

When you are gathering time-on-task data, you are taking a snapshot of student behavior at the moment you look at the student. Your observation is a sample of that moment, and it should reflect exactly what you see only at the moment of observation.

More than anything else, “time on task” means that students are engaged in the learning activity proposed for them by the teacher. Thus, if the teacher is asking students to write a paragraph, students who are on task (doing the task given them) are writing the paragraph. If the teacher is leading classroom discussion, the student should be listening or asking questions or responding to questions. As a general rule, a teacher’s goal should be 90% time on task or higher.

What It Looks Like

Time on task may include some of the following student behaviors:

- Doing the assigned task, which could include (but is by no means limited to)
 - Conducting an experiment
 - Reading
 - Working on a cooperative learning project
 - Writing in their notebook, engaging in classroom debate
 - Completing a learning sheet
- Making eye contact with the teacher or other students engaged in the assigned learning
- Responding verbally and nonverbally to teacher prompts, which could include (but is by no means limited to)
 - Smiling
 - Doing assigned tasks
 - Asking questions
 - Engaging in hands-on activities
 - Taking out materials needed to work on a task

What It Doesn’t Look Like

Time on task usually does not include some of the following student behaviors:

- Doing something other than the assigned task, such as
 - Sleeping
 - Not taking out materials
 - Texting
 - Engaging in side conversations
 - Reading unassigned reading material
 - Touching or bothering other students