

The APDR Cycle, Done Properly

Four stages, each with a question that must be answered before moving on. The cycle fails when stages get skipped or merged.

1 Assess

What exactly is the barrier? Triangulate teacher evidence, learner voice, parent insight and data before naming it.

In class: Not 'struggles with writing' but 'cannot hold a sentence in mind while transcribing it'.

2 Plan

Who does what, by when, expecting which change? Parents and learner in the room, outcomes written measurably.

In class: Sentence-rehearsal routine, daily, TA-led, 6 weeks: aim is independent 2-sentence output 4 days of 5.

3 Do

The class teacher stays responsible: support happens mostly IN the classroom, with fidelity checked, not assumed.

In class: A fortnightly 5-minute fidelity check: is the routine happening as designed, daily?

4 Review

Against the planned outcome, on the planned date, with the family. Decide: fade, continue, adjust or escalate.

In class: Week 6: 3 days of 5 achieved. Continue 4 more weeks with peer-rehearsal added; review date in diaries now.

The One-Page APDR Record

Copy this structure onto one page per learner per cycle. If it does not fit on a page, the plan is too vague to deliver.

Assess (3 lines)

- The specific barrier, in observable terms.

- Evidence sources: who said or showed what.

- What the learner says helps and hinders.

Plan (4 lines)

- The intervention or adaptation, named and described in one line.

- Who delivers it, how often, where.

- The measurable outcome expected, with its baseline.

- Review date, booked with the family now.

Do and Review (4 lines)

- Fidelity notes: did it happen as planned?

- Outcome data against the baseline.

- Learner and parent view at review.

- Decision: fade / continue / adjust / escalate, with the next cycle's start.

Writing Targets That Survive Review

A review is only as good as the target it measures. Four checks before any target enters a plan.

Observable

A colleague could watch for it without briefing. 'Improves confidence' fails; behaviour passes.

Say: "What will we SEE the learner do that they do not do now?"

Baselined

Progress needs a starting line measured the same way the target will be.

Say: "What is the count today, measured how, by whom?"

Conditioned

Name the support in the target: with the word mat, given a prompt, in small group.

Say: "Under what conditions does this target apply, and when do those conditions fade?"

Dated and owned

A review date in diaries and one named adult accountable.

Say: "Who checks this, on which date, and what evidence will they bring?"

Eight Ways APDR Goes Wrong

The failure patterns reviews keep finding, each with its fix. Audit your current cycles against them.

Assess skipped, plan recycled

Last year's plan is copied forward. Fix: no plan without a fresh assess line and current baseline.

In class: If the barrier statement is identical to last cycle's, the assessment did not happen.

Do without fidelity

The intervention exists on paper and sometimes in reality. Fix: brief fidelity checks, scheduled.

In class: Three of ten planned sessions ran. The review is measuring a plan that never happened.

Review without data

The meeting trades impressions. Fix: the target's own measure, collected en route, on the table.

In class: Reading age then and now, same test; tally charts; work samples dated.

Cycles without escalation logic

Round and round without deciding what two failed cycles MEAN. Fix: agree the threshold in advance. Minimal movement against baseline across two faithfully delivered cycles means seek specialist advice.

In class: Two cycles, faithful delivery, flat data: that triggers the next conversation, not cycle three of the same.

The Graduated Approach: A 5-Minute Evidence Briefing

What the statutory cycle asks, and what the research says makes it actually work.

■ It is the law, but it is also good design

The Code of Practice's assess-plan-do-review cycle is a feedback loop: baseline, intervention, measurement, decision. Done faithfully, it is formative assessment applied to provision.

■ The weak link is the written plan

Across thousands of analysed support-plan goals, measurability is the consistent failure, and quality drops as learners age. Most review meetings are starved by the targets written months earlier.

■ Training fixes it durably

Structured practice in writing measurable, conditioned, baselined targets improves plan quality with gains still present a year later. One staff meeting on target-writing pays for itself across every cycle.

■ The honest caveat

APDR itself has little direct outcome research: it is a statutory framework, not a trialled intervention. Its value tracks the quality of what goes in it; the evidence here supports the components (measurable goals, fidelity, data-based review), not the paperwork.

Evidence base

Department for Education and Department of Health (2015). Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years.
Sanches-Ferreira, M. et al. (2013). How individualised are the Individualised Education Programmes: an analysis of the contents and quality of the IEP goals. European Journal of Special Needs Education.
Rakap, S. et al. (2024). Examining long-term impacts of a training programme to improve quality of IEP goals. European Journal of Special Needs Education.