

# Nonverbal Imitation

## Objectives:

1. Student learns to imitate the actions of others
2. Student learns a foundational skill upon which other important skills are based (*e.g.*, verbalization, play, social, self-help, etc.)
3. Student learns the basis for modeling which is a very important type of prompting
4. Student builds awareness of the environment through imitation
5. Student develops attending skills
6. Student learns a simple task that can be used to establish or reestablish compliance and attention

## Procedure:

The teacher demonstrates an action and provides an instruction (*e.g.*, "Do this", "Copy me", "Do what I do", etc.). Student is to mirror the action of the teacher (*i.e.*, if teacher uses right hand, he should use his left hand). The phases start with obvious large actions and progress to more subtle and refined movements. Imitations involving the manipulation of a physical object (dropping a block in a bucket) or produce discrete sensory feedback (ringing a bell) are generally easier to learn. Ones that involve moving body parts away from the body (*e.g.*, arms out to side) or a part of the body he cannot directly see (*e.g.*, nose, head) are more difficult.

If the student is having difficulty responding to varied instructions then use one or two instructions until the student understands the concept. Imitations that require the student to leave the chair or designated sitting area, perform an action and return may be incorporated as soon as possible. Such tasks allow the student to experience a greater compliance demand and facilitates generalization.

As a final step, the action will be named (*e.g.*, "Clap hands"). This builds the knowledge base for following verbal directions.

**Prompts:** Use the least intrusive prompt that facilitates the response. Gradually fade the prompt to a light touch and then a slight gesture until the student performs independently.

**Entry criter:** Student's disruptive behaviors have been reduced and do not interfere with learning. The student has foundational "learning how to learn" skills (*i.e.*, understanding contingencies, paying attention, not grabbing).

**Mastery crit:** The student consistently performs a response correctly with no prompting, making few errors. This should be repeated with at least one additional teacher across environments.

*It is critical that the objective of imitation, not rote responding or memorization, be maintained when implementing this program. If students are able to predict your movements it is an indication that observation of others is not being effectively targeted. It is important to vary imitations and the use of materials. For example, sometimes you would raise the cup to your mouth, instead of pretending to pour something into the cup.*

**Phase 1:** **Start with items that involve the manipulation of an object.** Teach each one individually in isolation. This means doing repeated trials of just that item with no other object in view. Once the student is successfully performing an action without prompting, then move in one or more distractor items on each trial. Remember, each item needs to be used in more than one way in order to build attention and establish a discrimination. For example, sometimes you should drop the hammer in the bucket, instead of using it to pound the pegs in. Once three items are able to be rotated randomly, introduce a new item. As each one is mastered in isolation it should be randomized with all previously taught items.

### Object Manipulation Examples:

Blocks - drop in container - stack on another block - tap on table	Spoon - stir spoon in bowl - put in cup - tap on table
Ball - throw ball - roll ball  - hold ball	Cup - raise to mouth - turn over  - cover item with
Car - roll car - put car on chair - crash car	Brush - Student hair - doll's hair - bear's hair
Tissue - wipe nose - wipe table - put in trash	Ring - put ring on arm - put ring around toy - put ring on cylinder
Bell - ring bell - tap bell - move bell	Sticks - tap together - tap on table - put in box
Hat - put on hat - turn hat over - put hat on bear	Truck - load dump truck - roll dump truck - unload dump truck

### **Phase 2:**

#### **Start when Student has mastered several items from Phase**

1. Choose three items from large motor list. As each one is mastered, add an additional item for training. Remember to vary your instructions, sitting down should not always be the response that follows standing up. For example, you can have the student stomp his feet or raise his hand while standing.

### Large Motor Examples:

Raise arms	Arms out to side
Stamp feet	Wave bye-bye
Pat tummy	Touch mouth
Pat head	Slap knees
Cover ears with hands	Pull hair
Touch elbow	Touch eyes

### Large Motor Examples:

Tap shoulders  
Tap table with hand  
Rub hands

Touch toes  
Stand up  
March

Arms above head and  
brought down "Make rain"

Arms making round  
shape above head "Make a sun"

Arms side to side  
"Wipers on the bus"

Hands in fists, rotating around  
another "Wheels on the bus"

### **Phase 3:**

**Imitations away from chair.** Start when the student has learned several items from Phase 2. Teach responses that involve going to a location away from the chair, carrying out an action and returning to the chair. Student should remain in the chair until teacher has finished demonstrating the action and has returned to the chair.

### Examples:

Door - knock on door  
- open door  
- stand by the door

Paper - get a piece of paper  
- mark on a paper  
- pass out paper

Car - roll down ramp  
- put away  
- crash blocks

Doll - put doll to bed  
- put doll in stroller  
- cover doll with blanket

### **Phase 4:**

**Imitates another person.** Teacher indicates someone for the student to imitate and says, "Do that", or "Copy them", or "Follow along."

### **Phase 5:**

**Once several large motor items are learned (Phase 2), add fine motor actions.**

### Fine Motor Examples:

Play dough - squeeze play dough  
- roll play dough  
- squish guy in play dough

Fingers - wiggle fingers "make rain"  
- make "OK" sign  
- make victory sign  
- point

Touch - eyes  
- ears  
- mouth

Pinch - penny and put in jar  
- buttons  
- clothes pin

This is an appropriate stage to begin oral-motor imitation. See the Verbal Imitation, Phase 2 (oral-motor imitation).

**Phase 6:**            **Continuous chain.** Once several imitations are learned from Phase 2, have the student follow along with you as you link together a series of responses. Vary the responses to maintain interest and attention and promote generalization. Start with two or three responses and then continue on with longer chains. The goal is to give a single verbal cue and defer reinforcement until the chain is completed. Chains of responses that build play skills are perfect targets. For example, walking a guy to a plastic play structure and having him slide down the slide to get into a truck and drive into the garage.

**Phase 7:**            **Advanced imitation.** Once several imitations are learned from Phase 2 and several from Phase 5, go on to finer discriminations.

**Discrimination Examples:**

Raise one *vs.* two arms  
Beep your nose with one finger *vs.* whole hand  
Wave bye-bye with right *vs.* left hand  
Tap once *vs.* two times  
Clap high *vs.* clap low

**Phase 8:**            **Two-step chains.** This requires the use of memory. Once a variety of responses are mastered from any of Phases 1-7, begin chaining responses together into two-step responses (*e.g.*, put on hat and knock on door). Start with items taught in earlier phases and gradually increase the complexity.. Demonstrate both responses while the student watches. If necessary, prompt the student to wait until the second action is completed. Then have him perform the two responses.

**Phase 9:**            **Three-step chains.** Same as Phase 8, but the student performs three steps instead of two. As an option, this phase can also be presented in obstacle course format.

**Phase 10:**

**Imitates action in pictures or video.** Present media of someone doing an action and provide an instruction such as, "Do this" or "Do what they did." This is an optional phase that may be helpful in helping students develop play, self-help or leisure skills (*e.g.*, making a sandwich, enacting a play sequence with superheros). When students can understand that a photo represents a step or series of steps such as those in a routine, photos can be used to help create schedules or used as activity prompts.

**Cross-refer:**

Imitation is incorporated into Block and Construction Materials Imitation, Play and Verbal Imitation. It also will lead into Receptive Instructions. Negation includes "Don't do this." Please refer to those programs for more information.