

Using visual schedules

Summary

Visual schedules are words, pictures or visual representations - such as a timetable - of the sequence of activities or events that will happen over a certain time. Visual schedules can be varied to suit the needs of your students, from all-day timetables on the whiteboard, to personalised short session timetables.

Visual schedules help students to understand what they will be doing and reassures them about what will be coming next. They can help teachers to visually organise their day and communicate this non-verbally.

This practice looks at different types of visual schedules and how to apply them in the classroom.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 4.1 - support student participation
- 4.2 - manage classroom activities

For further information, see [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page](#)

Preparing to Teach

What is a visual schedule?

A visual schedule, such as a timetable, is a visual representation of what activities will occur and in what sequence.

Visual schedules can support:

- receptive language difficulties by keeping a table of activities to complete
- retention and recall of information, as remembering verbal instructions can be stressful and difficult for some students
- development of planning and organisational skills.

Visual schedules support every student in understanding the daily schedule and sequence of activities.

Why do visual schedules work?

Some students, especially those on the autism spectrum or those with anxiety, can have difficulties transitioning between activities.

Knowing what is coming next and when, as well as having it visually available at all times, can ease anxieties and support students to transition smoothly between activities or subjects.

Visual schedules can be used across all year levels. Showing the sequence of activities that will occur in a lesson helps students to know what is coming next, the time allocated for activities and the type of activities they will engage in.

It works better if:

- you refer to it frequently or at the same time each day (e.g., after morning roll call)
- you use a mix of visuals and words
- the activity sequence does not change without prior warning

It doesn't work if:

- the use of the visual schedule is inconsistent
- there is too much visual clutter around the visual schedule
- it is not at the reading/comprehension level of your students

In the classroom

How to create visual schedules

When creating a visual schedule, consider:

- whether to use words and/or pictures, depending on your students' comprehension and reading ability.
- the appropriate number of activities to include depending on your students' processing abilities.
 - This may mean you have morning/middle/afternoon session timetables
 - or separate morning/middle/afternoon session timetables and a full-day timetable.
- providing all students with a visual schedule; whether it is individualised on their desk or in view of the whole class
- using a consistent format, e.g., left to right, top to bottom, or in a grid.
- incorporating students' personal interests for individualised schedules.

Using prompts

Verbal prompts for the whole class: 'Check your schedule'

Prompt all students in the class to transition from one session by saying, 'Check your schedule', or a similar simple instruction that suits your style – try to keep it consistent.

Individualised prompts

If a student has a personalised timetable on their desk, they may need an individualised prompt as well. An example of a nonverbal prompt would be to stand close to their desk and draw attention to their schedule as you give the instruction to the class.

Some students may need a cueing system (such as a traffic light system or a visual countdown) to help them anticipate the transition.

Considerations

Consider the age and skills of your students when you design your visual schedule.

- Early years classrooms may benefit from short session schedules, with the activities divided into morning, middle and afternoon and only shown at the appropriate time.
- Senior years students may benefit from more individualised support in how to use their weekly timetable in their diary, such as using colour-coding for different subjects.
- Visual images can be beneficial across all year levels if the students learn visually.

Secondary examples of visual schedules

Student Name: _____ YEAR 9C

Class Timetable

Write down your classes you have throughout the day, for the week.

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
1	Math	Assembly	French	English	Math
2	History	Math	Study	Math	History
MT					
3	Music	English	Music	Sport	English
4	Digital Tech	History	Math	Sport	Digital Tech
LUNCH					
5	English	French	Digital Tech	Music	English

Term 1 assignment planner

	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Week 1					English Assignment given out		
Week 2		Math Assignment given out		Digital Tech Assignment given out			
Week 3			Music Assignment given out				
Week 4		Math Assignment draft due			English Assignment draft due		
Week 5			Digital Tech Assignment check in		Music Assignment draft due		
Week 6		Math Assignment due			English Assignment due		
Week 7		Music Assignment due					
Week 8		History exam		French exam	Digital Tech Assignment due		
Week 9		Music group performance		Sport assessment			

The videos below show a visual schedule from a Year 1 classroom and how a Year 6 teacher uses a visual timetable with her class

Transition support strategies

Countdowns

Some students will need to see how long they have left until the current activity ends – using a timer for this can work. Other students may respond well to a visual countdown, especially if the student becomes focused on how many minutes of the session remain.

Traffic lights

Traffic lights indicate to students where they are up to when completing and transitioning between activities. Pointing the arrow at different lights indicates different things. For example, point the arrow at:



- the green light when the student is working on the current activity
- the yellow light to indicate that the current activity is going to end shortly
- the red light to indicate that the student should stop the current activity.

See the Resources section on the [practice page](#) for examples and more information.

