

The Stroop Exercise

Stopping the automatic answer — three minutes a day

WHAT IT TRAINS

- Inhibition — overriding a stronger habit
- Selective attention
- Processing speed under interference
- Mental flexibility

Reading a familiar word is automatic and very hard to switch off. This exercise deliberately puts that automatic response in conflict with the task, so the brain has to suppress it. That suppression is the same machinery a reader uses to stay on task, ignore distraction, and stop themselves from guessing.

HOW TO DO IT

1 Read the words

Say each word, left to right, ignoring the color entirely. Time it. This part should feel easy.

2 Say the colors

Same sheet, same order — but now say the color the word is printed in and ignore what it says. Time it again.

3 Look at the difference

The second time will be slower. That gap is the effect, and it is normal. Write both times at the foot of the sheet.

4 Close the gap

Do it again over the following days and watch the difference shrink. That shrinking is the training working.

5 Alternate

Once both are comfortable, alternate — word, color, word, color — down the sheet. This is the hardest version.

RULES THAT MATTER MORE THAN THE EXERCISE

- Sit with them, and do it out loud. Silent practice does not train inhibition.
- Three minutes. This one is genuinely tiring and short sessions are better.
- Record both times each session. The difference is the number that matters.
- Expect it to feel frustrating — that is what the exercise is. Name it as the point.
- Never compare one child's times to another's. Only to their own from last week.

The words are randomly colored, and no word is ever printed in its own color. Print several copies so a fresh sheet is always available.

The Stroop Exercise

Red	Yellow	Red	Green	Red
Black	Green	Blue	Black	Red
Red	Yellow	Green	Blue	Blue
Black	Blue	Green	Blue	Black
Black	Black	Black	Yellow	Black
Green	Green	Black	Black	Blue
Red	Green	Blue	Red	Black
Red	Blue	Blue	Black	Black
Black	Black	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Blue	Green	Red	Blue	Green
Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green
Green	Black	Blue	Green	Blue
Blue	Blue	Yellow	Yellow	Black

First read the words. Then say the color each word is printed in. Time both.

Words: _____ seconds Colors: _____ seconds Difference: _____