

# Executive Function

Strategies for the brain's conductor to make you more efficient at home, school, and work.

Curated and edited by  
**Landmark School and Landmark Outreach**

Illustrations by Olivia Malloy

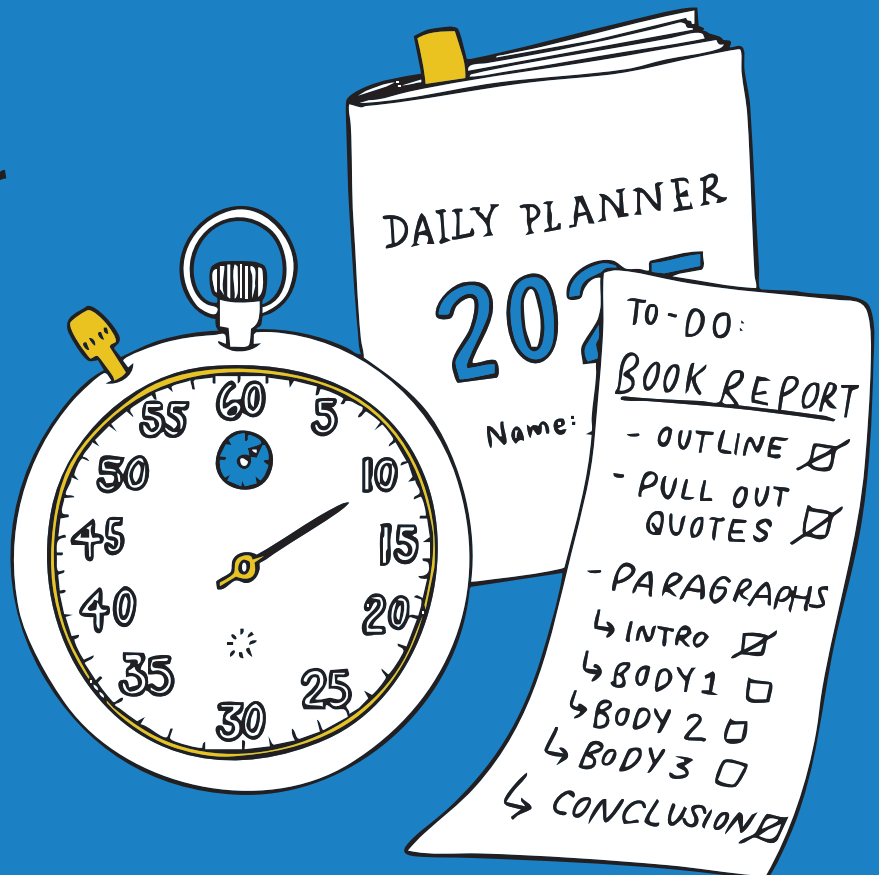
**A GUIDEBOOK**

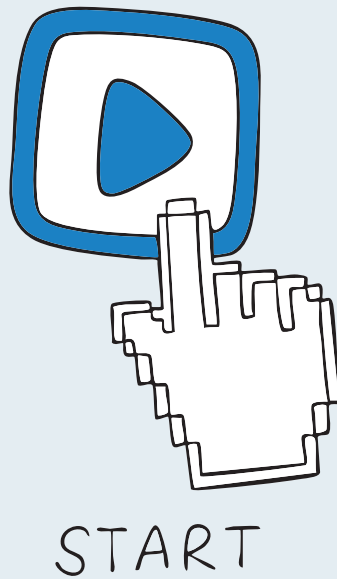
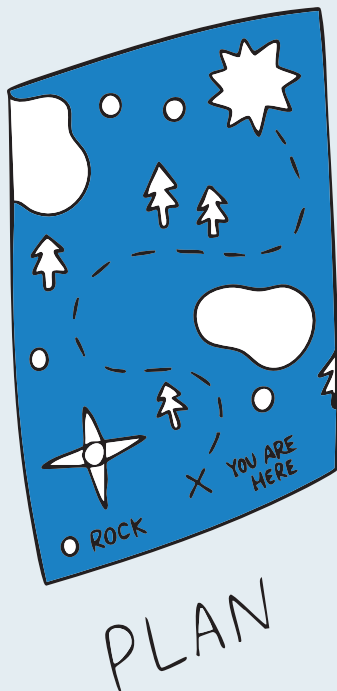


# What is Executive Function?

**Think, do, feel—  
how your brain  
keeps it all together**

by Kimberly Hildebrandt





**Definition:** The ability to get stuff done. Executive Function (EF) is a set of mental processes that helps us manage our thoughts, actions, and emotions to achieve goals.<sup>1</sup>

**Purpose:** It enables us to plan, start, and finish tasks. It helps us focus, control impulses, monitor and adapt behaviors, and stay on track to get things done.<sup>2</sup>

It is the brain's conductor, like that of an orchestra, coordinating our thoughts and emotions to guide us through complex situations and achieve a goal.<sup>3</sup>

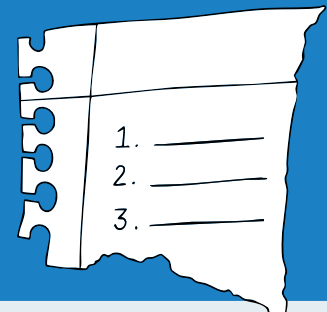
### WHY IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION IMPORTANT?

Strong executive function (EF) skills contribute to people's ability to achieve goals and have healthy and happy lives. Strong executive functioning can help people do well in school, find and keep a job, and develop strong social connections. Learn more about executive function and how to develop strong EF skills in your child's life.

