



## [Precision Teaching - an introductory guide & webinar](#)

If you're new to Precision Teaching, why not start off by watching our Webinar that gives a good, accessible starter's guide:

The purpose of the remainder of this article is to provide you with an overview of Precision Teaching and sufficient knowledge to be able to begin using the method with your students. It is strongly recommended that you also attend a SENDSuccess training on Precision Teaching. Please consult our training timetable on this link: [SENDSuccess - events](#) to find out when the next session will be or request in-school training.

Precision Teaching was initially developed by an American Psychologist called [Ogden Lindsey](#) in the 1960s and since then has become an established and evidence-based method of supporting students who experience challenges in their learning. It is often a recommendation in Assessment reports by Specialist spLD Assessors and Educational Psychologists.

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## Ineffective Intervention

Robert is a year 2 student who shows signs of dyslexia. He has difficulty decoding words with simple letter sounds and is becoming increasingly despondent about his learning. Robert received the same phonics teaching as his classmates, but he has not retained the knowledge very securely.

Most of Robert's class mates can now read books with Phase 4 and Phase 5 words. Robert tries to read the same books to keep up, but he guesses many of the words.

Robert spends 15-20 minutes a day, reading with an LSA, but he is still not making much progress in his reading.

## Why is the guided reading intervention not helping Robert?

*If Robert does not recognise phase 2 letter sounds then his reading progress will be impeded by this. Intervention needs to be **cumulative, structured and multi-sensory with opportunities for over-learning**. As well as reading practice, Robert needs **specific** intervention that will help him develop his fluency at recognising phase 2 letter sounds in words, so he can read those words. Once he is fluent at this, he can build on this knowledge and learn to read words with more difficult grapheme/phoneme correspondence.*

## The principles of Effective Early Intervention for Dyslexic Pupils

Procedural memory is defined as the memory system in charge of encoded knowledge - in other words, knowledge that is implicit and can be automatically recalled. For example, if a student is fluent at 'blending' letter sounds, they will no longer need to 'sound out' the letters when they see them in a word. A fluent reader will visually recognise these letter sounds and be able to read them speedily because they have encoded the necessary information in their procedural memory.

In order for the knowledge that underlies any skill to become 'automatic', an individual needs frequent rehearsal and exposure to that knowledge. If there is no repetition and practice of using this knowledge, fluency will not be achieved.

A dyslexic pupil needs **significantly more** rehearsal and practice to become fluent in literacy-based skills. A dyslexic learner may have a reduced capacity to encode language-based knowledge in their

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Procedural memory, so **OVERLEARNING** must be a cornerstone of any phonological and language based teaching and learning.

## **What is Precision Teaching and what kind of student does it benefit?**

Precision Teaching is an intervention approach aimed at improving a student's fluency in a skill where automaticity is required. Teaching objectives are ALWAYS specific and teaching sessions are daily, brief and timed.

We know that achieving fluency in a skill is integral to the progress of learning. For example, if a child is not fluent at identifying phase 2 letter/sound correspondence, he/she will not be able to read words with those letters and this will onto the next phase of phonic teaching. Therefore, fluency is needed to be able to generalise learning and use it in other contexts. Precision teaching can be used with any child, but may be particularly beneficial for the following students:

- Students struggling to retain basic skills or frequently used knowledge.
- Children who have a spLD (dyslexia) and need extra intervention to develop fluency in any area of reading or spelling.
- Children who have working memory weaknesses and need just to be able to 'know' things to access further learning.

## **Frequently asked questions**

### **How do you know when fluency has been achieved?**

Fluency of any skill is evident in the **accuracy AND speed** with which that skill is performed.

If a child can read a word accurately, but it takes him/her a long time to blend the word, he is not fluent at reading this word yet. That is why every session of Precision Teaching includes a timed assessment (1 minute) during which the student must read/spell multiple repetitions of the same 5-10 target items, using a grid called a **Probe sheet**.

### **What is a Probe sheet and where can I access one?**

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A Probe sheet is a grid containing the 5 to 10 items – target words/ numbers that you wish the student to learn. These target words are repeated in random order approximately 40 times.

|                                                                                                                  |     |     |     |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Name: Student B      target: Vowel digraphs</b><br><b>Date:</b><br><b>Aim rate: 37              Errors: 3</b> |     |     |     |     | <b>Example probe sheet:</b><br><br>Target graphemes are repeated in random order, so that student cannot memorise the sequence.<br><br>There are 40 words on this probe sheet. The target items are repeated in random order. |    |
| ai                                                                                                               | ee  | oa  | igh | oo  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 5  |
| oo                                                                                                               | igh | ee  | oa  | ai  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 10 |
| igh                                                                                                              | oo  | ai  | ee  | oa  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 15 |
| ai                                                                                                               | oo  | oa  | ee  | igh |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 20 |
| oo                                                                                                               | oa  | igh | ai  | ee  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 25 |
| oa                                                                                                               | igh | ai  | ee  | oo  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 30 |
| igh                                                                                                              | oo  | ee  | ai  | oa  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 35 |
| oa                                                                                                               | ee  | igh | ai  | oo  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 40 |

Use this website to create any the [Probe sheet](#) you need for Precision Teaching.

