the task. For other students, it might be a similar reason. Or maybe they hear our verbal directions so frequently they come to rely on them.

So, our teaching is typically most successful if we use more nonverbal prompts. If your student can understand pictures, then nonverbally point to the picture of each step. This can then easily be faded by fading the point (i.e., moving your finger farther away, waiting before pointing to see if there is independence).

By using nonverbal prompts, your students learn to follow that first direction (i.e., "load the dishwasher"). Then the steps of the task become the cues they follow for the next step.

- You say, "load the dishwasher" and the student opens the dishwasher.
- The open dishwasher then cues him to get a dish.
- The dish in his hand then cues him to put it in the dishwasher.
- and so on.

## 2. Visual Schedules Encourage Staff Consistency

Let's face it, visual schedules aren't just for our students. Mini schedules cue the staff on the steps of a task. They remind all of us about what comes next.

This is important because when I wash dishes and you wash dishes, we probably don't do it exactly the same way. Let's say I put the dishes in the sink first and then fill it with water. But you put the water in first and then add the dishes. The order of the steps would be different whether you taught Sam that day or I taught him.

Our students need explicit instruction and they need that instruction to be consistent. If you and I teach skills with different steps or in a different order, they might eventually learn to do it one way with you and another with me. But in the end, it is going to take longer, be harder, and generally make our instruction inefficient.

Mini-schedules are set up so that the student and all the staff complete the task in the exact same way each time. Even though I put the dishes in the sink first, if the team decides that filling the sink before putting in the dishes is important, we would do it that way. So I don't prompt Sam to put the dishes in the sink before filling it.



*How to Improve Instruction with Mini Schedules*

**CONSISTENT STEPS FOR TASKS MAKE INSTRUCTION MORE EFFICIENT.**

AUTISM Classroom RESOURCES


### 3. Mini Schedules Build Independence

Finally, the most important reason for using mini schedules in the classroom is that the adult can fade out and the student can complete the task with just the schedule. This increases this student's independence.



**Am I less independent if I have  
a grocery list at the grocery  
store? Are you less independent  
if you have a to-do list?**

Yes, I know some of you are saying, but he has a schedule so he's not independent. And yes, we could eventually fade out that schedule is needed.



But am I less independent going to the grocery store with my grocery list? I think not. We are all taught to do that to improve making good food choices (not my strength)? I'm being a good shopping planner. So why would we think that a student isn't if he has a grocery schedule or a picture list.

Another example. What about a student with an AAC device to talk. I hope we would never think we need to take that away from him to help him be more independent. Because it would make him LESS independent to be without it. Why are schedules any different?

Do you have a checklist for packing for a trip? Do you have directions you look at to start your grill (if you're paranoid about blowing it up like I am)?

Long and short...if the student can go to the grocery store with a visual schedule but without an adult telling him each step, he is more independent, not less. IF he can wash his hands in the bathroom with a visual schedule he takes out of his pocket but without an adult having to accompany him....he's more independent, not less.

Those are just some ways that mini-schedules can help make students both faster learners and more independent at a variety of functional skills. If you are looking for mini-schedules you can print and use, [check out my mini-schedule bundle on TpT](#).