### TOP EF TIPS

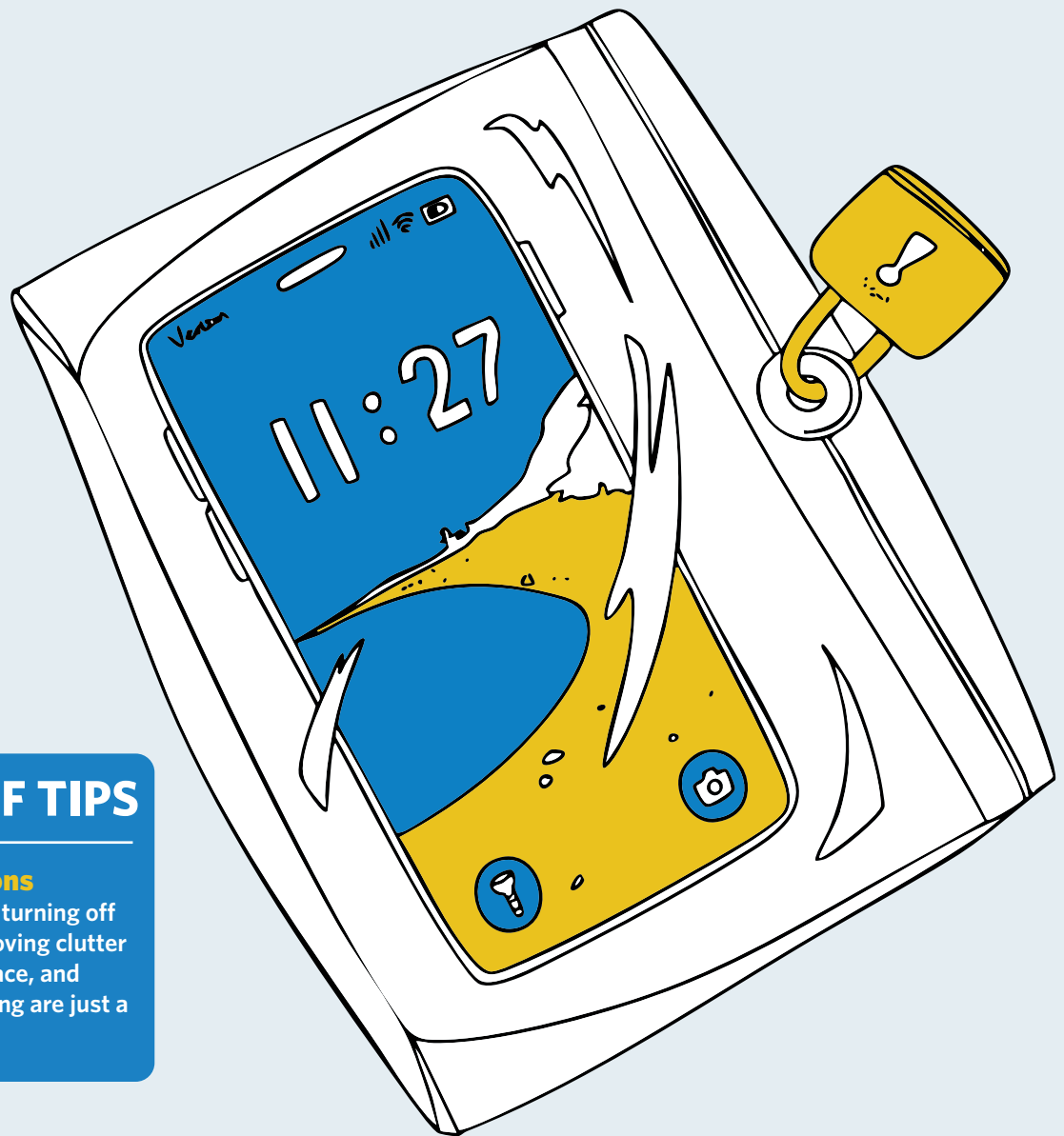
#### Chunking

The practice of chunking is simply breaking larger projects and assignments into smaller pieces, or chunks. Take breaks in between each of these smaller, more manageable tasks and you will find that your efficiency will improve.



# Key Executive Function Processes

While not all experts view executive function the same way, the following are commonly agreed upon Executive Function processes.<sup>4</sup>



## TOP EF TIPS

### Limit distractions

Closing your door, turning off notifications, removing clutter from your workspace, and limiting multitasking are just a few suggestions.

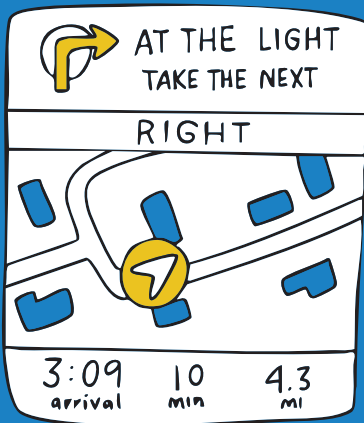


## WORKING MEMORY

*The ability to hold and manipulate information in our minds for short periods.*

### Examples:

- \* Following verbal multi-step instructions without needing them repeated or written down.
- \* Doing mental math, like calculating a tip at a restaurant.
- \* Remembering details of a story.



## COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

*The ability to problem solve by switching perspectives and adapting to new rules.*

### Examples:

- \* Switching from one task to another without getting stuck, like play time to meal time.
- \* Being open to new strategies when the current approach isn't working.
- \* Being able to make up a new story.



## INHIBITORY CONTROL

*The ability to resist impulses and distractions to stay focused.*

### Examples:

- \* Stopping yourself from blurting out in a meeting or class.
- \* Ignoring your phone to stay on task during work.
- \* Waiting for your turn.

# Boosting Your Brain's Toolbox

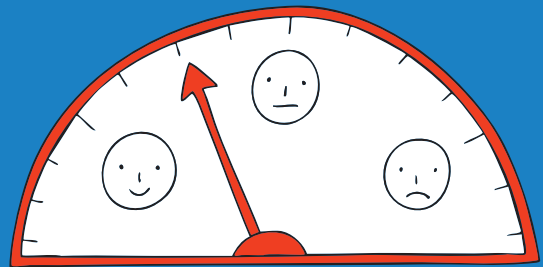
Think of Executive Function (EF) as your brain's toolkit for navigating life. It's important to sharpen our tools, learn new techniques, and get better at using each one. This is where EF skills come in—they're the strategies and habits we can build to work with our EF.



**Cold EF skills** Cool executive function refers to the brain processes that help us manage our thoughts, allowing us to plan, stay organized, and solve problems logically in situations that are low-stakes.



**Hot EF skills** Hot executive function refers to the brain processes that help us manage our actions and emotions in situations when emotions are running high.

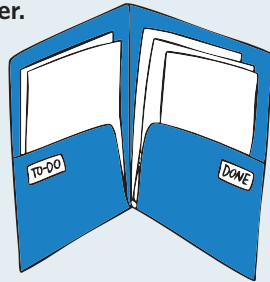


## ORGANIZATION

Arranging thoughts, materials, and activities in an orderly manner.

### \* COOL | Practical Tips:

- \* Use folders or labels to categorize items.
- \* Break larger tasks into smaller, manageable steps.



### 🔥 HOT | Emotional Response:

*What if I don't know where to put things?  
Is there TOO much to wade through?*

## PLANNING AND PRIORITIZING

The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal and decide what's most important.

### \* COOL | Practical Tips:

- \* Write down a daily or weekly to-do list.
- \* Identify three main tasks to focus on each day.

### 🔥 HOT | Emotional Response:

*How can I finish if I can't even start?  
Is there anyone who can even help me?  
Is it embarrassing to ask for help?*

## TASK INITIATION

The ability to start tasks without unnecessary delay.

### \* COOL | Practical Tips:

- \* Set a 5-minute timer: Work on a task for just 5 minutes to build momentum.
- \* Create a designated workspace to signal it's time to start.

### 🔥 HOT | Emotional Response:

*Have I done something like this before and either not liked it or failed?*

## TIME MANAGEMENT

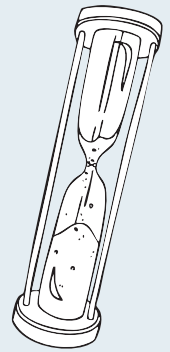
The skill of estimating time accurately and managing it to complete tasks efficiently.

### \* COOL | Practical Tips:

- \* Set timers or alarms as reminders.
- \* Break the day into time blocks for specific activities and reflect on whether or not you gave yourself enough time for each.

### 🔥 HOT | Emotional Response:

*Did I have enough time for the task?  
How off was I in my time estimates?*



## SELF-CONTROL & EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Managing emotions, thoughts, and actions to respond appropriately to situations.

### \* COOL | Practical Tips:

- \* Practice deep breathing or mindfulness when feeling overwhelmed or needing to pause before taking an action.
- \* Practice positive self-talk.



### 🔥 HOT | Emotional Response:

*Are my emotions based in reality or perception?  
How do I distinguish between the two?*

## GOAL-DIRECTED PERSISTENCE

The ability to stay focused on a goal despite challenges.

