
Ensure Automatization through Practice and Review

By: Landmark Outreach Staff (2017)



The Landmark School Outreach Program's mission is to empower students with language-based learning disabilities by offering their teachers an exemplary program of applied research and professional development.

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Automatization is exactly what it sounds like: the ability to perform a task without conscious effort. From tying our shoes to scanning the headlines, we depend on automatic skills to get us through our days efficiently. Imagine what mornings would be like if we could not automatically shower, dress, eat, make coffee, and get to work. We would have to get up hours earlier to review the process for each task, correcting our missteps along the way. We'd start the day tired and stressed, and we would be less effective in our work and social interactions.

Automatic skills develop over time, with explicit instruction and repetitive practice. The real bonus of automaticity is that as we get "good" at something, our confidence and effectiveness increase far beyond that skill. Why? In addition to saving us time, automatic skills free up focus and working memory so we can engage in tasks requiring conscious effort more easily. In the morning, we might sing in the shower, watch the news while we're making coffee, and mentally plan our weekends while we're driving to work. The more skills we can automatize, the more ability we'll have to engage in higher-level thinking or multi-tasking, and the less overwhelmed we might feel.

This is why we teach our young students to decode text and recall their math facts automatically. Speedy, accurate decoding skills are a major contributor to reading comprehension, just as arithmetic fluency is a significant contributor to mathematical performance. We can facilitate other automatic skills, too, if we institute and follow predictable routines.

Landmark Teaching Principle™ #4: Ensure Automatization through Practice and Review

Automatization is the process of learning and assimilating a task or skill so completely that it can be consistently completed with little or no conscious attention. Repetition and review (spiraling) are critical. Sometimes students appear to understand a concept, only to forget it a day, week, or month later. It is not until students have automatized a skill that they can effectively remember and use it as a foundation for new tasks. Teachers must, therefore, provide ample opportunities for students to repeat and review learned material. For example, the Landmark writing process emphasizes practice and consistency. Students always brainstorm, map/outline, draft, and proofread in the same way. This provides them with an ongoing, consistent review of learned skills.

For the full text of Landmark's Six Teaching Principles™, including "Ensure Automatization through Practice and Review," [click here](#).

Automatic Routines Facilitate Success

In addition to specific automatic skills, such as reading or solving equations, students need automatic routines to move through their day. Whether it's coming into the classroom and getting ready to learn, taking notes, or starting a research project, good routines facilitate student success. Explicit teaching and modeling, as well as consistent, correct practice, will ensure automaticity. Follow the steps below to ensure your students develop automatic routines that will help them succeed in class.

Step 1: Identify the routine you would like to reinforce and outline the steps involved in performing it.

Example: Students start the class period ready to learn.

| Student Behavior | Instruction Methods |
|--|---|
| Bring materials to class. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• List the materials students always need.• Develop a checklist of materials to track student preparedness. |
| Enter the room and be seated immediately. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider assigning seats.• Verbalize, review, and enforce clear expectations for transition into class. |
| Hand in completed homework on time. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collect homework at the same time each day.• Identify a consistent place where students should put completed work.• Keep a list of missing or incomplete work and speak after class with students who owe it. |
| Record homework in their assignment books. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post the homework on the board in the same place every day.• Give students credit for recording their homework. |
| Have correct pages or handout in front of them when working. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post an agenda for the day's class (what topics will be covered), and write the page # or handout required for beginning class.• Provide visual cues by showing them what the handout or page looks like. |
| Open the correct notebook to a fresh page and write the heading. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teach students to start every new page of notes with a standard heading (e.g., name, date, academic subject, notes topic). |

- Provide visual cues by modeling this expectation on the board or a poster.

Practice routines daily.

- Assign peer feedback partners.
- Create an incentive for students to follow this routine.

Step 2: Model and explicitly teach each step.

Example: Show students what "ready to learn" looks like by explaining and practicing each element of the routine.

Step 3: Require students to practice the routine while you observe and cue as needed.

Example: Keep a checklist for each element of the routine while you are teaching it, and check off when students have done it properly. Remember to compliment those who are successful, and provide additional instruction or reminders to those who need it.

Step 4: Require students to practice the routine and cue each other as needed.

Example: When students have demonstrated they can implement the routine while you are watching and providing feedback, tell them that they'll now need to do it themselves with feedback from an assigned partner.

Step 5: When students can perform the routine automatically, assess their independence.

Example: Grade each student on his or her independent implementation. A simple 1-2-3 model can work well.

1 = meet the teacher for further guidance

2 = you're almost there - keep practicing (specific skill)

3 = terrific - keep doing what you're doing

Step 6: Build in repetitive practice of the routine throughout the year. Consider adding to it.

Example: When the "ready-to-learn" routine is automatic and students can generalize it to other appropriate settings, consider adding to it a higher-level skill, such as "ready-to-question" or "ready-to-summarize." Teach students to prepare a question about the class topic or a short summary of the previous day's lesson as an additional step in their ready-to-learn routine. Follow steps 1-6 to make this additional step part of the automatic routine.

Free Landmark Teaching Strategies

For some content-specific ideas about how to facilitate the development of automatic skills in your classroom, please see the attached strategies.

- **Math Tic-Tac-Toe Review**
 - **Literary Element Instruction**
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http://www.idonline.org/article/Ensure_Automatization_through_Practice_and_Review?theme=print

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