

Guided Practice

Guided practice is a vital instructional strategy in teaching students with disabilities across all phases of special education—from Prep to Year 12. It forms a core element of explicit instruction and ensures that students are supported as they develop and consolidate new skills. Guided practice refers to the phase of learning where the teacher and student work together to practice a new skill or concept after it has been explicitly modelled. During this phase:

- The teacher provides scaffolds, feedback, and corrections in real time.
- Students attempt the task with increasing independence.
- Instruction is gradually released, preparing students for independent performance.
- "Guided practice helps transfer responsibility from the teacher to the learner, ensuring skill development with decreasing adult support." *Archer & Hughes, 2011*

Why Guided Practice Matters – Evidence from Research

1. Bridges the gap between instruction and independence

- Research confirms that many students—especially those with cognitive or processing difficulties—benefit from structured, supported rehearsal of skills.
- Rosenshine (2012) identifies *guided practice* as one of the most effective components of instruction, allowing students to build fluency before errors become habits.

2. Increases mastery through repetition and feedback

- Guided practice provides multiple opportunities to respond, with immediate corrective feedback.
- Hattie (2023) assigns guided practice a high effect size (between 0.6–0.75) when paired with explicit teaching and formative feedback.

3. Supports working memory and reduces cognitive load

- Students with intellectual or learning disabilities often experience working memory limitations. Guided practice:
 - Reduces the pressure of performing alone
 - Allows repetition across modalities (visual, tactile, verbal)
 - Scaffolds step-by-step rehearsal of skills
- Sweller et al. (2011) support this through Cognitive Load Theory, which emphasises chunked practice with support.

Guided Practice in Special School Contexts

Prep – Year 3: Classroom Example

Skill: Identifying colours

Strategy: Teacher shows a red card, then asks the student to find another red item. Teacher offers help (e.g., pointing, gesturing) and gives praise upon success.

Outcome: Student learns through imitation + supported choice, reducing prompt dependency over time.

Years 4–6: Playground Example

Skill: Playing a turn-taking game

Strategy: Teacher plays alongside student, narrating turn-taking rules and guiding language use ("My turn", "Your turn").

Scaffolds: Visual cards, hand-over-hand support with ball, rule reminder cues.

Benefit: Student begins to regulate play with peers, building social interaction and communication skills.

Years 7–10: Literacy – Comprehension

Skill: Finding main idea in a short text

Strategy: Teacher and student read together. Teacher highlights key words and models "thinking aloud", then supports student with a sentence frame.

Example Frame: "This story is about ____."

Benefit: Combines visual, verbal, and guided recall for literacy development.

Years 11–12: Work Preparation (QCIA / Transition)

Skill: Job routine – setting a table for food prep

Strategy: Teacher completes task with student using a visual checklist. Step-by-step prompting is provided, and errors are corrected with modelling.

Fading Plan: Teacher support reduces from physical to verbal to visual.

Outcome: Student learns workplace expectations through scaffolded rehearsal in a real-world context.

Key Elements of Effective Guided Practice

Feature	Why It's Important
Repetition	Reinforces skill and promotes fluency
Scaffolding	Supports learners through mistakes and success
Immediate feedback	Prevents errors from becoming entrenched
VAKT supports	Multi-modal delivery suits varied learning styles
Teacher–student dialogue	Builds communication and reflection
Fading over time	Builds independence and confidence

Here is a Guided Practice Planning Template designed for teachers in a special school setting (Prep to Year 12). It aligns with best practices for supporting diverse learners and encourages intentional, scaffolded instruction.

Guided Practice Planning Template for Special School Settings (Prep–Year 12)

Section 1: Lesson Overview

Field	Details
Learning Area	e.g., English, Maths, HPE, Community Access
Topic/Unit	Name of the lesson or unit focus
Curriculum Links	Level description (e.g., GIL, Australian Curriculum/ABLES)
Intended Learning Outcome(s)	Clear, specific, and measurable goals
Date & Duration	e.g., 8 July 2025 / 40 minutes

Section 2: Preparation for Guided Practice

Prompt	Notes
What prerequisite skills are needed?	Identify and list prior knowledge or skills students need
How will I activate prior knowledge?	Visuals, discussion, videos, real-life examples
What tools or supports will be used?	AAC, visuals, timers, sensory tools, fidgets, whiteboards
Differentiation strategies	Adjustments for individual students' communication, cognitive, and sensory needs

Section 3: Guided Practice Structure

Stage	Description
1. Explicit Modelling	What will I demonstrate? Include language, visual cues, tools, and exact steps.
2. Joint Practice	How will I guide the class in doing it together? Include prompts and checks for understanding.
3. Supported Practice	How will I support individuals or small groups? What scaffolds will I use? (e.g., hand-over-hand, visual sequencing, partner support)
4. Gradual Release	How will I know they're ready for more independence? (e.g., fade prompts, observe confidence)

Section 4: Scaffolds and Supports

Type	Support
Communication	PODD, Key Word Sign, visuals, single switch, eye gaze
Cognition	Simplified steps, repetition, concrete examples
Behaviour/Engagement	Task schedules, timers, movement breaks
Social Interaction	Peer modelling, role-play, group norms

Section 5: Monitoring and Feedback

Question	Response
How will I check for understanding?	e.g., thumbs up/down, checklists, prompting hierarchies
What will success look like for each student?	Individualised success criteria
What feedback will I give?	Verbal, visual (e.g., thumbs up, token), written
How will I document and reflect?	Anecdotal notes, photo evidence, rubrics, learning stories

Section 6: Reflection and Next Steps

Prompt	Notes
What worked well?	Engagement, clarity, participation
What didn't go as planned?	Challenges, misinterpretations
Which students need further support?	Adjustments, re-teaching opportunities
Next lesson adjustments	Pacing, groupings, strategies

GUIDED PRACTICE

The teacher and students practice a new skill together.



Includes:

- ✓ Scaffolding
- ↺ Repetition
- 😊 Feedback
- 👐 Support

The teacher provides help and prompts as needed.

Summary

Guided practice is a critical middle step in the learning process—between modelling and independent work. It ensures that students:

- Gain confidence through success
- Receive immediate, responsive support
- Develop skills in authentic, functional settings
- It is not optional in special education—it is a must.
- *"I do → We do → You do"* — Guided practice is the "we do" that makes "you do" possible.