### \* COOL | Practical Tips:

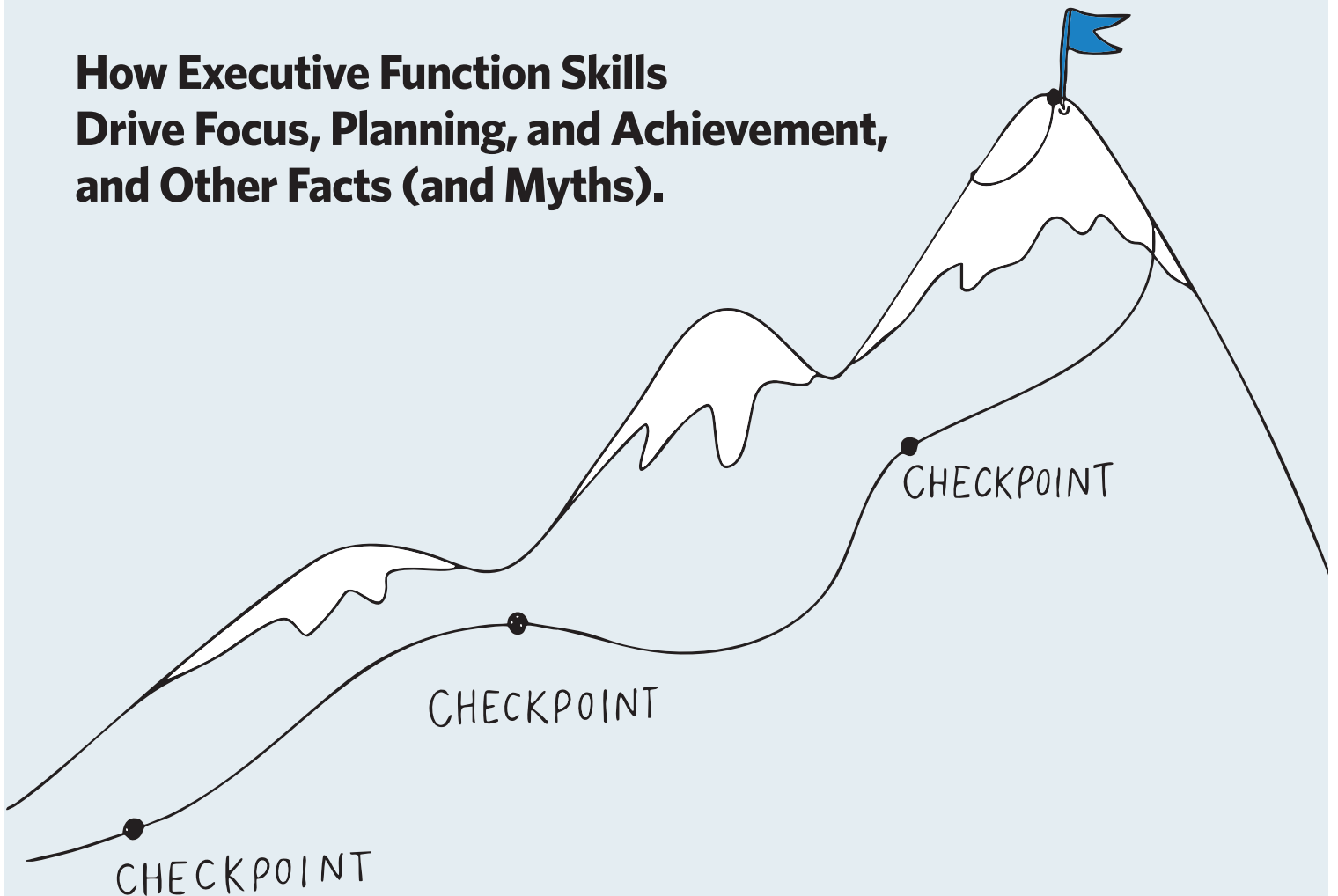
- \* Break large goals into smaller milestones and celebrate progress.
- \* Create a vision board with inspiring quotes and images.

### 🔥 HOT | Emotional Response:

*What if the goal isn't something I WANT to do but just something I NEED to do?*

# Myths and Facts

**How Executive Function Skills  
Drive Focus, Planning, and Achievement,  
and Other Facts (and Myths).**





**MYTH:** Executive function challenges aren't real.

**FACT:** Executive function (EF) challenges are real and affect individuals in different ways. Although EF issues are not listed as a separate diagnosis in major diagnostic manuals like the DSM-5, they are often associated with conditions like ADHD, depression, and anxiety. EF difficulties can manifest as challenges with planning, organization, or impulse control, making them a legitimate concern for many people. <sup>6</sup>

**MYTH:** Only people with ADHD have executive function issues.

**FACT:** While individuals with ADHD often experience EF challenges, they are not the only group affected. People without ADHD can also struggle with EF skills due to factors like trauma, stress, or mental health conditions. Weak EF skills can also be present in those with learning disabilities, anxiety, or depression. <sup>6, 9</sup>

## WEAK EF SKILLS SHOW UP WITH:



ANXIETY



LEARNING  
DISABILITIES



DEPRESSION



TRAUMA



ADHD

**MYTH:** Executive function skills only affect academic success.

**FACT:** EF skills are essential for every aspect of life, not just school or academic success. They impact how we manage daily routines, maintain relationships, regulate emotional responses, and achieve long-term personal and professional goals. Everyone, regardless of their career or educational background, uses EF skills in activities like managing time, setting goals, and regulating emotions. <sup>7</sup>

**MYTH:** Kids outgrow Executive Function challenges.

**FACT:** EF skills continue to develop into early adulthood, but challenges do not simply disappear with age. Many adults still struggle with EF skills if they did not receive support or develop effective strategies in childhood. With consistent practice and intervention, EF skills can improve, but they don't naturally resolve on their own. <sup>6, 7</sup>

