

# Wait Card



A unique, distinctive icon for those using visual communication strategies.

Created by the developers of the Pyramid Approach to Education®  
and the Picture Exchange Communication System® (PECS®)

For detailed information on teaching “wait” or on implementing the Pyramid Approach to Education or the Picture Exchange Communication System, contact Pyramid Educational Consultants.



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# Teaching “wait”

When we initially are teaching a student to request desired items, we create many opportunities for those requests. We try to reinforce each appropriate request by giving the student immediate access to the item or activity. Once a student is reliably and consistently requesting desired items, however, we will need to teach him that he can't always immediately get what he requested.

We all occasionally have to wait for something we want! If a student has learned to request vocally or via PECS, then he can be taught to wait for a short period of time immediately after making a request. If conducted in a systematic manner, this teaching can result in the student being able to wait for several minutes, even during situations where staff have not anticipated the need for waiting. The first several “wait” opportunities should take place only when the teacher can directly control how long the student will need to wait. The basic sequence for teaching a student to wait is:

1. When the student requests something, give him the “wait” card.
2. Pause for 1 to 2 seconds.
3. Take the “wait” card back while saying, for example, “Nice waiting!”, and simultaneously giving the student the requested item.

Over time, gradually increase the wait interval once the student is successful at the majority (90%) of “wait” opportunities of the target duration. When increasing the wait interval, a general guideline to follow is to increase by 50% of the successful interval. So, go from 2 to 3 seconds, then 3 to 4½ seconds, etc.

If the student is not successful at a specific teaching opportunity, shorten the next wait interval so that he once again achieves success. Remain at this level for several opportunities and then systematically begin increasing the interval again.

Once a student is waiting for more than a minute, allow him to hold or play with a small item - just like we do when we are waiting for our dentist appointment! Continue to have the student keep the “wait” card with him.

For how long should any student learn to wait? Remember in the “real world” we often see people having difficulties waiting, so make sure to set realistic goals. A couple of minutes for a two-year old is realistic; fifteen minutes for a three-year old is not. A good strategy when setting goals is to look at students in mainstream environments and determine how long these students successfully wait.

For more detailed information on teaching “wait,” refer to pages 258 to 261 of ***The PECS Training Manual, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*** (Frost & Bondy, 2024).