Many of the day-to-day behaviors that we perform, without even attending to what we're doing, are really quite complex, comprised of many smaller, discrete, singular, specific sub-behaviors that we perform in a certain order. Consider "one" behavior done easily even when you are tired and distracted: Brushing your teeth. When you think about it (which we rarely do), brushing is really a bunch of distinct simple behaviors performed one after another. Just analyze the task (Ah ha! Now you know where the name came from).

**Brushing Teeth**
- Pick up the tooth brush
- Wet the brush
- Take the cap off the tube
- Put paste on the brush
- Brush the outside of the bottom row of teeth
- Brush the outside of the top row of teeth
- Brush the biting surface of the top row of teeth
- Brush the biting surface of the bottom row of teeth
- Try to make yourself understood while answering the question of someone outside the door
- Brush the inside surface of the bottom row of teeth
- Brush the inside surface of the top row of teeth
- Spit
- Rinse the brush
- Replace the brush in the holder
- Grasp cup
- Fill cup with water
- Rinse teeth with water
- Spit
- Replace cup in holder
- Wipe mouth on sleeve
- **Screw cap** back on tube
- Place tube back in room mate's toiletry/shave kit so s/he doesn't realize that you forgot to bring **toothpaste** on the trip

How small you decide to make the steps will depend on your best guess as to how well the student will be able to remember, understand, and perform the T.A. process and the sequential steps. Some individuals will display the desired behavior after only 5 steps being provided for them to follow. Others would need 20 increments in order to become competent in that action.
Task analysis is used most often with those who have problems mastering complex behaviors (e.g., individuals with autism, people who are mentally retarded or mentally ill, young children). Many of you have engaged in the process when non-impaired friends have asked "How did you do that?", all without even being aware it had been given a name.

More Examples Of Task Analysis (click on the one you wish to view)
- Tying shoes (long and short versions)
- Toilet training of a child with autism
- Getting ready for home economics lab
- Getting ready for math class
- Making the perfect martini

The process of breaking a complex behavior (a chain of simple behaviors that follow one another in order) down into it's component parts takes a little practice, but soon you'll be able to construct behavior chains for the easier to analyze motor skills, followed by the more difficult to delineate academic and social behaviors. How are the "links" in the chain of behaviors developed? What process do teachers go through in devising the list of sequential actions? There are a number of ways: You might just imagine the desired behavior and write down the possible "steps". Or you might engage in that behavior, noting the sub-behaviors that lead to the final product. You could brainstorm with another teacher or aide, or consult with a more experienced colleagues who has probably taught the behavior before. Or, you can find one of the many texts that have task analyzed lots of common behaviors.

Once you have determined the sequence of the discrete links in the chain of a complex behavior, it's time to instruct the student in joining them together. As you might suspect from the lead-in of the previous sentence, the process of teaching the links in the chain is called "Chaining". The act of chaining can be accomplished in one of three ways. You might teach the behaviors from the beginning of the chain, requiring the student to display increasing amounts of simple behaviors at the front of the chain. As often as the student is able, s/he adds a new simple behaviors onto the tail end of the behaviors already mastered. As the learner links more and more of the chain, you have to complete fewer of the steps at the end of that chain of behaviors. Learning the behaviors from the front end is called "forward chaining".

The third way that you might decide to teach the links in the behavior chain is through the process of "total chaining" in which the student performs all of the behaviors in the chain during every attempt (with your assistance and prompting
given as needed). The steps for completing a long division problem would be taught in this manner. You guide the student through the process, helping as needed. The student performs every step in the process from the very first attempt at it.