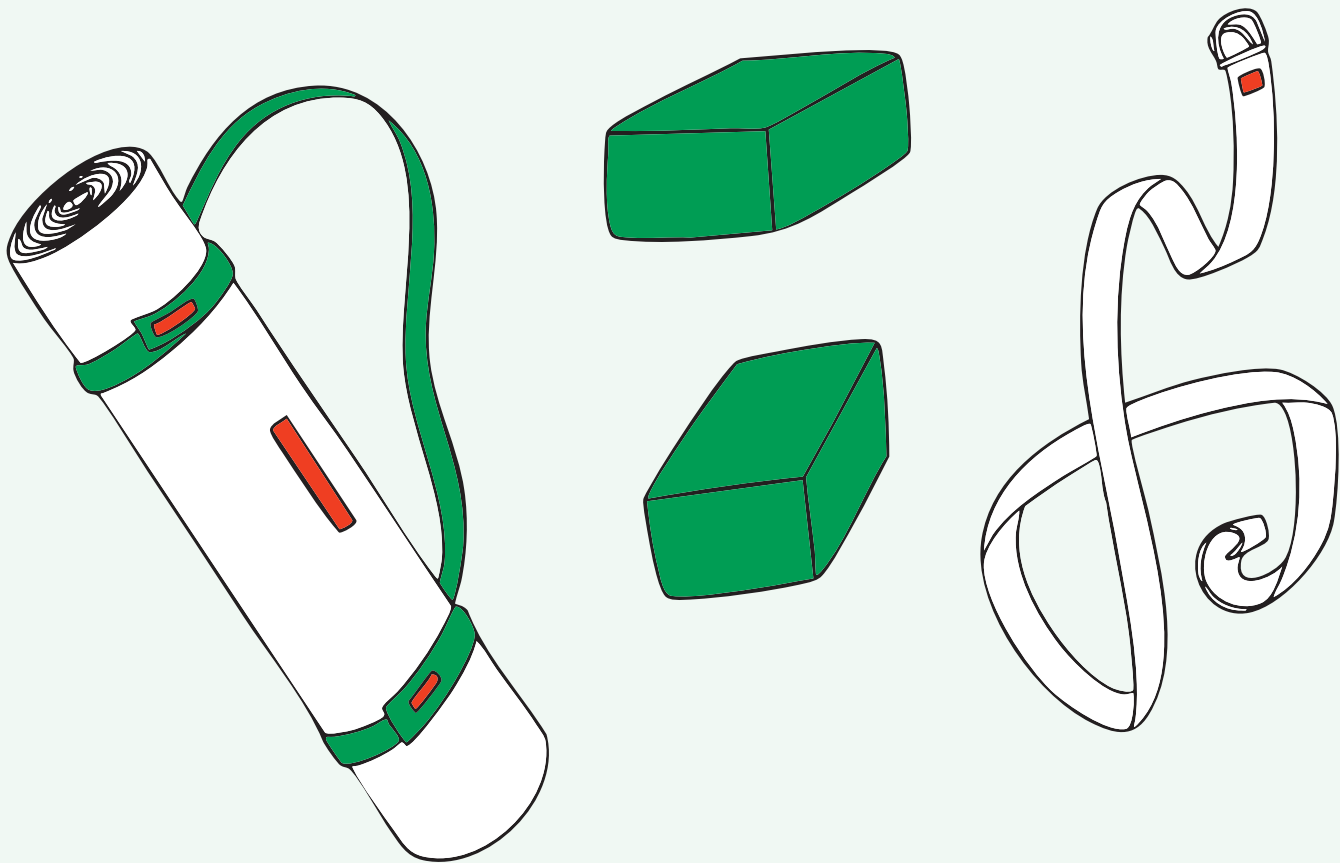
# Executive Function

## FOR HOME

**Getting and staying organized can make home a more tranquil place for your whole family.**

**by Susan Tomases**





Lila, age 14, is lying on the couch scrolling through her social media feed. She has to walk the dog and start her homework. With a research paper and a math test looming, she knows she's procrastinating but can't seem to get started. Lila's mom suggests she get off the couch, lay on a yoga mat, and do some stretching to clear her head. Lila's experience is typical for any teen but particularly challenging without executive function (EF) skills and tools to tackle what's before her.

### CREATING BALANCE ON THE HOMEFRONT

Strong EF skills help you achieve your goals whether you're a student dealing with school demands or a professional juggling work and a busy family. These skills are vital for everyday tasks, like getting ready in the morning, completing chores, managing emotions, and maintaining healthy relationships. They also allow us to balance responsibilities and enjoy hobbies. When EF is underdeveloped, people may struggle with focus, self-regulation, and time management. With some strategies, we can all improve these skills and feel less overwhelmed and more fulfilled.

### ✓ TOP EF TIPS

#### **Establish routines**

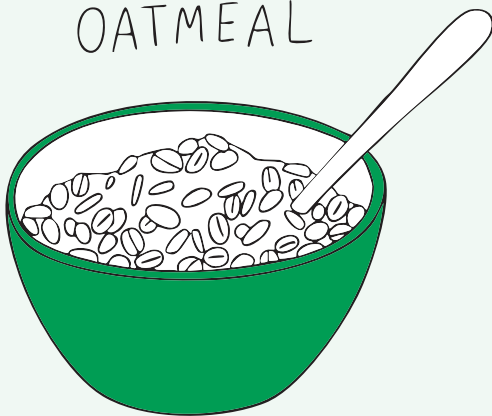
Consistent routines help minimize cognitive load and make you more efficient. Establishing these daily habits can be challenging for those who struggle with EF, but they're essential. These could include daily exercise, meditation, sleep, getting up and walking around consistently throughout the day, checking off completed projects on to-do lists, and many more.

# Making Everyday Tasks More Manageable

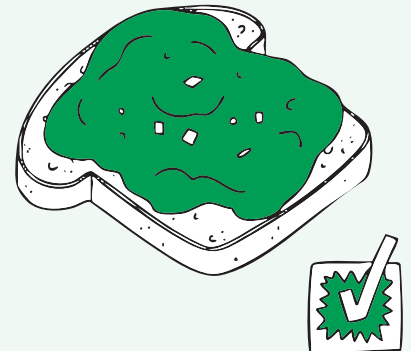
Simple digital and analog tools can help you stay on track, manage emotions, and have more time for the fun stuff.

## CHOOSE A HEALTHY BREAKFAST

OATMEAL



AVOCADO  
TOAST



FRUIT, NUTS  
& YOGURT



# 1. Getting Out the Door on Time

Mornings are a great opportunity to practice time management for everyone in the household. For parents with children struggling with EF, assist your child with structure and support, and then relinquish some control over time, letting them be in charge of their routines. 📄 [Downloadable](#)



## MAKE IT VISUAL

Post a step-by-step routine with pictures. For example: “Eat a healthy breakfast” (list some suggested food options to make decision-making easy), “clean up from breakfast,” “brush teeth” and “pack backpack.”



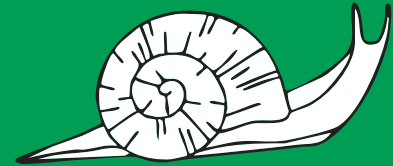
## USE TIMERS

Set alarms for key transitions, like waking up, taking a shower, or getting out the door.



## PREPARE AHEAD

Lay out clothes and supplies the night before. This reduces stress in the morning and builds planning skills.



## DON'T RUSH

Carve out extra time into your morning routine to practice.



## RELY ON REMINDERS

Set alerts on your phone or write notes on scrap paper the night before.

Executive function doesn't fully mature until we're in our mid-20s, so it's natural for children to need support. By practicing routines, managing emotions, and exploring interests, you and your child can build a **foundation for success**.

## 2. Keeping Your Room or Your Home Organized

Routines for organization and time management are keys to support executive function.

📄 Downloadable

### **BREAK TASKS INTO MANAGEABLE CHUNKS:**

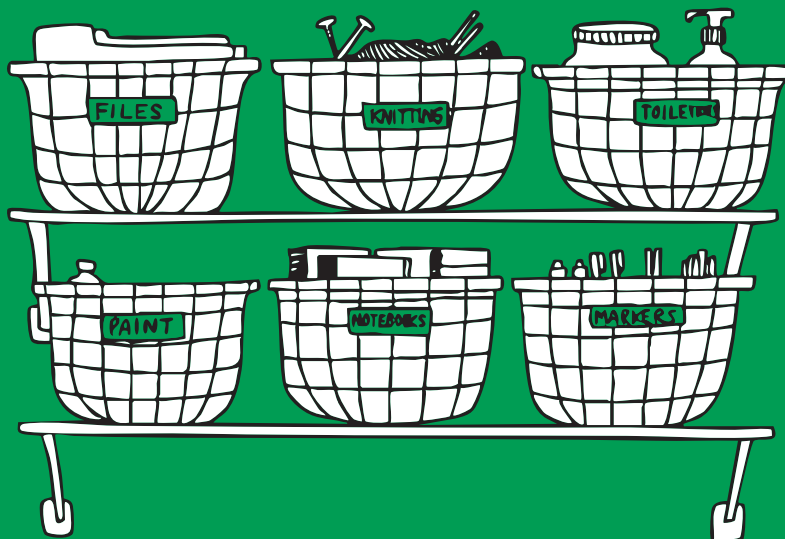
This makes an overwhelming chore more doable. An example for cleaning the house or a room could include: pick up clutter, fold laundry and put it away, make bed, empty trash cans, vacuum, etc.

### **PROVIDE SPACES TO SORT AND ORGANIZE:**

Use boxes, bins, or baskets with labels to put things in their place. Clutter will build up if there's nowhere to put it.

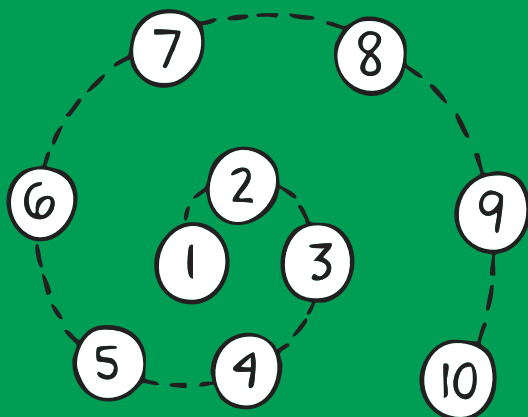
### **USE TIME LIMITS:**

Set a timer or challenge yourself or your child to complete a task in a manageable predetermined amount of time. For kids, making it fun turns a chore into a game.



