



# PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #2



projectaccess.missouristate.edu  
projectaccess@missouristate.edu  
866-481-3841

---

## VISUAL SCHEDULING

### What It Is and How to Get Started

Visual scheduling presents the abstract concept of time in a concrete and manageable form. This ability to predict time brings order and security to a person, allowing him/her to spend time learning rather than frightened or worried. The student's level of understanding will dictate what type of visual representation will be used in the schedule. Following is a hierarchy of abstraction of visual symbols from concrete to highly abstract:

- full size objects
- tangible object symbols
- miniature objects
- photographs
- colored drawings
- black and white drawings
- written words
- written phrases and sentences
- signing

Choose the type of symbol by experimenting to see what symbols the student can match. Always try to use the most adult-like type of symbol s/he is able to match, and remember to continue to instruct more advanced symbol matching through the child's school career.

**STEP 1:** Get a symbol of each current activity in the student's day. Arrange them in order. Initially it is essential to include everything the student does, i.e., bathroom, snack, reinforcers, group time, therapies, recess, lunch, etc. Once using the schedule becomes part of the routine, the student will be able to chunk, or group, minor activities into larger chunks, thus ultimately requiring fewer symbols.

**STEP 2:** Depending on the functioning level of the student, give her or him the whole day's schedule or a part day schedule. Do not present only one item at a time. The purpose of the schedule is to give the student advance notice of upcoming activities, so that he can predict what will happen to him. Place the schedule on the wall next to the student's workstation, on his desk, on a shelf next to his desk, or hanging from his belt loop. The schedule must be accessible by the student. Many students carry calendars in purses or shirt pockets, class schedules, trip logbooks, assignment books, or other visual schedules. Your student will eventually wish to carry his schedule with him like everyone else.

**STEP 3:** Instruct the use of the schedule. Teach the process of attending to the schedule. Always direct the student to his schedule immediately upon his entry into the classroom each day. The teacher will consistently look at and point to the schedule, using key phrases such as "check your schedule" instead of verbally cuing the next activity. Words disappear once said, but a concrete representation of activities can be processed more easily. For a lower functioning student, use a one-to-one discreet trial format to teach using the schedule.

**Begin by:**

- a. handing the student the visual symbol
- b. bringing his eyes to the matching visual symbol located on a container
- c. prompting his hand to grasp the container and pull it toward him while holding the matching symbol in his other hand near it,
- d. putting the symbol into the container
- e. doing the activity
- f. leaving the setting

The next step is to place two symbols side by side within his visual field, repeat the above steps with the first symbol, prompt him to look at and pick up the second symbol immediately following the completion of the first task, and finish the sequence. Continue to increase the number of visual symbols, remembering to include symbols for activities and reinforcers, as well as work tasks. While teaching use of the schedule always use previously mastered tasks (such as "put in") because you are teaching the process, not the task. Later you can put instruction of tasks into the schedule.

**STEP 4:** Teach acceptance of changes in routine by changing the schedule periodically. The student will notice the change and may become upset or attempt to return the schedule to the old routine. Allow his or her expressions of anxiety while pointing to the scheduling and referring to previously accepted activities. While pointing to the schedule, say "Yes, something has changed, but your regular (or favorite) activity is next." If the student perseverates on the schedule change, simply cue him to check his schedule. High anxiety events are generally diffused before they occur because the schedule predicted their occurrence in advance.

**STEP 5:** Begin to insert new functional/meaningful tasks into the schedule. Once you and the student have become accustomed to the use of the schedule (usually within the month, often within a few days for higher functioning students):

- a. Assemble the materials needed for a new task.
- b. Select a visual symbol to represent that task.
- c. Insert the symbol into the student's schedule
- d. Teach the new task as it occurs in his/her schedule

Create a new task about once each week or two. Gather one older task, box or bag it, label it, and store it in your closet. Later, rotate the task back into the schedule to check for maintenance of skills. Remember, IEP objectives can be taught in multiple ways, using different materials, and with different people. This is a great way to generalize!

Following are examples of visual schedules. Some symbols are attached using paper clips, Velcro, or other sticky substances. The first example is an Object Schedule, with each object corresponding to an activity. The second example is a Picture Schedule in which pictures are paired with the typed or written word. The third example is a Written Schedule.



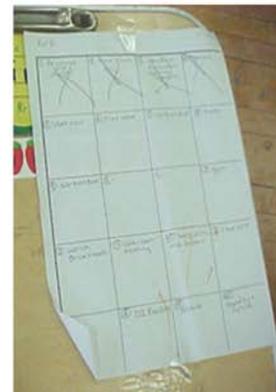
Example 3:

## Written Schedules

Written schedules are used for students who are already reading. They are very easy to develop and can change as needed. Students can use a pencil or marker to transition to their schedules and cross off each item as it is completed.



TELL ME ABOUT TODAY					
MORNING 	① Eat Breakfast 	② Go for a walk	③ Play outside	④ Clean Room	⑤ Help Make Lunch
AFTERNOON 	① Eat Lunch 	② Play Game with Charlie	③ Walk to store	④ Put groceries away	⑤ Watch TV
EVENING 	① Eat Dinner 	② Do Dishes	③ Read	④ Watch TV	⑤ Bath ⑥ Bed



© Project ACCESS 2019 \*Project ACCESS is a collaboration among the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri State University, and Missouri's public schools.