

# Designed for Teachers: How to Implement Self-Monitoring in the Classroom

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**M**s. Hincklebee is teaching her fourth grade class their math lesson. Most of the students are actively engaged in the lesson and are working on their math, but Mary Sue is out of her seat, walking around the room, and talking to peers. Ms. Hincklebee does not want to stop the lesson again to redirect Mary Sue back to her seat, but she does not know what else to do. How can Ms. Hincklebee help Mary Sue?

This scenario is common in many classrooms. Numerous teachers are faced with similar off-task behaviors, and one solution to this problem is to implement a student-centered strategy aimed at decreasing the problem behavior. One such strategy is self-monitoring, which is used to increase on-task behavior of students by encouraging them to monitor their own behavior (Hallahan, Lloyd, & Stoller, 1982).

According to Daly and Ranalli (2003), there are many benefits of self-monitoring: (1) It is an effective tool for changing behavior; (2) It promotes generalization of the appropriate behavior to other environments; (3) It frees the teacher to attend to other students and focus on content; (4) It increases student independence by making students responsible for their own behavior; (5) It is inexpensive; (6) It is relatively easy to teach and implement; (7) It can be used on a variety of behaviors; and (8) It can be used successfully by students with different ability levels.

The purposes of this paper are to outline the ten key steps for implementing self-monitoring in the classroom and to address key questions regarding self-monitoring.

## Steps for Successful Implementation of Self-Monitoring

### *Step 1: Identify the behavior.*

The first step in implementing self-monitoring is to identify the problem behavior or the area of academic concern. If the student presents several areas of concern, select the behavior that is causing the greatest number of problems. (It is important to address only one problem at a time to avoid overwhelming the student.) In the case of the scenario described above, Ms. Hincklebee reflects on Mary Sue's conduct and determines that Mary Sue's out-of-seat behavior is the most problematic because it is distracting to both her and her peers. In addition, it is preventing Mary Sue from completing her own work.

### *Step 2: Define the target and develop a replacement behavior.*

The second step in self-monitoring is to write a specific and clear description of the target behavior. The definition of the target behavior must be worded in observable terms that the student can understand. For example, Ms. Hincklebee writes, "Mary Sue gets out of her seat, walks around the classroom, and talks to her friends during math." Ms. Hincklebee can observe each of these off-task behaviors; she can see when Mary Sue is out of her seat, walking about, and talking; therefore, her definition is observable. The definition is also child-friendly; Mary Sue will understand what Ms. Hincklebee does not want her to do.

Next, the teacher needs to decide what the student should do in place of the problem behavior. Ms. Hincklebee decides that she wants Mary Sue to

stay seated in her desk during work times. Ms. Hincklebee recognizes that there may be times when Mary Sue legitimately needs to get out of her seat. In those cases, she wants Mary Sue to raise her hand and ask for permission to leave her seat.

### *Step 3: Collect baseline data.*

Once the undesirable behavior has been identified and defined, the teacher needs to determine the extent to which the behavior is interfering with classroom learning. If the behavior happens quickly and frequently—like off-task behaviors usually do—then the teacher would want to use frequency recording. Frequency recording is exactly what it implies: every time the student exhibits the undesirable target behavior, the teacher puts a tally mark on the recording page and then adds up the tally marks at the end of the recording period. The recording period can vary, depending on the number of times the student exhibits the behavior, the frequency with which the behavior occurs, and how the teacher chooses to track the behavior. Therefore, recording sessions can last for an entire class period or for only a ten-minute time segment of a class period. The literature recommends that baseline data be collected on five separate occasions over five school days. This length of time is not necessary for all cases; sometimes a clear and consistent pattern emerges after three days. *Figure 1* offers an example of a frequency recording sheet.

For Ms. Hincklebee's case, she is going to record the frequency of Mary Sue's off-task behaviors during math class. Every time Mary Sue gets out of her seat, Ms. Hincklebee will make a tally mark on the recording sheet.

**Figure 1** BEHAVIOR FREQUENCY RECORDING SHEET

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Target Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Record the number of times the student's behavior occurs.*

Date	Frequency

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When math class is complete, Ms. Hincklebee will then add up the tally marks to see how many times Mary Sue was out of her seat during the class. Ms. Hincklebee will repeat the data recording process for the next few math classes.

**Step 4: Schedule a conference with the student.**

Once the teacher knows the frequency of the undesirable behavior, it is time to talk with the student about starting a self-monitoring plan. The purpose of the meeting is to convince the student that he/she would benefit from adhering to a self-monitoring program. The best way to begin is by emphasizing the student's strengths and the times when the student carried out the appropriate behavior without prompting. It is critical that the student clearly knows what he/she is doing *correctly* to increase the occurrence of the appropriate behavior. Additionally, the student will need specific verbal reinforcement to foster the growth of the desired behavior; however, the inappropriate behavior also must be addressed. During the meeting, the teacher must clearly define the incorrect behavior to ensure that the student will know what behavior he/she is not to engage in during class.