## 3. Managing Emotions

Emotional regulation is a cornerstone of executive function and an essential life skill:



### **TEACH CALMING STRATEGIES:**

Identify and practice techniques like deep breathing or counting to ten during stressful moments.

### **ROLE-PLAY SCENARIOS:**

Practice ways to handle disagreements or express feelings with phrases like, "I feel upset because..."

### **ENCOURAGE REFLECTION:**

After emotional moments, discuss what went well and what could improve. This builds self-awareness.



## 4. Balancing Screen Time

Technology like smartphones and computers are resources to help accomplish tasks with built-in tools to help manage time, set reminders, and more. But they can also be a distraction, interfering with accomplishing tasks, and more personal pursuits like cooking or practicing a sport.

The downsides of too much screen time are well documented and can result in obesity, irregular sleep, behavioral problems, and impaired academic performance.<sup>10</sup>

Outside of work and school, practicing moderation when it comes to screens is a good idea.

### **SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES:**

For example, "No screens during dinner," or "Screens off 30 minutes before bed."

### **OFFER ENGAGING ALTERNATIVES:**

Encourage creative hobbies, like drawing, puzzles, fitness, or socializing to fill downtime.

### **CONSIDER PARENTAL CONTROLS:**

Putting the pressure on parents to limit their child's access to online content potentially places blame for their child's overuse or misuse of their devices unfairly on the parent. However, knowing what, where, and how your children are using their devices is important. Open and honest dialogue, as challenging as that may be with adolescents, is always the best way to address this.



## TOP EF TIPS

### **Meditate and practice mindfulness**

Take a few minutes every day to sit quietly, calm your mind, and tap into regular, deep breathing. Science has proven that this helps regulate emotions, improves memory and focus, and reduces anxiety.



"As a mother of three sons with dyslexia and executive functioning challenges, I was the embodiment of a helicopter parent—constantly hovering to shield my children from failure. I not only intervened in their academic struggles but also micromanaged their friendships to prevent feelings of rejection. Fast forward 15 years, and I now realize in trying to protect their feelings, I unintentionally hindered their ability to develop resilience and problem-solving skills. I was just making it harder for them to learn how to pick themselves up when they faced failure.

Now, as a teacher for students who learn differently, I recognize the importance of allowing children the space and support to navigate challenges with greater independence."

— Ann Andrew, Middle School Teacher and parent



## 5. Developing Interests Beyond Work, School, or Chores

Explore hobbies and develop passions based on innate interests.

### **TRY NEW ACTIVITIES:**

Experimenting with new activities or tapping into existing strengths and interests is a great way to alleviate stress.

### **CELEBRATE EVERYONE'S EFFORTS:**

Whether it's building a model, baking, or gardening, give yourself or your child a pat on the back for getting involved with new interests.

### **BE CURIOUS:**

Try something new with friends or family or explore more personal pursuits like crafting, learning a trade, video editing, or drawing. Or set a physical goal and aim toward that like **training for a 5K road race.**





# Five Ways to Manage Your Digital Resources

📄 Downloadable

## Organize Your Digital Files and Folders

- ✓ Create a clear folder structure.
- ✓ Use consistent and descriptive names for files.
- ✓ Search for “untitled documents” and rename any.
- ✓ Use document tabs to reduce the number of documents open for each project.
- ✓ Close tabs daily to reduce visual clutter and create tab groups in Google Chrome.
- ✓ Archive old files.
- ✓ Delete duplicate files.



## Manage Email

- ✓ Create folders or labels like “Assignments,” “Activities,” or “Family.”
- ✓ Unsubscribe from emails you don’t read.
- ✓ Manage email settings from Google Classroom and other learning management platforms.
- ✓ Set up filters to move emails with specific words like “morning announcements”, “assignments” or from certain senders into folders automatically.



UNSUBSCRIBE

## Software and Apps

- ✓ Hide apps from the dock on MacBook that you don’t use regularly.
- ✓ Uninstall unused apps.
- ✓ Update frequently used apps to avoid performance issues.
- ✓ Organize apps on your phone into folders.



## Calendar and Scheduling

- ✓ Use Google Calendar, or a similar app, to add all your events and color-code them (e.g., blue for School, red for Personal).
- ✓ Set reminders for deadlines.
- ✓ Schedule weekly planning time to review tasks and events for the week.

10:30 - 11:30

REVIEW TASKS FOR  
THE WEEK

Office ?

## Digital Wellness

- ✓ Turn off non-essential notifications.
- ✓ Use a tool like Screen Time on iPhone to limit daily usage of apps like Instagram.
- ✓ Turn on “Focus” mode during work/study periods to mute notifications.

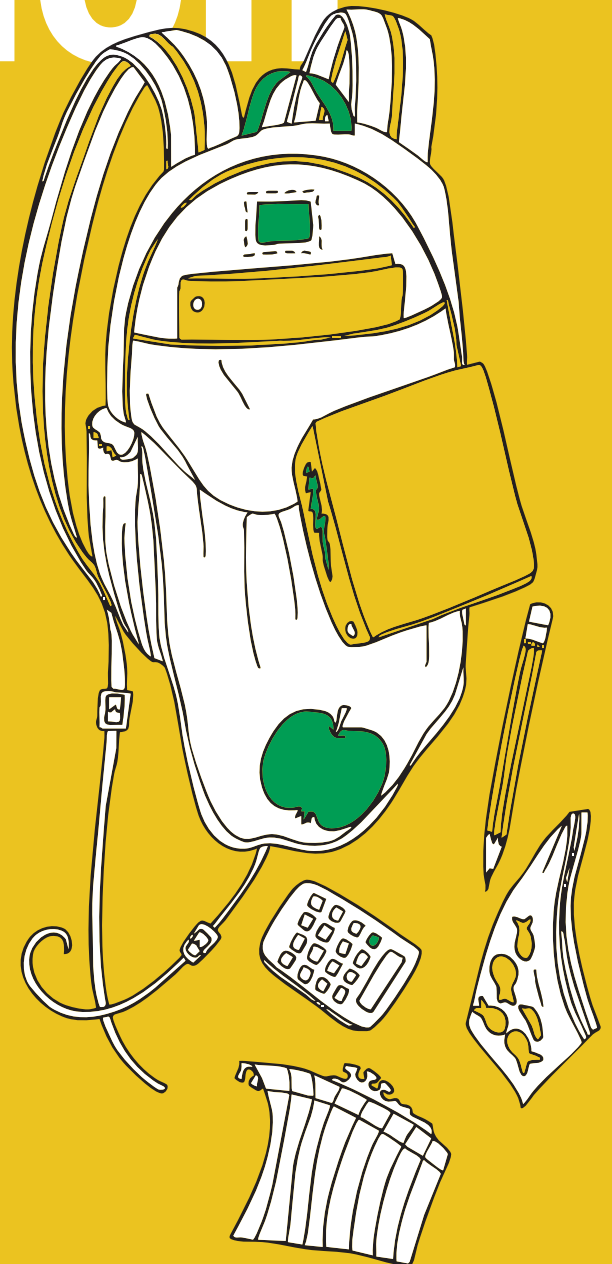


# Executive Function

## FOR SCHOOL

**The demands that school puts on our Executive Functions can be significant. Planning, strategizing, and communicating can help.**

**by Kimberly Hildebrandt**





It's a school night, and your child sits at the kitchen table surrounded by textbooks, a pencil in hand, and a blank worksheet staring back at them. "I don't even know where to start," they say, frustrated. Sound familiar? Moments like these often bring executive function (EF) into sharp focus—not because EF only matters in school, but because school is where young people face some of their biggest challenges in planning, organizing, and managing tasks.