If the learning target is reading based, you and the student will need a copy each – You will listen and tick the words they can read. If the learning target is spelling-based, only you have a probe and the student writes the words that you read out from the probe.

### Assessing the student’s knowledge and setting targets

Prior to beginning a ‘teaching block’, you will need to identify between 4 and 10 ‘items of knowledge’, that you would like the student to learn, for example:

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- To be able to read words with 5 of the phase 3 vowel digraphs
- To be able to read 6 phase 2 tricky words
- To be able to spell decodable words with phase 2 letter sounds

Ensure that you have assessed the child and know what it is they need to learn. Start with the foundational items first. – If a child cannot recognise letters of the alphabet, there is no point teaching him/her to spell complex polysyllabic words.

## **Setting an Aim Rate for Fluency**

The objective of any Precision Teaching session is for the student to become fluent in their knowledge, so that they can use this knowledge to perform a skill with fluency. A fluency aim rate is the number of items of knowledge a student can read/spell in a minute which indicates that they are now fast and accurate enough to demonstrate automaticity.

There is not a magic number that indicates fluency. Some argue that correctly reading or spelling 90% of the items indicates fluency, but this will not be the same for everyone. A fluency aim rate should be more individualised.

A good way of setting an aim rate is to create a probe that contains 4 to 10 words/items of knowledge that the child already has a good knowledge of. Ask

the child to read/spell those words in a minute, using a probe sheet. How many of those items can the student read/spell/calculate in 1 minute? That indicates their fluency aim rate for a new set of words that they are not fluent in.

Remember that setting an aim rate is dependent on what you are asking the child to do in the probe. Hearing and then spelling words will take longer than reading words. The aim rate for a spelling activity will always be lower than the aim rate for a reading activity.

## **Teaching ideas**

The title 'Precision Teaching' is a little deceptive as it implies that a methodology is applied during the teaching phase. In actual fact, the teaching is not prescriptive at all.

Below are some examples of teaching

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- Start off with a quick recap:
  - Flashcards
  - Quick spelling of words with/out peeping at flashcard
  - Rote reading on number bonds or phonic cards
- Some quick fire games for **reading** words (remember, every time they see a word in the game they must read it aloud):
  - Bingo
  - Snap
  - Words on post-its stuck on things nearby....'find \_\_\_ as quick as you can'
  - Pairs memory game. Two of each word, jumbled up and placed face down on table, turn over to find pairs.
- Some quick fire games for **spelling** words (remember, every time they spell a word in the game they must read it aloud):
  - Spelling words with the word in front of them, then with as many peeps as they need, then with one peep...
  - Write \_\_\_ in green; write \_\_\_ in pink; write \_\_\_ in very large letters...
  - Writing words in a sand tray, on your back, you can on theirs IF they don't mind (check first).
  - Run to a pink post-it and write \_\_\_
  - Hopping and spelling aloud (with letter names) a word, or jumping, or bouncing....
- Some quick fire games for number bonds (remember, every time they see a pair of numbers making 10 (or 20 or 100) in the game they must say it aloud) and can be used for times table facts:
  - Snap
  - Memory pairs game
  - I have 7, find the number that makes 10

Ideally, the child comes across and practices each word or fact about twenty times the teaching session.

## An Overview of the Steps

1. **Set specific targets for the student before beginning the teaching.** The targets must be between 4 and 10 specific words or graphemes or number bonds that you want the child to be able to recognise, spell, or read fluently.
2. **Set an aim rate that will indicate the student is fluent in reading/ writing the target**

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**items.**

3. **Teach the same 4 to 10 target item, every day in 2- 8 minute slots.** This is the Teaching phase. STOP after 8 minutes. There is nothing to be gained by going over that time.
4. **Assess the student's fluency using a PROBE.** This lasts 1 minute and is the assessment phase. Start at the top, the bottom, the side to change the order each day and record how many they get right AND how many they get wrong.
5. **Track progress after 1 to 2 sessions.** You can ask the student to colour in the correct and incorrect responses they have made after each session on a [Celeration chart](#). Click celeration chart to print one out. Track the student's progress on a Celeration chart and the student will record progress after each session until the aim rate has been reached. **Once the aim rate has been maintained over 3 consecutive sessions, then new targets can be set.**
6. **Analyse learning.** After assessing fluency you track student progress on a chart. **If no positive changes are recorded after 3 days, reduce the target words/numbers. There is no point teaching 8 items, if the student is not making progress incrementally. Focus on a smaller number of items if needed.**

## Training

Please contact SENDsuccess website if you would like on-site training or check the SENDSuccess training timetable for this year.

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