



Processing Speed

About processing speed

Processing speed is how quickly you can take in and understand information, and respond to that information. Processing speed does not refer to how 'smart' a student is – it is about how quickly they can process and respond to verbal or visual information. Students with developmental disabilities may tend to take longer than other students to respond to instructions, or to complete tasks (including tasks they know well). They might not always keep up with class discussions, and they may struggle with time management. Some students may also experience anxiety related to not being able to think and respond quickly and this anxiety can then cause further challenges for their ability to process information.

Evidence-based strategies

Consider routines and time provided

- **Allow more time.** Give more time to complete tasks. Allowing more time for them to finish tasks, and avoiding timed tests, can provide them with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding.
- **Create a consistent daily routine.** Rules and routines help a student know what is planned. Consider using a timer/clock to help teens learn to manage their time and routines. This can be useful if teens are learning to self-monitor their behaviours too.
- **Get students to re-read things.** “Repeated reading”, or getting students to re-read material, may be helpful.

Consider adjustments to communication style

- **Repeat and simplify instructions.** Use simple words and repeat. Consider breaking down big tasks into smaller ones. For example, give step-by-step instructions or visual instructions (i.e. pictures). It may be helpful to check their understanding before moving on to the next step or activity. For example, ask them to repeat instructions or answer questions.
- **Use visual instructions.** Visual instructions about how to do something might be needed. Consider using a visual schedule, written notes, poster or video to outline or model the task.

Provide lots of opportunities to practice

- **Offer fewer tasks with more opportunities to practise.** This is better than offering many tasks with little opportunity to practise.



Best practice tips

Tailor the assessment approach

- Some students may need extra time for reading or writing.

Get student feedback

- Check in with students to see how they're travelling. Some students may need adjustments to the teaching pace, their goals or the level of support given.

Reflect regularly on how you communicate

- Students who are aware they do not answer or complete tasks as quickly as other students may feel anxious about this. Providing reassurance regularly that it is okay to "take your time" to answer, and avoiding statements that may make them feel rushed (i.e. "hurry up", "quickly") may help them feel less anxious.

Other considerations

Homework

- Homework may be challenging for some students. When setting homework consider what types of activities they could complete within a set time or to a set standard.

Common co-occurring conditions

- Students with thinking/cognition skills challenges behaviour might also experience with [intellectual disability](#), [ADHD](#), [autism](#), [anxiety](#) and [specific learning disability](#).
- Refer to information about these areas to help support the student.



Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for students with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for supporting students with processing speed issues include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Locker checklist
- Problem solving guide
- AllPlay Learn Story - How to be organised