We all have strengths and weaknesses when it comes to EF, and we rely on strategies to help us stay on track. This is more important for kids than adults, as their brains are still growing and changing. EF begins developing in infancy, but there are major growth spurts between the ages of 3 and 5 and again during adolescence. During these times, it's critical for adults to step in and help children build the skills they'll need to eventually manage on their own.<sup>11</sup>

## ✓ TOP EF TIPS

### Reward yourself

With a little bit of self-reflection, you will become more aware of what rewards you need to feel successful. Maybe it's a five-minute break, a cup of tea, a few minutes of stretching, or simply closing your eyes and focusing on deep breathing.



# EF Strategies to Help Your Child with School

When a 9-year-old forgets to hand in an assignment, we often shrug it off, gently reminding them to turn it in the next day. But as children grow older, our expectations shift. By middle or high school, we assume they'll manage deadlines, stay organized, and juggle multiple assignments on their own. The truth is, many kids simply aren't ready for this level of independence. As school demands increase, the support from adults often decreases, leaving some students to struggle—not because they lack intelligence, but because their EF skills are still catching up.

Below are strategies you can implement at home to support EF for schoolwork.

## Planner or Assignment Notebooks:

If your school doesn't provide one, get your child an assignment notebook where they can make and keep checklists of assignments, due dates, and activities. Check in with your child every day after school. Have them get out their assignments either online or in their notebook and talk through their to-dos.



## Set Aside Time to Get Work Done:

It is helpful if this is a consistent time each day, but if it can't be consistent, make sure it is communicated with your child so they know what to expect.

## Set Aside Space to Get Work Done:

A quiet space, if possible, with an adult nearby for support. Ideally, the workspace should be well-lit and free of distractions like phones or TVs.



## Model Planning:

On either a daily or weekly basis, talk through what the schedule is for the week. If you are using an assignment notebook or calendar, you can have your child add in their after-school activities. This way, if a particular evening is extra busy, talk about planning ahead. Perhaps there won't be time to do homework that evening and the child needs to adjust when they get work done.



**LEARN MORE**

**5 Strategies to Support College Students' Executive Functions**

## Create Routines:

Routines help your child know what to expect, to help them get their brain in the right frame of mind. This is particularly important for older children who struggle more with task initiation.

📄 Downloadable



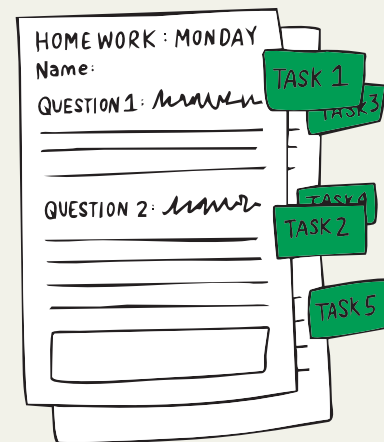
**Tell Your Child Why:** Especially as your child gets older, it is important that they understand WHY these strategies are being used. This will help them decide how and what strategies to implement on their own as they gain independence.

**Change It Up:** If a strategy isn't working, try something different! Talk to your child about why it isn't working and brainstorm ideas together. Involving them in the process gives them more agency and demonstrates the need for flexibility.

## Estimate Time:

Help your child estimate how long it might take to complete tasks. Then have your child reflect on how long the task actually took. This helps them build time awareness.

📄 Downloadable



## Micro Unit:

If your child gets overwhelmed by homework or projects, help them break the assignment down into smaller parts. Get started with a small step that is easy to complete. This builds confidence and helps with task initiation. 📄 Downloadable

## Rewards:

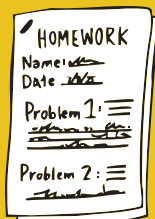
Let your child pick rewards for completing steps. The size of the reward should match the size of the step. If it is a short step that takes a few minutes, perhaps it is just a bite of a snack. If it is a longer step that has taken them most of their homework time, perhaps it is some screen time or something else they enjoy.<sup>12</sup>



# Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher

Below are questions you can ask your child or child's teacher. It is better to do this early in the school year. If you already have concerns about your child's EF, be specific with the teacher, working to build collaboration. As your child gets older, if they don't already know the answers to these questions, encourage them to advocate by reaching out to the teacher for answers.

*(Tip: you could help your child compose an email to their teacher.)*



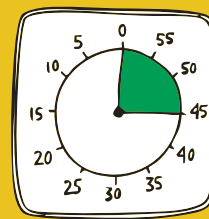
- How do students know what their homework is and when it is due?
- Do you expect your students to track their assignments in a planner or online?



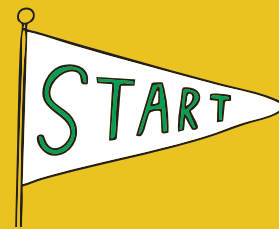
- What strategies do you use to help students stay organized with materials?
- If students are doing a longer-term project, like a book report, are there due dates along the way?



If my child is struggling with a concept, what options are available to them for extra help? What is the best way for my child to communicate their needs with you?




Are there any visual cues or reminders you use to support student focus and time management?



Have you noticed any specific challenges with my child initiating tasks or completing tasks independently?



More tips for discussions with your child's teacher about EF challenges

 It's helpful to know if there's anything stressful happening at home, so I can **manage expectations** with that student at school."

—MARIA R., MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER



## What is Metacognition and How Does it Work?

"Metacognitive thinking teaches us about ourselves," says Tamara Rosier, a learning coach who specializes in metacognitive techniques. "Thinking about our thinking creates perspective — perspective that leaves room for change."

She gives an example: "Instead of saying, 'Math tests make me anxious,' we're asking ourselves, 'What is it about math tests that makes me feel anxious and what can I do to change that?'"

Kids [and adults] who are taught to think of themselves as being "good" or "bad" at a particular task can have a fixed mindset that makes them passive in approaching a challenge: either they can do it or they can't, but they aren't likely to think they can change that outcome.

Teaching someone to become more self-reflective helps them move from a mindset that leaves little room for change to a mindset which promotes self-awareness and resilience.<sup>13</sup>



### TOP EF TIPS

#### Self-reflect

Metacognition is the practice of understanding the way you think and learn. Taking time to reflect on what strategies are working and why will build self-awareness and define how to tackle certain tasks more efficiently.

