

Fading

Fading is a core instructional strategy in special education, especially relevant when supporting students from Prep to Year 12 in special school contexts. It is designed to promote increased independence, skill generalisation, and self-determination by gradually removing supports once they are no longer needed. Fading refers to the systematic, intentional reduction of prompts, cues, or supports as a student becomes more proficient with a skill, behaviour, or routine. The goal is to prevent prompt dependency and foster autonomous, functional performance across settings.

In other words: We start with more support and slowly reduce it, enabling students to eventually perform tasks independently or with minimal assistance.

Why Fading Is Essential in Special Education

Builds independence—reduces adult over-reliance

Improves life quality—students can perform tasks in real-world environments

Enhances dignity—students have agency and choice

Supports generalisation—skills transfer across people, settings, and tasks

Promotes goal achievement—especially for QCIA, ICP and transition planning

Common Areas for Fading in Special Schools

Area	Fading Target
Communication	From physical prompting on AAC to spontaneous requests
Behavioural support	From adult-directed calming to self-regulation strategies
Academic tasks	From modelling every step to independent task completion
Life skills	From guided personal care to independent hygiene routines
Social interaction	From adult mediation to peer-based interaction
Work experience	From supported tasks to autonomous, sequenced roles

Types of Prompts That Can Be Faded

Prompt types range from most to least intrusive. Fading usually starts with more intrusive supports and progresses to less intrusive supports:

Type of Prompt	Example	Fading Strategy
Full physical	Hand-over-hand to grasp toothbrush	Reduce to elbow guidance, then verbal reminder
Partial physical	Tapping hand to point	Move to gestural prompt
Modelling	Teacher demonstrates handwashing	Student copies, then works independently
Gestural	Teacher points to bin	Student begins to respond without gesture
Verbal (direct)	"Pick up your pencil."	Replace with a pause or indirect hint
Visual cue	Using First/Then board	Fade frequency or replace with checklists or timers
Time delay	Adding pause between instruction and prompt	Allows time for student initiation

Practical Examples of Fading by School Level

Prep / Early Years (GIL or ABLES Levels)

Task: Snack routine using visuals

Start: Teacher says "Open your lunchbox" + points to visual.

Faded: Teacher waits 5 seconds → student uses visual independently.

Year 4 / ICP in Mathematics

Task: Counting with touch cues and manipulatives

Start: Teacher uses hand-over-hand to count 5 objects.

Faded: Verbal prompt only ("What's next?"), then removed entirely.

Year 8 / HPE – Behaviour Support

Task: Managing anger using Zones of Regulation

Start: Teacher directs student to break card, models calming strategy.

Faded: Student uses visual independently and initiates break.

Year 12 / Work Experience (QCIA)

Task: Cleaning workstation

Start: Task analysis checklist, modelled sequence

Faded: Checklist with visuals only → student self-monitors performance

Fading Schedule Considerations

Best Practices

Why It Matters

Fade gradually and systematically Prevents regression and frustration

Always pair with reinforcement Encourages maintenance and engagement

Monitor for prompt dependency Adjust fading pace based on student responsiveness

Individualise fading plans Align to communication modes and developmental level

Use data collection Track skill acquisition, generalisation, and errors

Fading and Student Dignity

Inclusion and participation are not just legal or curricular obligations—they are linked to dignity, identity, and belonging. By reducing intrusive supports over time, teachers promote:

- Greater autonomy
- Choice and control
- Preparation for adulthood
- Reduced stigma

“The measure of success in special education is not dependence, but independence.”

Fading Plan Template for Teachers

(Suitable for print, digital documentation, or inclusion in IEPs, ICPs, or behaviour support plans)

Student Name: _____

Class/Year Level: _____

Date Plan Started: _____

Staff Member(s) Responsible: _____

1. Target Skill or Behaviour

What specific skill, task, or behaviour is being supported?

✎ "Initiating greeting", "Completing 5-step hygiene routine", "Counting objects independently"

2. Desired Outcome (Goal)

What does independent performance look like?

✎ "Student greets peer with no prompts", "Completes routine with visual only", "Counts 5 objects using verbal self-prompt"

3. Current Prompt Level

✓ Check the current support level used:

- Full physical
- Partial physical
- Modelling
- Gestural
- Verbal (direct)
- Visual
- Time delay
- Independent

4. Fading Sequence Plan

Outline how prompts/supports will be reduced over time:

Step	Prompt Type	Support Strategy	Date to Start	Indicators for Fading	Achieved (✓)
Step 1	Full physical	Hand-over-hand brushing teeth	e.g., 1 Aug	3/5 attempts with minimal correction	
Step 2	Partial physical	Light touch at elbow to guide	e.g., 8 Aug	80% success with prompt	
Step 3	Modelling	Teacher models brushing beside student	e.g., 15 Aug	Student starts after watching	
Step 4	Visual	Step-by-step visual sequence card	e.g., 22 Aug	Uses card independently	
Step 5	Independent	No prompts needed	e.g., 29 Aug	Skill completed over 5 days unprompted	

5. Data/Observation Notes

(Record student responses, barriers, breakthroughs, and generalisation)

6. Review & Next Steps

- Is the student maintaining the skill?
- Can the skill be generalised to other settings?
- Do we need to modify the fading schedule?

Review Date: _____ Signed By: _____

Summary

Fading Is...	Fading Is Not...
Planned and individualised	Withdrawing support abruptly
Guided by student progress and data	Guesswork or arbitrary withdrawal
Designed to build independence and dignity	A way to 'rush' students toward unrealistic goals

PROMPT FADING HIERARCHY



