

# ACR 202 FINAL

📅 Mon, Jan 29, 2024 12:45PM 🕒 17:22

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

tasks, work, students, system, file folder, independent, talked, finished, materials, pieces, mastered, sorting, boxes, good, teaching, means, classroom, skills, worksheet, visual

## SPEAKERS

Veronica

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Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom, to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back. I am Chris Reeve. And I'm your host, and you were listening to Episode 202 of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. In our last episode at [autismclassroomresources.com/episod201](https://autismclassroomresources.com/episod201), I talked about the structure and materials for setting up an independent work system or work systems in your classroom.

And in this episode, I'm talking about the characteristics that your task boxes need to have to be successful at teaching independence in a work system, because believe it or not just any old task will not do. And this is part of our series on independent work that we're doing all throughout the month of February in 2024.

Now, if you're just getting started with independent work systems, and you'd like all the materials that you need to get set up, then you can grab a tutorial and all the tools you need in my starter kits or the starter bundles in my store. And you can find everything in my TPT store for independent work at [autismclassroomresources.com/independentwork](https://autismclassroomresources.com/independentwork).

And in addition, I picked this month of February 2024 because it's our theme for the Special Educator Academy this month. And that means that if you're listening when this first airs, my independent work starter kits and some of the tasks for work systems are available as part of your membership after you finish your trial.

So I've curated as well, all of our content on work systems to walk you through an efficient set of tools to get started. And they are tools to get started with work systems, tools to refine your work system, and tools to train your staff to use work systems, whatever works for you at your stage. And you can find out more about that at the [specialeducatoracademy.com](http://specialeducatoracademy.com).

Today's episode is going to focus on the characteristics of the tasks themselves. Because all task boxes are not created equally. Some might be great tasks, but if they don't have these characteristics, they aren't going to work well in a true independent work system or structured work system based on our evidence based practices. So let's get started.

Let's start with how do you choose what tasks go into your work system. So there's a couple of things that we can look at. One of the things that independent work systems are really good for, and I talked about why you might want to have them in a previous episode, I'll make sure that's linked in the show notes. But one of the things that it's good for is making sure that our students maintain the skills that we've taught them. So it gives them practice on things that we've already taught that they've already mastered. And so maintenance programs from your instruction are really good things to go into a work system.

So things that the student has already mastered with you in your instruction can go into work system. Things that they've mastered that you also want to generalize to new material also make really good tasks, because work systems are designed to teach students to do work independently. And what that means is that they have to be things they can already do, or they can't be independent.

What you're teaching with an independent work system is independence, you're not teaching new skills. If we're teaching new skills with a task, it goes somewhere else besides independent work. So independent work is great for maintenance. And it's great for generalizing to new material.

So you can do it by looking at curriculum and skills that your students have already mastered on your curriculum like your STAR or your ABLS or your HELP or things like that. You can also look at four skills that you know, you've taught that you know, the student needs more practice on, those make really good things to go into your work system.

Now, I have a blog post on table tasks, which is something I do where we use a lot of different task boxes, to keep students engaged at times where we're down to staff member for whatever reason, or while we're waiting for everybody to get into school and get started with the day at the same time. And I'll make sure that that link goes in the show notes as well.

But that's a really good time to find out what your students can do as well. So it's a good time to pull out those task boxes, see what things are independent on, and those things can go into independent work, and they can practice to other skills in Table tasks, and we can move it to independent work

when they are independent.

So I often will look for tasks that are highly motivating, things that they're really interested in. Sometimes I will make tasks that are specifically focused on a high interest of theirs. So if I have a kid who's really into Disney, I might have tasks that have Disney characters in them, I might have a file folder, if I have a kid who is really into basketball, I might have a basketball task. And in fact, I have a letter matching basketball task in my free resource library. And I'll give you that link a little bit later.

Once you've thought about what the skills are that you want to focus on in independent work, and they generally do need to be tasks that don't require verbalization, because they're doing it by themselves, so there's nobody there to listen. Eventually, you want to be able to leave a student with a work system and have them just do a series of tasks by themselves.

So it's important to recognize that, again, not all tasks that are labeled as work tasks, or work boxes, or task boxes, necessarily are going to fit into an independent work system because the independent work system is designed to give specific information about four questions I talked about in the last episode, that show the student what the expectations are: how much work do I need to do, what work do I need to do, what do I do next, and how do I know when I'm finished.

So the structure and the elements of a work system are purposeful, and I talked about that in episode 201. And the tasks chosen need to adhere to those specific criteria in order for the system to really teach independence. It's not busy work, we're teaching them to work on their own, without somebody standing behind them.

So really, the first criteria of tasks that meets this criteria is that all your tasks have to be mastered. They all have to be things that the student can already do independently, because remember, you're not teaching the skill in the independent work system, you're teaching independence at working. That is the function of an independent work system.

Now, if a student struggles, then maybe that task hasn't been generalized beyond maybe your instructional setting. So you might want to bump it down and make it a little bit easier in the new independent work context. But you can take tasks from your work time with the teacher and students in your small group instruction, in your curriculum, and put those in there. Things like file folders, things that they can practice that are typically visual motor, because again, they're not going to be able to read your story because there's not another person involved. They're not going to be able to verbally answer questions, because they're working on their own.

So think of it as kind of what we think about with morning work in a general classroom, where the students are all working at their desks independently, those kinds of things. Worksheets work, well file folders work well, things like that. Just make sure that what you're giving them is something they

have mastered.

The second criteria is that the task has to have a clear beginning and end. It needs to have a very clear starting point. And the student needs to know when something is completed. It is a visual task, because the visual nature of the work system relies on the student being able to know how to start a task and what's expected and when it's going to be complete.

