

# ACR 204 draft

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## 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 to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Chris Reeve, I'm your host, and you are listening to Episode 204.

And we have been talking about independent work systems this month. So far, I've talked about how to get started in Episode 201, how to set up the tasks in 202, and the teaching strategies we use in episode 203.

So in this episode, I'm going to be talking about how we take it to the next level. How do we advance the independent work system once our students know how to complete it on their own and how do we bump up their levels of independence. Because it's really, really important that we recognize that we're not just teaching this to teach this, we're moving this to where they can have a list of things to do and be able to do their work. We're moving them towards being able to be more independent in other situations in the classroom, as well as in a work environment as they get older.

So I'll talk about ways that we can change up tasks and change the system itself to fit some of our more independent students or to build our skills as they get more independent.

Now, if you are just getting started and are looking for a toolkit to get you set up with a tutorial, you can find all of my independent work materials in my store at [autismclassroomresources.com/independentwork](https://autismclassroomresources.com/independentwork) and that includes my starter kits and starter

[classroomresources.com/independentwork](https://www.classroomresources.com/independentwork), and that includes my starter kits and starter bundles to get you set up.

And I picked this topic because we're talking about it in Special Educator Academy in February 2024. So if you would like to come and get more training and get some printables to get you started, definitely come and join us at [specialeducatoracademy.com](https://www.specialeducatoracademy.com). We have tools for getting you started, for refining work systems, and for helping to train your staff to implement work systems in your classroom.

In addition, I live independent work so much, I wrote a book about it. My colleague and I Susan Cabot wrote a book called Building independence. It's got tons of pictures and examples, and you can find it at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). And I will make sure that link is in the show notes. So let's get started.

Today, I am talking about how we build and stretch our students work skills and their independence within a work system structure. So I wanted to talk about some ways that we can bump things up so that our students can be more independent as they develop skills.

Now, keep in mind that these are strategies that I would only use once a student is able to be independent at using the system itself and doesn't need assistance. So I think that's a really important thing. We want our students to learn to work independently within the system. And then we're going to start making changes, but I'm not going to make these changes until they know that they can handle them. So that's a really important component.

Now, there are lots of different ways that we can change up a system. We can keep the structure of the system the same, but make some tweaks to it.

So one thing is that once students are able to do their work at the table with the work boxes in front of them using a schedule, then we start moving the tasks away from the table. So I want them to learn how to use a schedule or eventually a list to be able to go to a shelf or a cabinet and get the work they need to do, bring it back, complete it, put it away, they'll get the next thing that they need to do. Because that's where we're going with this, we're going to where we can just give them a list of things to do and they can do it. So we want to eventually we want them to make their own list.

But our first step in this is to move the tasks away from the table itself. So I know a lot of people use a three drawer cart and I have a blog post on why I don't like them. But in short, I don't like them because they don't require the use of a schedule. You could use a three drawer cart where you mix the tasks up and they have to find the one with the right number. But that doesn't necessarily go with are working left to right, top to bottom.

So three door carts are nice and they have some great things about them. But the problem is that

So three door carts are nice, and they have some great things about them. But the problem is that they're very hard to bump up. So I want a student to use that schedule that I talked about when I talked about setting up systems, so that then they can use it to go get their tasks.

So when I set up independent work, I number all my tasks. And as students become more independent, typically they can match numbers, or I just put the numbers on so I know where they are. And I store them in a cubby or a shelf or various places sometimes. And so I want them to be able to eventually go to that shelf and get their own work, so we don't have to set it up for them.

One way to do this is we start by slowly moving their work from being right in front of them on the table, to being on a shelf next to them. So once they're able to understand a turn and get the work, and maybe the work isn't always in the same order that they needed in so they learned that they have to pick which work to get off that shelf near them, then I can start to move the tasks to a shelf across the room. Keep it simple at first and then expand so that the student can go get his materials later.

So I generally will have them numbered so that I can then just set up their schedule, and they can go get their work and do it. But we want to start small. We start our system with the tasks in front of the students, then we move it to a shelf maybe to their left, and then we start moving those tasks farther away.