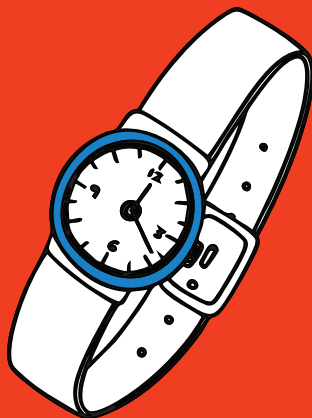


# Executive Function

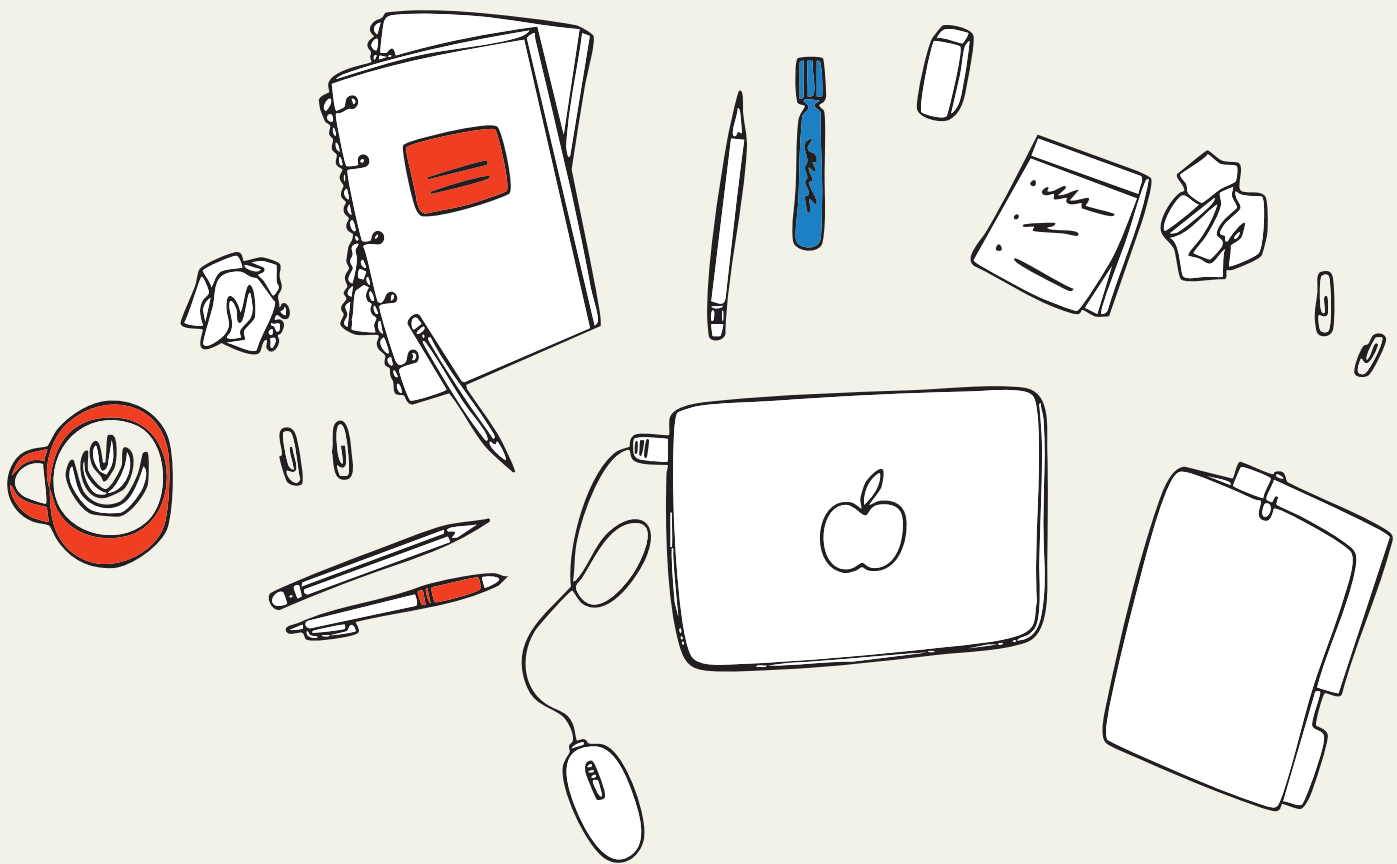
**FOR WORK**

**No matter what you do for work, Executive Function skills are essential for getting the job done.**

**by Susan Tomases**







Ronaldo works at a tech start-up. He's a brilliant coder, has excellent people skills, and is passionate about the software his company sells. But he sometimes arrives late to meetings, misses deadlines, and struggles to organize the resources he needs to get his job done. Renaldo has clear executive function (EF) deficits at work—and they show up at home, too.

### KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

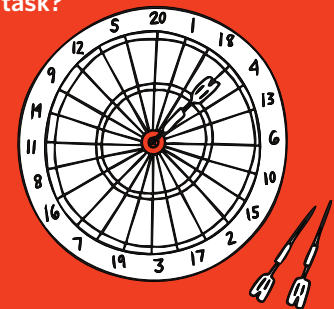
Executive function is not a diagnosed disability, so while people may struggle with this at work, employers are not required to provide accommodations for those struggling with time management, prioritization, motivation, and more. However, many employers are willing to provide reasonable accommodations even if there is no disability diagnosis, especially if it is something that will benefit several employees.

Many employers agree that accommodations provided for one employee often benefit many.

### TOP EF TIPS

#### Set clear goals

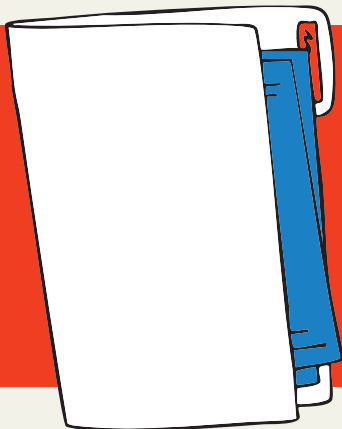
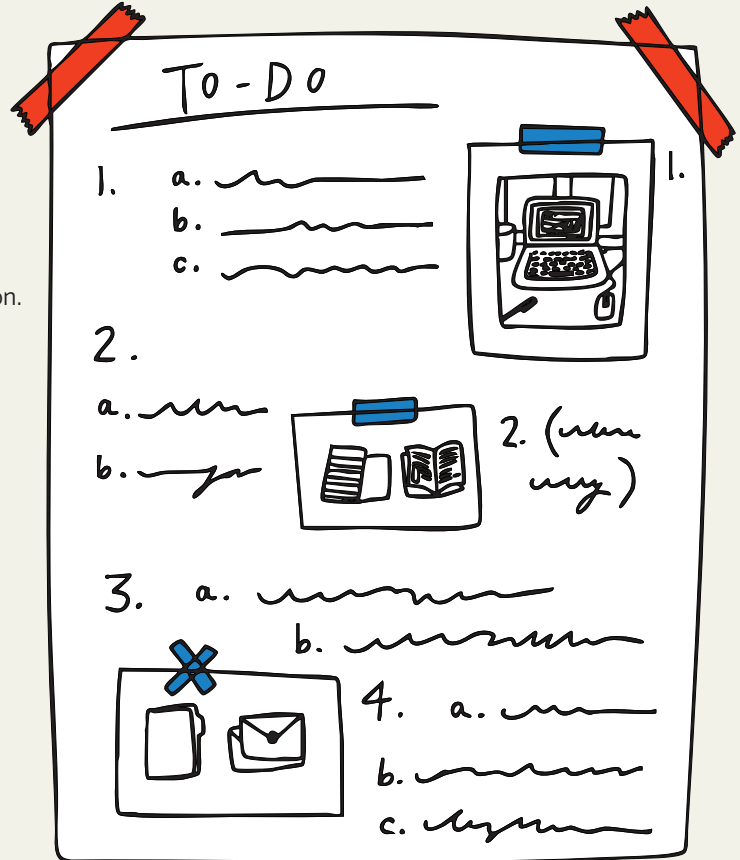
Setting achievable, actionable, realistic goals and establishing a plan will make completing something more manageable. If you aren't sure what you're aiming for, how can you know whether you've completed a task?



# Workplace Accommodations

Here is a list of possible workplace accommodations. A larger list is available on the Understood.org website.<sup>14</sup>

1. Written instructions with short, clear steps.
2. Pictures, photos, or videos that show how to do an important task.
3. Text-to-speech tools if needed for emails and texts.
4. Visual reminders posted in physical and virtual workstations.
5. Checklists to help structure the steps in a given task.
6. Daily or weekly huddles to ensure that each team member is aligned and focused on goals.
7. Written agendas shared before a meeting or conversation.
8. Mentors and/or job coaches to support interactions or to help teach new tasks.
9. Ergonomic workstations, including the flexibility to sit or stand as needed.
10. Flexible break times.
11. Clear goals and metrics, including examples of how to achieve them.
12. Tasks broken down into smaller steps.
13. Visual demonstration of how to start a task and what it should look like at the end.
14. Daily schedules and/or ideas on how to structure work time to be more productive.



