DRAGEN ACADEMY · FREE LESSON · PARENTS, TEACHERS, TECHNICIANS, NEW BCBAS · 7 MINUTES

How to make a skill work everywhere, not just in session.

Esta lección en español

What it is. **Generalization** means a skill shows up where it wasn't taught: with other people, in other places, with other materials. **Maintenance** means it's still there weeks later. Together they are the difference between "he can do it at the table" and "he can do it."

Why it matters. A skill that only happens with one adult, in one room, isn't really learned yet. The classic paper on this called the usual approach "train and hope": teach it in one place and hope it spreads (Stokes & Baer, 1977). Hope isn't a plan.

HOW TO DO IT YOURSELF

How to plan for generalization yourself, in six steps.

1. **Write down where the skill has to work.** The people, the places, the materials, and how long it has to last. "Asks for help: with mom, dad and his teacher; at home and at school; with any toy." That list is the real goal.
2. **Teach with more than one example from the start.** Three different cups, two rooms, two adults. One example teaches that example.
3. **Loosen up.** Vary your words, your spot at the table, the time of day. A skill taught exactly the same way every time can depend on exactly that way.
4. **Carry something from teaching into real life.** The same picture card, the same words, a classmate who was there. Familiar things help the skill show up in a new place.

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5. **Make sure it pays off out there.** When he asks for help at home, someone helps. Tell the family and the teacher what to answer, or the skill fades where it's needed most.
6. **Check, don't assume.** Every week or two, try the skill somewhere new without teaching it first, and write down what happened. That try is called a **probe**. Probe again a few weeks after mastery, to see if it lasted.

Settled: generalization has to be planned. Stokes & Baer (1977) sorted the ways it had been made to happen, and nearly all of them are built in on purpose: several examples, looser teaching, common things between settings, and real-world payoffs. The steps above are those ideas in plain words.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Leo's zipper leaves the classroom.

Made-up example. Leo, his coats and his family are invented to show the method. He is the boy from the task analysis and prompting lessons.

Leo now zips his school coat alone at the classroom hook. At home, and in his puffy winter coat, he doesn't. His team practices with both coats, with his teacher and his dad, at the hook and at the front door, always with the same words: "Zip up." Each week they probe, including one place they never teach: Grandma's house.

Probe	Week 1	Week 3
School coat, teacher, classroom	Yes	Yes
Puffy coat, teacher, classroom	No	Yes

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School coat, dad, front door	No	Yes
Puffy coat, Grandma, her house (never taught)	No	Yes

The last row is the point. Nobody taught Leo at Grandma's, and in week 3 he zipped there anyway. Two coats, two adults, two places and the same two words were enough for the skill to travel. The team probes again in a month, to check it lasted.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

Ways a skill gets stuck in one place.

- Train and hope: one adult, one room, one set of materials, and a surprise when it doesn't show up anywhere else.
- Calling it mastered at the table. It's mastered when it shows up where it's needed.
- Nobody outside the session knows the plan, so nobody answers the skill when it appears at home.
- Never checking again after mastery. Skills that aren't used or answered fade quietly.

TRY IT

One question, then the answer.

A made-up case: Mia says "dog" every time she sees one particular picture card at the table, but says nothing when a real dog walks past at the park. Which step was skipped, and what would you do?

▼ Show the answer, and why

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Teaching with more than one example. She learned one picture, so “dog” may mean “that card.” Teach with many dogs: photos of different kinds, toy dogs, real dogs on walks, and say “dog” in different places. Why: a skill learned with a single example is often tied to that example.

Something to keep

Generalization plan and probe sheet.

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Skill, so a stranger could check it

It has to work	**Where exactly**	**Taught?**	**Probe 1**	**Probe 2**
With these people				
In these places				
With these materials				
And still, weeks later	2 and 4 weeks after mastery	–		

Each probe: the date, and yes or no.

Who needs to know the plan, so the skill pays off (family, teacher, other staff)

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WHERE DRAGEN HELPS

Home and school, one plan.

Generalization is where the adults in a child's life have to work from the same page.

DRAGENfamily, the hub at home, logs what you see as it happens and shows the last two weeks as a graph, so every adult works from the same page. The paper version above works tonight.

Free on this page, and yours to keep: the lesson and its printable sheet. No email, no login.

SOURCE

Where this comes from.

Stokes & Baer (1977), *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 10, 349–367: "An implicit technology of generalization," where "train and hope" comes from. Cooper, Heron & Heward, *Applied Behavior Analysis* (3rd ed., 2020), the chapter on generalization and maintenance.

Examples on this page are made up. They contain no client, student or family information. This lesson teaches a method; it does not replace your BCBA, your program, or your payer's written rules.

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