So that means that if you've got more complex tasks, you may need to add visual support. So for instance, I've seen teachers that have a checklist for a student who's able to do something like a worksheet that says, cut it out, paste it on, add your name. And so those are the three steps they need to follow to do a cut and paste worksheet, and it may have visuals to show them how to do that. So we might add visual support to more complex tasks. You might have very simple tasks like a puzzle, where it's very clear.

Number three, though, is you don't want extra pieces. Similarly, you want to make sure you have all the pieces. So you want to make sure that there's no confusion. So the student knows when all my pieces are gone, then I know that I'm finished. And then you don't want to have a missing piece from say, a file folder or a puzzle, because that often is going to be a problem for students to know that they're done. If there's an empty space, how do I know I'm finished?

Now we can bump this up and this becomes something we can use to make a system more advanced. I'll talk about that in a future episode. But when we're starting, we want to make sure that there aren't extra pieces. You want to make sure that each piece in the system has a purpose and a place within the task so that the student doesn't question whether or not they're done because one of those four questions is How do I know when I'm finished.

You want to make sure that you know, it's kind of like if you open up the furniture that you're assembling and you have more pieces than you put into the furniture, did you miss something or did you have extra pieces? So we want to try to avoid that confusion for our students.

Number four, is that we want to make sure our task components are organized. Now I talked in my last episode about the need for smaller containers to organize materials. Our students typically struggle with executive functioning skills, and that means that they have a hard time organizing skills on their own.

I talked in Episode 198, about shoebox tasks, shoebox tasks are designed specifically for students that don't have the ability to organize the tasks to take it out, take the pieces out, and recognize that they need to match them. They're designed so that the task comes all together in one piece and they just work on that box and then put it away.

But as our students moved to doing, say, a file folder, rather than just throwing the file folder pieces in there, we may want to organize them in a small container. So they know that those are the pieces that go with this file folder.

We want to use bins and other methods to segment the materials. So for instance, if we have a sorting task, we don't want to just put all the materials in the box without having something to help them know how to set out the sorting. So for students that aren't at a point where they can put their materials together, I'm going to have one bin that has the pieces that are all mixed up to be sorted. And I'm going to have a bin for each category they're sorting into.

Things like ice cube trays, for one to one correspondence or matching, egg cartons are really good for this. So I have a ton of tasks on the blog and on the YouTube channel that gives you some ideas about that.

And the fifth essential element is that the completed tasks need to remain assembled. So after finishing a task, the student needs to put the independent work into the completed area the finished basket without taking their work apart. That practice reinforces the concept of task completion. And really, it mirrors a real world work scenario where undone work is not the norm. I would never ask a restaurant worker to fill up all the salt shakers, and then empty them again.

We have a tendency in classrooms to have students do things and then take them apart. That's great when it's play, where I'm building with the blocks, and now I put them away. But when I'm doing work, I would never ask a student to complete a Math Worksheet and then erase all the answers. I would want him to give it to me completed so I could check it. So you want to make sure that your work is going to stay together when it goes into the finished box.

You want to make sure that you are not asking the students to take the task apart when they are done because we want them to learn that I do my work, my work is completed, and I put it away. That also gives you the opportunity to check it. Because sometimes you will have that student who does a file folder and they just throw anything wherever there's Velcro, and they don't pay attention, that tells you you've got some reteaching to do. So it's important that we also check their work to make sure that they're doing it correctly.

So in order to make sure that things stay intact, on a file folder, I use Velcro, I don't just have a file folder where they match and then pick it up and put it away. I want the pieces to stay where they've matched them or where they've sorted them or what they've done. I want to make sure that you know I'm clipping it or velcroing it. I want it some way that it's going to stay intact, and be able to go into the finish basket because some kids will get stuck and they will pick up the file folder, all the pieces will fall off. And they'll have to open it and do it again. Because it's telling them that it is not finished.

So with these five essential characteristics in mind, special ed teachers can curate or create work tasks that are going to empower their students to work independently with confidence, with clarity, and really reduce the amount of time that people have to stand behind them and prompt them in what to do. So that sets the stage for the real world application. It reinforces positive work habits. It also builds that confidence and that feeling of success because they have finished something and it's clear to them.

So I think it's really important to recognize that this is where we're going with this. So every decision that we make with an independent work system is made with the thought of am I building the student into being more independent with this work system rather than needing more support? And am I building good work habits for them that are going to carry over into the general classroom, into other parts of our classroom, into a work environment as they get older? Those are the questions that we want to be asking as we think about the work tasks themselves.

So, five things that you want to make sure every task box in your work system has. Without those, the students are not going to be able to answer those four critical questions that I talked about last week.

If you have questions or comments about independent work, or you want to see more examples, or just questions about the podcast in general, pop over and leave me a comment on TikTok. I am @autismclassroomresources, and I'll be sure and try to come back and help.

If you want a more in depth overview with images check out our free independent work webinar at [autismclassroomresources.com/iw-webinar](https://autismclassroomresources.com/iw-webinar), iw-webinar.

Finally, if you want to come and get some resources at a cheaper price, come join us in Special Educator Academy in the month of February 2024. And you can grab free tools after your trial at [specialeducatoracademy.com](https://specialeducatoracademy.com).

I hope you'll join me next week when I'm going to be talking about the strategies we use for teaching students how to be independent with work systems. So come back, join us then, and until then, have an amazing week and I'll talk to you later.

Thanks so much for listening to today's episode of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. For even more support, you can access free materials, webinars and Video Tips inside my free resource library. Sign up at [autismclassroomresources.com/free](https://autismclassroomresources.com/free). That's F-R-E-E or click the link in the show notes to join the free library today. I'll catch you again next week.

