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CHECKLISTS AND RATING SCALES

What is a checklist?

A checklist is just what it sounds like: a list that educators check off. Using this method is a little bit like going bird watching. Start with a list of items you want to observe and then check off each item when appropriate.

One popular choice for educators is to use developmental checklists to record what they have observed about individual children; these developmental checklists consist of lists of skills from the different developmental domains for a specific age range.

Why use checklists?

Checklists are quick and easy to use, so they are popular with educators. They can be used to record observations in virtually any situation, and do not require the educator to spend much time recording data; in general, a few moments is all it takes. One other advantage is that there are many different pre-made checklists available for use from a variety of sources. For example, certain websites connected with ECE offer developmental checklists that educators can download and print out. Educators can also create a checklist that exactly meets their needs, depending on what they want to observe and record.

How do I use a checklist?

As it is such a popular choice for educators, the example we will present here shows how to use a developmental checklist. These developmental checklists are generally used to record observations of one child at a time. The list of skills is targeted for a specific age group (e.g. 12 to 24 months). They may be divided into the different developmental domains or focus only on one aspect of a child's development.

Once you have chosen or created a checklist, you then observe the child in a variety of natural contexts and check off all the relevant skills or behaviours. Usually, there is a space to indicate the relevant date(s) on the checklist, as this might be an important piece of data.

As the checklist method does not allow for the recording of a lot of qualitative data, you might choose to have a column for comments.

Sample checklist for language development: Two-year-olds

A blank checklist could look something like this:

Child's Name: Alan

	Behaviour/Skill	Date	Comments
	Communicates with gestures and pointing		
	Shakes head for no		
	Uses one- word sentences		
	Uses two- word sentences		
	Names familiar objects		
	Follows simple instructions		

	Enjoys songs and rhymes		
	Refers to self as "me" or "I"		

Once you begin filling in the checklist, it will start to look something like this:

Child's Name: Alan

	Behaviour/Skill	Date	Comments
✓	Communicates with gestures and pointing	March 9, 2012	
✓	Shakes head for no	March 9, 2012	
✓	Uses one- word sentences	March 10, 2012	
✓	Uses two- word sentences	March 29, 2012	"My book"
	Names familiar objects		
	Follows simple instructions	April 15, 2012	
✓	Enjoys songs and rhymes	March 5, 2012	Loves Hokey Pokey
	Refers to self as "me" or "I"	March 20, 2012	Taps self on chest, says "Ayan"

Note that, in general, behaviours and/or skills that you have not yet observed, or that the child has not yet mastered, are left blank, so that you can update the checklist as needed.

In some cases, you may want to add a comment like the one in the last box in the sample above.

In this example, Alan's strategies for referring to himself are significant, even if he is not yet demonstrating the specific behaviour from the checklist.

Using a rating scale

Sometimes educators feel limited by a checklist because this method only allows the observer to record **if** a child uses a specific skill or not. In this case, they might choose to add a rating scale to their observations. By adding a rating scale, an educator can rate the quality, frequency or ease with which a child uses a certain skill.

If you were to add a rating scale to your checklist, it might look like this:

Child's Name: Alan

Date: March/April 2012

Behaviour/Skill	Usually	Frequently	Rarely	Never	Comments
Communicates with gestures and pointing					
Shakes head for no					
Uses one- word sentences					
Uses two- word sentences					
Names familiar objects					
Follows simple instructions					
Enjoys songs and rhymes					
Refers to self as "me" or "I"					

Once you begin filling it in, it could look something like this:

Child's Name: Alan

Date: March/April 2012

Behaviour/Skill	Usually	Frequently	Rarely	Never	Comments
Communicates with gestures and pointing	✓				
Shakes head for no	✓				
Uses one- word sentences		✓			
Uses two- word sentences			✓		"My book"
Names familiar objects				✓	
Follows simple instructions	✓				
Enjoys songs and rhymes	✓				
Refers to self as "me" or "I"					Taps self on chest, says "Ayan"

[Click here](#) for exercises to help practise using checklists and rating scales.

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