The teacher then needs to outline the correct procedure or behavior so the student knows what to do in place of the inappropriate behavior.

Ms. Hincklebee prepared for her meeting with Mary Sue regarding her out-of-seat behavior during math by thinking about examples of Mary Sue's appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Ms. Hincklebee begins her conversation with Mary Sue by saying, "Mary Sue, you are a very friendly girl, and I really appreciate how you are so nice to everyone in this class. I have noticed, though, that sometimes during math you get up and walk around the classroom to talk with people when you should be in your seat. One thing that friends do is help each other get their work done. Do you remember yesterday when you got up and talked to Billy Bob while I was teaching? Do you think you were helping him get his work done when you did that? I have a great idea about how we can work together so that everyone will get their work done faster and you will have more free time at the end of the day."

**Step 5: Select self-monitoring procedures.**

Once the student has agreed to try the self-monitoring plan, the teacher and the student need to decide how

frequently the student will record his/her behavior. In Mary Sue's case, her problem behavior occurs only during math, so Mary Sue will monitor her on-task behavior only during math. Ms. Hincklebee and Mary Sue decide that Mary Sue will record her behavior every five minutes on a chart on her desk (see Figure 2). If she is on task for the last five minutes of the math lesson, she will put a check mark in the "Yes" column; if she is off task, she will put a check mark in the "No" column. In order for this to work, Ms. Hincklebee will have to keep track of time and remind Mary Sue every five minutes to self-assess her behavior. The teacher and the student also need to decide on a prompt to signal the student to record his/her behavior. Prompts can be visual, audio, physical, or verbal. Before they begin self-monitoring, Mary Sue and Ms. Hincklebee decide on a signal to use so that the class will not be interrupted at recording times. On the corner of Mary Sue's desk is a picture of her sitting appropriately at her desk and working. Every five minutes, Ms. Hincklebee will walk past Mary Sue's desk and point to the picture to signal Mary Sue to record her behavior.

**Step 6: Teach the student to use self-monitoring procedures.**

When teaching the student how to self-monitor, the teacher and the student should meet in the classroom setting to practice self-monitoring together. The teacher needs to lead the student step-by-step through the self-monitoring process and discuss any possible questions and points of confusion. When Ms. Hincklebee meets with Mary Sue to show her how to use self-monitoring, she explains that when Mary Sue looks at the picture on her desk, she is to remember that she needs to stay in her seat and do her work at math time. Ms. Hincklebee then shows Mary Sue how to record when she is in her seat and when she is out of her seat. "See, Mary Sue, I am in my seat doing my math work, so I put a check mark under the box that says 'Yes,'" Ms. Hincklebee explains. Ms. Hincklebee will continue with examples of how to

**Figure 2** STUDENT SELF-MONITORING CHART

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Was I Doing My Work?

TIME	YES	NO
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		

record the information and have Mary Sue practice with her until she knows that Mary Sue understands how to use the self-monitoring strategy. Ms. Hincklebee also demonstrates how Mary Sue should get her attention when she needs to get out of her seat. They practice this additional skill together.

**Step 7: Have the student implement the self-monitoring.**

The seventh step of self-monitoring is the implementation of the plan once the teacher is confident that the student is familiar with the procedure. It is essential that the teacher provide frequent positive reinforcement, feedback, and assistance to encourage the student to continue using the self-monitoring plan. Over time, the teacher can decrease the level of support, but initially the student needs support while adjusting to the self-monitoring plan. For example, as Mary Sue follows the agreed-upon procedures, Ms. Hincklebee tells Mary Sue that she is proud of her effort, gives her a thumbs-up, or pats her on her back.

**Step 8: Use specific verbal praise.**

As the student begins to use the self-monitoring strategy in the classroom, it is necessary for the teacher to use specific verbal praise. Using specific verbal praise means addressing the student by name, stating the correct behavior being performed, and providing positive feedback. This type of praise provides reinforcement of specific behaviors so that the teacher can target the behaviors he/she wants to continue. Use of all types of reinforcement increases the chances that the behavior will be repeated in the future.

When Ms. Hincklebee notices Mary Sue stand up, look at the picture on her desk, and then immediately sit back down, she walks over to Mary Sue and whispers, " Mary Sue, I like how you sat back down in your seat when you looked at your picture. You are doing an excellent job. Thank you for your hard work."

**Step 9: Monitor student progress.**

Once the self-monitoring plan begins, the teacher needs to monitor

the student's behavior to determine the effectiveness of the self-monitoring plan. In addition, the teacher should continue to observe the student and collect data on the frequency of the student's inappropriate behavior to ensure that the student's behavior is improving. Occasional monitoring also allows for the teacher to change aspects of the plan if it is not working as anticipated.