Now initially, I might even put it on top of the shelf at the left before I start putting it in the shelf itself. So you decide on what level of steps you need based on the student's performance. But that's a really big way to start moving your students forward.

The next piece might be that instead of giving them a schedule with velcroed pictures to match, then I start giving the students a list of materials within the task. So I would give them a list of where to go to get the tasks. So you know, I can give them an index card, do you know work task 5, 25, 32. And then do your reinforcer or the next thing that you get to do when you're done.

Another thing that we can do, as students get independent is we can start doing what I call, we can start messing with them, we can start leaving things out of the system. Because what happens if you're doing a job, and you realize that you're missing materials that you need to do the job? Well, you need to know that you need to go ask for help. That's an important skill. That's an important skill to develop independence in.

We don't start there because it would just be confusing. But once students really know a system, and then we know that they know the task, then we might start giving them a cutting task but not putting scissors in the box, or giving them a worksheet but not giving them a pencil. I might put in a puzzle, but it's missing a piece. And by this point they're learning, they know they can't put it in the finished

basket until the task is complete. So if I sabotage the system, then often I will start by putting reminders on their desk or in their work area to remind them that they can raise their hand and ask for something.

Sometimes I want them to go get something independently, like go get your own pencil from your desk. So I may give them a visual for that. So we want to make sure that we're giving them support so they can be successful. But we can start changing things up a little bit so that they understand that maybe all the materials aren't always given to you.

Another is, especially and this is especially useful if you have students who had a tendency not to be really careful in the work that they do in their work system, is to put a raise your hand visual instead of in the what's next place. So instead of a reinforcer, it's raise your hand to get your work checked. And so the students learned that when they complete their system, they have to raise their hand and have somebody come over and check their work to make sure they got it completed correctly. And this is a way that they were giving them a cue that you should let somebody know that your work is finished. So that may be something that we want to teach them.

Number four is that we might give the students a list of materials within the task that they need to get. So I would give the student the task but I wouldn't give them all the materials, I would make a list of things they need to find in the classroom to do the task. So this might start with simply a note that says, "Get a pencil" and then it grows into a list that says, "Get the following: a pencil, notebook paper, and the stapler." And then they have to use those materials to complete the tasks that you've given them in the work system itself.

Now a fifth way that you can start to really expand this also allows you to take it into different environments a little bit easier. A basket system is hard to transfer into a new system or a new area. You know, it's hard to take a basket system, maybe into a Gen Ed environment, it's not something I would see in most work sites.

So I might use a folder work system, where I simply take a folder and I put the work to be done on the left, and the work that's completed goes in the right, and sometimes I'll put a reinforcer visual underneath the work that's to be done. You can also use something like a trapper keeper and put three folders or four folders in there, each with their own work tasks. And then the what's next visual at the end. And that becomes something that you can easily transfer into the gen ed environment, so that they can do morning work when the other kids are doing their morning work. It's a way of helping to structure that material.

The ultimate piece of independent work is when you see students using this left to right type of strategy to organize their own work. That's what we're trying to do is really enhance their executive functioning, and give them at first give them the structure, but later teach them how to use that structure.

So those are five ways we can really start to stretch their skills, and really bump up the difficulty of the work systems, as well as building the ways that they can be used with a to do list, use them a worksites, use them for homework, use them to work in a class without a system that looks like a system. We're still giving them a system, but they have internalized it to some degree.

So if you have questions or comments about independent work, feel free to pop over and leave me a comment on TikTok. I am @autismclassroomresources, and I would love to chat with you there. I will also try to put up some TikToks on different work systems and things like that.

And don't forget, if you want a more in depth overview, you can grab the free webinar at [autismclassroomresources.com/iw-webinar](https://autismclassroomresources.com/iw-webinar). You can grab everything about independent work in my TPT store at [autismclassroomresources.com/independent work](https://autismclassroomresources.com/independent-work). And if you want to join us in the Special Educator Academy to grab materials as well as training you can find out more at [specialeducatoracademy.com](https://specialeducatoracademy.com).

I hope that you'll join me next week when I'm finishing up this series. And I will be talking about what to do when your student takes more time to finish independent work than you allotted for independent work time. So come back and 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.