

Neuro-Affirming Task Design Framework: A Practical Guide for Teachers

This guide helps teachers strategically design learning tasks that are grounded in evidence-based practices (EBP), are aligned with curriculum, and flex to the diverse learning and regulation needs of students.

Framework Step	Considerations
1. Foundation: Start with the Goal - Alongside the learning goal (curriculum) what other skill is the student learning or required to do? - Make it achievable (failproof!)	☐ Curriculum – subject or academic area: _____ ☐ Planning & Organization – setting goals, sequencing steps, managing materials ☐ Working Memory – holding and using information while completing tasks ☐ Initiation – starting tasks independently without excessive delay ☐ Inhibition / Impulse Control – resisting distractions or impulses ☐ Cognitive Flexibility – shifting strategies, adapting to change, seeing new perspectives ☐ Sustained Attention – maintaining focus over time, even on non-preferred tasks ☐ Time Management – estimating time, pacing, and meeting deadlines ☐ Task Monitoring / Self-Monitoring – checking progress, spotting errors, adjusting strategies ☐ Emotional Regulation – managing frustration, stress, or excitement while working ☐ Goal-Directed Persistence – following through to complete tasks despite challenges
2. Incorporate Assessment Data & Step into the Learner's Shoes Consider strengths, interests, regulation needs and anticipate barriers to success.	 Literacy & Communication ☐ Reading load too heavy (decoding, comprehension) ☐ Writing/motor output required beyond skill level ☐ One mode of communication only (no alternatives like visuals, AAC, oral)  Motor & Physical ☐ Fine motor demands (handwriting, cutting, manipulating small objects) ☐ Gross motor demands (coordination, stamina, balance) ☐ Physical accessibility (workspace, seating, materials)  Executive Functioning ☐ Task has too many steps at once (overload) ☐ No visual supports (hard to sequence or organize) ☐ High working memory demand (holding too much info) ☐ Weak self-monitoring opportunities (no built-in “check your work” step) ☐ Time demands unrealistic (too rushed or too long without breaks)  Sensory & Regulation ☐ Noise level overwhelming ☐ Lighting or visual clutter distracting ☐ No option for movement, sensory breaks, or co-regulation ☐ Materials/textures causing discomfort (paper, glue, clothing, seating)  Social & Emotional ☐ Task relies too much on peer interaction without supports ☐ Fear of failure or public mistakes (task too exposed)

- ☐ Performance anxiety triggered (e.g., timed test, oral response)
- ☐ Task irrelevant to student interests (low motivation)

3. Support the Goals and the Learner with Evidence-Based Practices (EBP).

- ☐ Chunking: Break into clear, visible steps
- ☐ Choice & Interest: Interesting, practical, meaningful
- ☐ Multiple Modes of Expression: Speech, drawing, typing, AAC
- ☐ Regulation Supports: Breaks sensory tools are incorporated
- ☐ Reward: Are you rewarding task completion and/or learner behaviours (ex. perseverance)

4. Assess Using Success Indicators

Indicator	Emerging	Developing	Proficient	Mastery
Interest	Task feels irrelevant	Engages with prompts	Connects personally	Extends learning independently
Attention (Time on Task)	Distracted, brief focus	Refocuses with reminders	Focuses with minimal support	Sustains attention independently
Regulation	Dysregulated, stress interferes	Co-regulates with adult/peer	Uses strategies with prompts	Self-regulates independently
Social-Communication	Withdrawn	Responds when prompted	Participates with supports	Communicates authentically
Skill Acquisition	Minimal evidence	Beginning to use skills	Demonstrates with support	Consistent & independently
Independence (Exec. Function)	Relies fully on adult	Follows with prompts	Organizes/finishes with little support	Plans, organizes, and self-corrects

5. Reflect & Refine

- What worked?
- What were the barriers?
- Redesign for next time.