USING PREFERENCE ASSESSMENTS WITH STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT INTELLECTUAL, DEVELOPMENTAL, AND PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

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Today’s Goal
- Importance of preference assessments
  - Why do we need them?
  - Who benefits?
- Two assessments
  - Paired stimulus using eye gaze
  - Multiple stimulus without replacement (MSWO)
- Next steps

What Do We Know Already Know?
- Individuals with significant intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities can demonstrate clear preferences through methodologically rigorous assessments
- Items identified as preferred can be used to reinforce new behaviors

Why Run a Preference Assessment?
- An overused reinforcer loses effectiveness
- This is common in most classes
- A variety of reinforcers increases teaching effectiveness

Why Not Just Ask Someone?
- Most people just select common reinforcers
- People forget idiosyncratic preferences

Who Benefits From Preference Assessments?
- The Student
  - Individual preferences taken into account
- The Teacher/Staff
  - Programming is made far more effective by incorporating preferred items

Stability of Preference
- Data are now available suggesting that preference is relatively stable across time
  - Specifically, highly-preferred items

Last Thoughts . . .
- Choosing the right assessment
  - MSWO is easy, understandable, efficient
  - If the MSWO is not appropriate, there are other options that are available
- Symbols vs. actual items
  - Depends on the student
  - Actual item is always preferred
Next Steps …
Use the items you’ve identified as highly preferred:
✓ To reinforce new behaviors you are teaching or to maintain those behaviors the student has already learned
✓ To provide your students with activities that they prefer
Remember, reinforcement of new skills is most powerful when the reinforcer used is highly preferred!

Remember . . .
YOUR PREFERENCE ASSESSMENT IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE ITEMS YOU INCLUDE
Multiple Stimulus Without Replacement (MSWO)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>Individuals who choose from an array of three or more items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of items to assess?</td>
<td>Usually between six and sixteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long?</td>
<td>Depending on the number of items in the array, between 20 and 30 min per student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of use?</td>
<td>Fairly simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In preparation</td>
<td>List the items you will be assessing on your data sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions</td>
<td>For each session, start by presenting all items that you want to assess in front of the student. Instruct the student to select one. After the student has made a selection, rearrange the remaining items (not including the one just selected). After the student has either consumed the item (edible) or played with the item activity for a predetermined period of time (usually 5–30 seconds), present the instruction to select an item again. Repeat this procedure until there is only one item remaining. After each selection, record the order of that selection (i.e. if item #1 is selected second, you would write “2” in the row for item #1). Run five sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculating preference hierarchy</td>
<td>Add up the rankings for each item across the five sessions. Rank the items from most (lowest number) to least preferred (highest number).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possible data collection sheet for the MSWO assessment (6 items)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 2</th>
<th>Session 3</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tbody>
</table>

Rank Items from lowest total to highest total to give preference hierarchy, where the lower number indicates a higher preference.

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________
5. ____________________________
6. ____________________________
Using Preference Assessments With Students With Significant Intellectual, Developmental, and Physical Disabilities  
Helen I. Cannella-Malone, Linsey M. Sabielny, & Eliseo Jimenez  
The Ohio State University  

**Eye Gaze (EG)**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>Individuals who have physical impairments that don’t allow them to physically select an item.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of items to assess?</td>
<td>Usually between six and sixteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long?</td>
<td>Probably several hours per student, increasing as items to be assessed are added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of use?</td>
<td>This is the most complicated of the assessment methods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preparation**  
On your data sheet, list the items you will include in the assessment. Pair each item with every other item, making sure to balance their presentation on the right and left. Use one data sheet per session.

**Directions**  
Present each pair of items in the order listed. First, cover both items and wait for the student’s eyes to come to a neutral gaze. When there, lift the cover off of the items and watch the student to see what item they look at. A choice is defined as looking at an item for 2–3 seconds, depending on the student. Once a choice has been made, provide access to the chosen item and remove the item not chosen. For each trial, circle the choice made by the student. If no choice is made after 30 seconds, remove both items, indicate no choice on your data sheet, and present the next pair. Repeat until all pairs have been presented. This entire procedure should be repeated at least twice.

**Calculating preference hierarchy**  
For each item, count the number of times the item was chosen. Rank the items from highest preference to lowest preference, where items selected the most are more preferred.
Possible data collection sheet for the Eye Gaze assessment (5 items)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Number of Times Chosen</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Rank Items from highest total to lowest total to give preference hierarchy, where the higher number indicates a higher preference.

1. _____________________________________
2. _____________________________________
3. _____________________________________
4. _____________________________________
5. _______________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (circle selection)</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>None</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trial 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial 10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem/Pitfall</td>
<td>Solution</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| The student grabs all of the assessment items | Arrange the items so they’re not easily grabbed  
Have a second person assist |
| The student selects in a certain order  
Left to right  
Last one mentioned | Randomize the presentation order  
Switch order  
Introduce distractions |
| The student won’t select any of the options  
Perhaps nothing is motivating  
Perhaps it is a skill deficit | Possibly look to use different selection response  
Possibly look for more basic assessments  
Possibly prompt item sampling |
| The student satiates on the assessment items  
Some items are “one shot” items | Select items that are “low satiation” items  
Provide only small samples of items |
| Student ranks several items equally | May not be a problem as items may be equally preferred  
Conduct more than one assessment |
| Items don’t function as reinforcers  
Your preference assessment is only as effective as the items you assess | Choose items likely to be reinforcers  
Observe student to see what he/she naturally consumes |
| Selecting items/activities the class can’t use  
Sometimes edibles are completely unnatural  
Not all activities are available | Speak with classroom members  
Make an inventory of the available options |
| Making the assessment too “artificial”  
The student can react to a highly contrived assessment  
Some activities are inherently two-person activities | Don’t be afraid to minimally interact during the assessment |
| Only conducting one assessment  
An assessment gives you a “snap-shot”  
Preferences change over time | Conduct more than one assessment |
| Too many items are presented simultaneously  
Particularly a problem with MSWO  
Student “misses” some items | Arrange items so all are equally viewed  
Limit assessment to 5 or fewer items  
May be more or less depending on student |
| Insufficient item sample time or no opportunities  
If a student is not able to sample the item, the assessment may be inaccurate  
Allowing sample opportunity promotes motivated selection | Allow the individual to sample each item when selected |