System of Least Prompts Procedures

Determine which skill to teach:
Discrete Behaviors, like naming pictures or reading sight words, should always be taught at least two per session (e.g., teach naming colors red and yellow together, rather than teaching only red).

Chained Behaviors, like hand-washing or completing a transition, should generally be taught as a set of behaviors rather than one step at a time (e.g., leaving activity, walking to visual schedule, choosing top picture, walking to correct area, matching pictures in correct location, entering area).

Determine which prompt to use:
For system of least prompts, you use at least two types of prompts. The first prompt used during each trial should increase the likelihood of correct responding (give the child a little help), and the last prompt used during each trial should ensure the child will respond correctly. The types of prompts be decided separately for each child and behavior. For example, a child might require hand-over-hand (full physical prompts) to share preferred items. That same child might be able to respond correctly to a gesture prompt (teacher points to the correct choice) for a receptive identification task.

Note: All examples on this page use two prompting levels, which is typical when using system of least prompts. You can use 3 or (more rarely) 4 levels of prompts, but trials may be overly long.

Data collection:
Record whether the child made a correct response or an error, and whether it was before or after the prompt.
Unprompted correct: Correct response, before any prompt.
Prompted correct: Correct response, after any prompt.
Unprompted error: Error, before any prompt.
Prompted error: Error, after the last prompt. *If an error occurs before the last prompt, move to the next prompting level.*

For each trial, start with a task direction or cue to allow child chance to respond independently.
During all trials, the child is provided with an opportunity to respond correctly and independently after you provide the cue or task direction Example 1: When a student walks to the sink (the cue to turn on the water during hand-washing), you wait to see if he will engage in the correct response (turn on water) without prompting. Example 2: You say "What word is this?" and wait to see if child will engage in the correct response (saying "red") with no prompting needed. Provide reinforcement for all *independent correct* responses. If no responses or errors occur, go to next prompting level.

If no response or an error occurs, use the first prompt (non-controlling prompt).
If an *independent correct response* is not made with a set amount of time (usually a few seconds or sooner, if an error occurs), provide a prompt that increases the likelihood of correct responding. Example 1: If a child walks to the sink and does not turn on the water within 3 seconds, you would point to the spigot (gesture prompt). Example 2: If a child did not respond when you said "What word is this?" within 3 seconds, you would point to the "r" in the word "red" and make an "r" sound. Provide reinforcement for all *prompted correct* responses. If no responses or errors occur, go to next prompting level.

If no response or an error occurs, use the second prompt (controlling prompt).
If a *prompted correct response* is not made with a set amount of time after the first prompt is given (usually a few seconds or sooner, if an error occurs), provide a prompt that ensures correct responding. Example 1: If a child did not turn on the water within 3 seconds after the gesture prompt given above, you would provide physical prompting via hand over hand assistance. Example 2: If a child did not respond within 3 seconds after you give the verbal prompt above, you would give a full verbal model of the word ("red"). Provide reinforcement for all *prompted correct* responses. If no responses or errors occur, go to next prompting level.

Mastery:
Continue instruction until a child has met the pre-specified mastery criterion (e.g., 100% correct over 3 sessions). If applicable, add new behaviors (e.g., more colors).