Precision teachers are guided by four basic tenets:

- Frequency (a count per unit of time) provides a universal measure of performance.
- Count each time you teach.
- Display student performance on the standard celeration chart to evaluate teaching and learning.
- The learner knows best.

Of these four principles, “the learner knows best” is most important. This principle needs some explanation, however, because of its common, and much different, use in child-directed teaching methods (see Grossen, 1998). With child-directed teaching methods this principle means that a learner knows best what to learn, how to study, when to practice, whether to practice, and so on. To precision teachers, “the learner knows best” simply means that when a learner makes academic progress, the practice and instruction are right for that learner. If the learner does not make progress, then something about the instruction is inappropriate for that learner. The precision teaching team (learner, teacher, and chart) must find another way to practice and learn. Thus, the learner’s behavior knows best. Precision teachers only trust the learner’s actual progress to guide the development and refinement of appropriate instruction.

Joe (a fifth-grader with learning disabilities who attends an inclusive classroom in an inner-city elementary school) and I used precision teaching to improve his reading skills. We worked together in an after-school tutoring program on Tuesdays and Fridays. Each session lasted about 45 minutes.

**Charting one-minute timed readings.** During his first tutorial, Joe orally read 62 correct and 8 incorrect words per minute from a grade-level chapter book, *The Wish Giver*. We set his “see/say” reading aim at 180 to 200 correct words with 5 or fewer incorrect words per minute. In just eight tutoring sessions over the next four weeks, Joe reached his aim and selected a new book at the same grade level, *Stone Fox*. He began the new book at 89 correct and 8 incorrect words per minute, almost 30 more correct words per minute than he read four weeks earlier. On the second book, he achieved his aim in six sessions. We moved to a new book at the same grade level, *The War with Grandpa*. During the first counting time, Joe read 124 correct words, with 1 incorrect word, per minute. It took just three practice sessions for Joe to achieve his instructional aim on this book.

**Sprinting.** Each session began with Joe reading one or two chapters to me. Before the 1-minute counting time, he practiced by reading shorter passages with 10-second timings. Precision teachers call these shorter timings *sprints*. Academic sprinting can help to develop fluent performances and build academic endurance (Binder, Haughton, & Van Eyk, 1990). Joe and I looked for fluency blockers during the sprint practices. (Precision teachers call anything that keeps a student from performing smoothly and accurately a *fluency blocker*.) Teacher-paced flash cards, reading books with many pictures, underdeveloped phonemic awareness, and teacher instructions to slow down are common fluency blockers for reading. Joe found that big words such as “nothingness” and “dimension” blocked his fluency development. He deliberately practiced reading these words until he read them automatically.

**Segmenting long words.** Joe practiced ways to look for smaller parts in longer words by breaking the word into syllables. He practiced breaking words into syllables using the precision teaching practice sheets called “Segmentation and Blending of Syllables and Words” (Freeman & Haughton, 1996). He practiced dividing three or four syllable words and answered questions about the order of the syllables in each word. Joe reached the aim of 30 segmentation responses per minute for the three or four syllable words in only four sessions. He said he liked doing the segmentation practice!

**Celebrating accomplishments.** Joe worked hard to reach his oral reading aim of 180 to 200 words per minute. He made reading more enjoyable and interesting by choosing the books he wanted to read, striving for a personal best performance each session, and charting his performance on the standard celeration chart (see Figure A). After charting, Joe and I would celebrate his personal best performances.

Joe’s improved reading fluency raised his academic performance in the classroom. The more fluently he
Figure A  Joe's standard celeration chart
read, the more time he could give to thinking about the meaning of the words and sentences. Fluent reading correlates highly with reading comprehension (Downs & Morin, 1990).

Joe’s progress in reading made me very happy and proud of his accomplishments. On his last day of tutoring, he had his best reading day ever. He read big words like “intelligence” without hesitation. When he came to a word he didn’t know by sight, he would say, “Don’t tell me; I will get it!” and then use his new skills to sound out the word.

Joe’s precision teaching team (teacher, student, and chart) made the instructional decision to advance to more challenging, higher-grade-level books.

John O. Cooper is Professor of Special Education at The Ohio State University, where he conducts research in applied behavior analysis and trains teachers in the use of precision teaching.

We sometimes use the word tutor instead of teacher to describe somebody who gives personal or private lessons: My son wasn’t making much progress in school, so I hired a maths tutor to give him private lessons after school. If you are enrolled as a student in a British university, you will have a personal tutor who provides you with close support throughout your studies and with whom you will have tutorials to discuss aspects of the subject being studied. Note that a seminar at a college or university is a class for a small group of students to discuss the subject with the lecturer. Professor. In the UK, professor is a university teacher of the highest rank in a subject area. Joe agreed to coauthor the book with me. After all, the real game we are preparing our His insights on the challenges of coaching athletes for is the game of life. And its the one today, innovative approaches to managing game they cant afford to lose. key to diagrams. All diagrams 5 = Player assigned to 5. = Path of player = Offensive player = Path of ball = Offensive player with ball = Dribble Drill diagrams = Screen C = Coach Offensive diagrams C = Coach with ball 1 = Point guard M = Manager 2 = Shooting guard M = Manager with ball 3 = Small forward General situations: 4 = Power forward = Of