Ms. Hincklebee makes a point of collecting data on Mary Sue's behavior once a week with the same recording sheet that she used to collect baseline data. Each time Ms. Hincklebee gathers new data on Mary Sue's out-of-seat behavior, she compares it to the previous level. To Ms. Hincklebee's delight, Mary Sue has gotten out of her seat only half as much as before implementation of the plan.

**Step 10: Maintenance and follow-up.**

Once students have demonstrated consistent success with a self-monitoring plan, it should be gradually phased out until the student is maintaining his/her own behavior independently. For example, when Mary Sue began her plan, she recorded her on-task behavior every five minutes. As she progressed, Ms. Hincklebee decreased Mary Sue's recording times to every ten minutes, and then to every 15 minutes. Gradually, Mary Sue totally discontinued the use of the self-monitoring plan. Although Mary Sue no longer required the use of the self-monitoring plan, Ms. Hincklebee continued to use intermittent verbal praise as a reinforcer for on-task behavior.

Follow-up consists of intermittent recording of student behavior to ensure that the behavior change is maintained. This means that Ms. Hincklebee continues to record off-task behavior every couple of weeks to make sure that Mary Sue's behavior is sustained.

Self-monitoring is a successful strategy for reducing off-task classroom behaviors. Implementing the ten key steps provides behavioral support for students while encouraging personal responsibility, and it allows the

teacher to teach instead of attending to inappropriate behaviors. Although these ten steps answer many questions about the process of implementing a self-monitoring program, additional questions may still remain. Hallahan et al. (1982) answered commonly asked questions that teachers had regarding self-monitoring.

### Frequently Asked Questions About Self-Monitoring

#### *How much work will self-monitoring be for the teacher?*

Self-monitoring requires a minimal amount of time at the beginning in order to teach the new behaviors and the procedure to the student. Once the student is using self-monitoring in the classroom, the teacher needs to provide only prompts and feedback and, on occasion, take data on student behavior. The system is designed for the student to be the active member in his/her own behavior.

#### *How disruptive will the self-monitoring procedure be to other students?*

It is minimal. The prompts and the recording chart may initially elicit interest from the student's peers, but it will quickly fade into the background among the many other classroom procedures.

#### *What happens if the student is inaccurate?*

The student does not need to be perfectly accurate with his/her recording of on-task behavior. As long as the student's appropriate behavior is increasing, the occasional mistakes on the monitoring chart are not important. It is important that the student feel in control of their own self-monitoring; therefore, a teacher pointing out the occasional mistakes may lead to discouragement and possible regression to the previous inappropriate behavior. If students are frequently inaccurate, they may need to be retaught the correct self-monitoring procedures.

#### *With what kind of students is self-monitoring most effective?*

Self-monitoring works best with students who can do their assignments but may have problems with attention. Self-monitoring is most applicable when students are beginning to learn a skill and have shown that they are able to perform the skill, although they are choosing to not use the skill on a regular basis.

#### *With what types of behaviors is self-monitoring most effective?*

Self-monitoring is best for decreasing off-task behaviors such as out-of-seat behavior and talking to peers during work times. Using self-monitoring to increase on-task behavior is a very efficient way to assist students with their attention and help them focus on the task at hand.

#### *With what types of activities can self-monitoring be used?*

Individual seatwork and small-group instruction are the best activities for self-monitoring to be successful. The definition of on-task behavior can and will vary from individual seatwork and small-group instruction, thus allowing for modifications to be used with self-monitoring in the classroom setting.

#### *How long will the student need to continue self-monitoring?*

The duration of self-monitoring is dependent on the student's rate of behavior change. Some students will be eager to change their behavior immediately, while others will require more encouragement and time.

#### *Is it all right if I use additional reinforcers along with the self-monitoring procedures?*

Using a back-up reinforcer to encourage the student to maintain the new behavior is suitable and can be used with self-monitoring; however, it is not always necessary for successful implementation of self-monitoring. If

additional reinforcers will be used—such as rewards and extra recreation time—it is highly recommended that a contract be written in which the student and teacher clearly outline how the student can gain/earn the additional reinforcer.

### Conclusion

Overall, teachers must remember to: (1) Define behaviors in terms that students can understand; (2) Effectively teach the self-monitoring procedure *before* implementing the plan; and (3) Provide students with the support they need. Ms. Hincklebee implemented the self-monitoring strategy with Mary Sue during math. Due to the fact that Ms. Hincklebee followed the ten key steps for using self-monitoring, Mary Sue was successful with the self-monitoring strategy in the classroom. In the end, Mary Sue was able to sustain her self-monitoring in the classroom even after all prompts were removed; her behavior was maintained and generalized to other subject areas as well.

### REFERENCES

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### AUTHOR NOTE

Preparation of this manuscript was supported in part by a leadership grant (No. H325D030051) from the U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education, and no endorsement should be inferred.