

Behavior-Specific Praise: A Step-by-Step Guide for Virtual Learning Environments

What is behavior-specific praise?

Behavior specific praise (BSP) refers to positive statements that name the exact behavior being acknowledged, delivered contingent upon the desired behavior occurring. In short, it is spoken or written acknowledgement used to let a student know when their behavior has met expectations. BSP continues to be integral to reinforcing student behavior given new expectations for the virtual learning environment. Use BSP after a student engages in an expected behavior, then verbally state or type in a message stating the expected behavior rather than using general praise such as “thank you” or “good job.” For example, “Johnny, thank you for logging in to class on time!” By naming the specific behavior you provide clarity to the student about the behaviors that will help them be successful in the virtual classroom. In the above example, Johnny may be more likely to log in to the virtual classroom on time in the future because he knows the expectation and it was positively noticed and acknowledged by his teacher.

How do I use this strategy in the virtual classroom?

In the table below, we provide the steps for how to use BSP in a virtual learning environment. Following the steps are a few quick tips and two illustrations, one for an elementary age student and for a middle and high school age student.

Steps	Description
1	Evaluate your current rates of general and BSP.
2	Identify behaviors in the virtual environment to reinforce.
3	Practice virtual delivery of BSP.
4	Observe student behavior (e.g., scanning their video feeds, joining break out rooms, and monitoring chat).
5	Provide BSP.
6	Monitor your BSP delivery.
7	Provide the students with an opportunity to give feedback.

Quick Tips for Success:

- Practice delivering BSP statements verbally and through the chat function. Consider using the integrated lesson plan from ci3t.org/imp to identify opportunities to embed reinforcement into instruction.

- To support your use of BSP and monitor your delivery, consider using treatment integrity checklist from ci3t.org/imp.
- Download the chat at the end of a virtual session to examine your use of written praise (see illustration).
- To provide students an opportunity to give feedback, consider using the student social validity forms from ci3t.org/pl.

Using Behavior Specific Praise in the Virtual Learning Environment

Example: With an elementary-age student...

Step 1. Ana’s teacher, Mrs. Jenkins, reflected on how many times she acknowledged Ana for following expectations in the virtual learning environment (e.g., logging in to class on time, using the chat feature to ask or answer questions). Mrs. Jenkins noticed that she rarely acknowledged Ana for meeting expectations. Ana was just one of those students who quietly followed expectations – however, Mrs. Jenkins was concerned about Ana’s tardies and attendance.

Step 2. Ms. Jenkins noticed that Ana was not always logging in to the Zoom session, and sometimes she logged in more than ten minutes late. Mrs. Jenkins reviewed the schoolwide expectations for remote learning and decided to focus on supporting Ana with the expectation for the virtual learning environment as listed on the expectation matrix: Arrive on time.

Step 3. Mrs. Jenkins practiced reinforcing Ana for logging in on time. She made a note in her morning meeting lesson plan to provide BSP in the chat or verbally to Ana if she was on time that day. She decided to write out some praise statements in advance, which would be easy to cut and paste into chat when needed. Some of her practice statements included, “Ana, thank you for logging on time today it is nice to have you here!” or, “Ana, I noticed you were in the waiting room before I even logged in today, excellent planning!”

Step 4. Before class started, Mrs. Jenkins regularly scanned the waiting room to see if Ana was logged in. As she waited, Ana’s teacher acknowledged other students for logging in on time. As soon as Ana arrived (on time!), Mrs. Jenkins was ready to greet her with BSP.

Step 5. When Ana logged in to class on time, Ana’s teacher provided her with a BSP statement: “Hi, Ana! Great job on logging in on time; you’re ready to learn!”. Ana’s teacher continued to provide BSP statements in the following days when Ana logged in on time, varying her statements and using both verbal and typed acknowledgements. Mrs. Jenkins also intermittently paired the BSP with the school’s reinforcement system – Virtual BEST Bucks.

Step 6. Mrs. Jenkins made note of how often she used BSP with Ana in each virtual session by downloading the chat and computing her rate of written BSP (number of BSP, divided by the number of minutes of instruction). She also had a sticky note on her desk with Ana’s name written on it so she could tally and compute her rate of verbal BSP. Ana’s teacher noticed when expected behaviors occurred (e.g., timely attendance in the virtual classroom), and the

teacher acknowledge the behavior, the behaviors happened more often, and Ana's academic achievement increased. Ana's teacher also noted that regular attendance happened more often over time.

Step 7. Mrs. Jenkins provided Ana with an electronic social validity student form and met privately at the end of class in a breakout room. Ana's teacher asked if she enjoyed receiving acknowledgement for arriving on time each day. Ana responded to her teacher by saying, "It has helped me so much! It helps me remember to log in on time. It makes me feel good!" Ana indicated a high level of social validity on her student form as well, demonstrating BSP to be an appropriate support.

Using Behavior Specific Praise in the Virtual Learning Environment

Example: With a middle or high school student...

Step 1. Maggie's teacher, Mr. Carroll, reflected on how often he acknowledged and praised Maggie's efforts and participation in class. Mr. Carroll realized he mostly used general statements such as "Good job." or "Great work!" to praise Maggie or that he directed his attention to her when she was not meeting expectations.

Step 2. Mr. Carroll reviewed the expected behaviors for the virtual classroom. He was concerned about Maggie's level of engagement in the classroom and specifically, her level of active participation during discussions. Mr. Carroll identified the expectation on their virtual learning expectation matrix, "Be engaged", as the behavior to reinforce.

Step 3. Mr. Carroll practiced using BSP to become more fluent in this practice. He would say things like, "Thank you for using the chat to type your responses," or "Thank you for using the hand raising feature on Zoom so everyone can share their ideas." When Mr. Carroll felt more comfortable using BSP, he was ready to implement this to support Maggie's engagement in instruction.

Step 4. During class, Mr. Carroll paid close attention to see how often Maggie was participating in class. He noticed she often appeared preoccupied with other tasks, and that she rarely spoke up during discussions or raised her hand using the feature in Zoom. However, Maggie did respond to all of the prompts when Mr. Carroll used the Poll feature. He decided to increase the variety of ways to participate in virtual discussions.

Step 5. In the next class, Mr. Carroll watched for when she typed a comment or a discussion question on the chat and he used BSP to acknowledge it. He thought Maggie might appreciate private praise based on how she was contributing in class so he used the private chat feature. He planned out a few BSP statements that he could quickly access when Maggie was engaged in the lesson, "Thank you for using the chat ask your question, Maggie! Way to 'Be Engaged'." "I see Maggie is giving me a thumbs up, letting me know he's ready for practice."

Step 6. Mr. Carroll reflected on how often he used BSP to increase her engagement in the following days. He noticed that when he used BSP and focused on Maggie’s engagement was helping create a more friendly and supportive learning environment. Mr. Carroll also noticed Maggie appeared more attentive in the virtual classroom and she was more willing to engage in discussions and ask at least one question during each class.

Step 7. Maggie’s teacher offered her an opportunity to give feedback on her experience after BSP was incorporated into virtual instruction. Maggie shared, “It makes me feel like my ideas are valued and I feel better about participating in class.” He also emailed her a social validity form in a Google Form to fill out. The high social validity score she gave to BSP indicated that it was appropriate to support her behavior.

Watch a brief introduction to BSP [here](#) and watch the updated video for virtual learning environments [here](#).

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