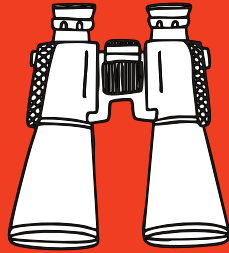
It isn't about right or wrong tools,  
but rather what **works for you.**

## Self Awareness and Communication

Understanding how you think and learn, called metacognition (pg. 31), is vital to making change. If you are asking your employer for workplace accommodations, it's imperative that you know what support you need to be effective.

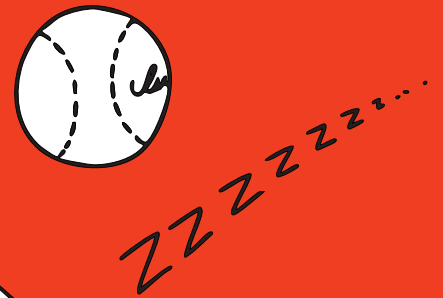
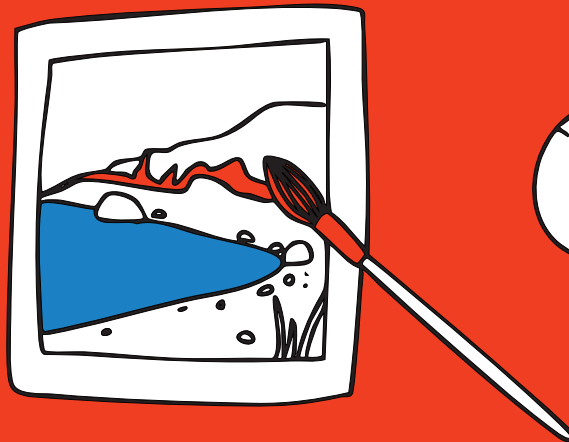
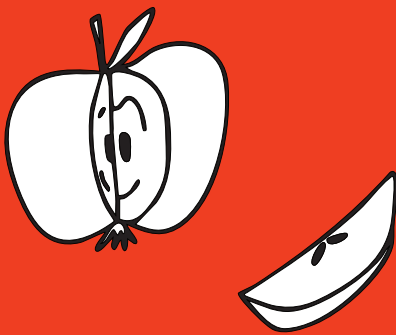
## MODEL BEHAVIOR

There's always that person at work who seems to be on top of everything. Observing the routines and practices of colleagues can be a great way of developing skills and strategies that may be useful to you and your EF skills.



## THE POWER OF TEAMWORK

If there are specific things that challenge you, e.g. time management, talk to a trusted colleague about this. You should feel comfortable owning your weaknesses and asking for help. Peers at work are often eager to share strategies that work for them and you likely have some tips that your colleagues can benefit from, too.



# Self Esteem

Even though researchers note that EF solidifies in the human brain in our mid-twenties, it doesn't mean that adults cannot learn strategies to address their EF deficits. A recent article from the renowned Mayo Clinic<sup>15</sup> offers some advice, including being aware of situations in which your self-esteem may be challenged. For example, making a presentation to colleagues could be difficult and intimidating, and it's important to recognize that. Are the beliefs you have about yourself and your performance true? For those who suffer from low self-esteem, negative thoughts often become exaggerated.

If you notice that you frequently convert positive emotions into negative ones, address this and try to raise your awareness of this habit. Here are some key tips for maintaining positive self-esteem.

- Focus on your strengths and lean into these to help counteract your negativity.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself.
- Try to do something you enjoy every day.
- Take care of yourself by eating a healthy diet, getting seven to eight hours of sleep each night, and exercising 30 minutes each day.<sup>15</sup>

# Tips from Landmark Alumni

We've polled some Landmark alumni to share favorite executive function tips they practice at work.

## Spencer Smitherman '08

Head of Customer Success, Sublime Security

### USE AI TO SUMMARIZE CALL NOTES

I use ChatGPT or Claude to summarize a meeting transcript generated from call recording software like Gong. It helps augment any notes I take during the meeting.

### MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

I disable most notifications on my phone to reduce distractions.

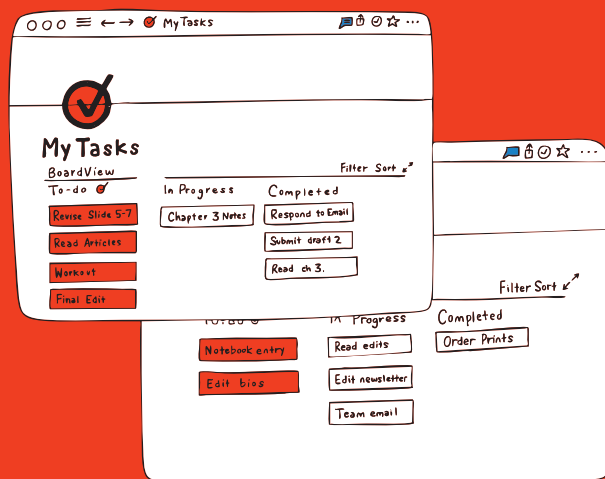


### PREP THE NIGHT BEFORE

I generate meeting agendas on Sunday before my week starts. It makes back-to-back meetings much less stressful.

### USE VISUAL TOOLS

Kanban-style trackers to organize tasks and make them visual in project management software, like Notion or Asana, are super helpful when juggling simultaneous tasks.



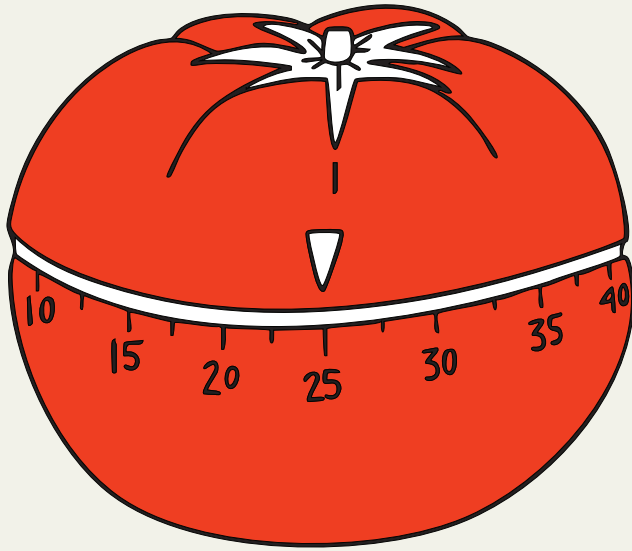
## ✓ TOP EF TIPS

### Use visual aids

There are many analog and digital tools available to help visually plan out projects and execute a plan.

Low-tech project management options:

- Post-It notes with smaller tasks on a wall or bulletin board
- Large format paper taped to a wall with bulleted lists
- Daily agenda with space for to-do lists on each day



## Simon English '14

*Co-Founder,  
Common Table Creative*

As a filmmaker running my own production company, Common Table Creative, I face a myriad of short and long-term tasks. Executive functioning is the backbone of my operation. The

two essential strategies I use are the Pomodoro technique and maintaining micro and macro checklists.

### POMODORO TECHNIQUE

With the Pomodoro technique, I work intensely for 25 to 35 minutes, then take a quick 3 to 5-minute break. This helps me stay on task but also lets me reset periodically to keep my eyes and mind fresh and to avoid burnout.

### MACRO AND MICRO CHECKLISTS

The macro checklist is what I need to get done in the next month or two. My micro list is my day-to-day tasks.

These strategies help me stay focused, achieve my goals, and hit deadlines.



If you want to explore higher-tech options, here's a link to a website with some top-rated digital project management tools.



## Ady Tibrewal '17

*Assistant Project Manager,  
EDA Contractors*

### DIGITAL CALENDAR MANAGEMENT

With numerous meetings, site visits, and calls every day, I use my online calendar to schedule appointments and even block out time for independent tasks that require focus.

### MINI WHITEBOARDS OR POST-IT NOTES

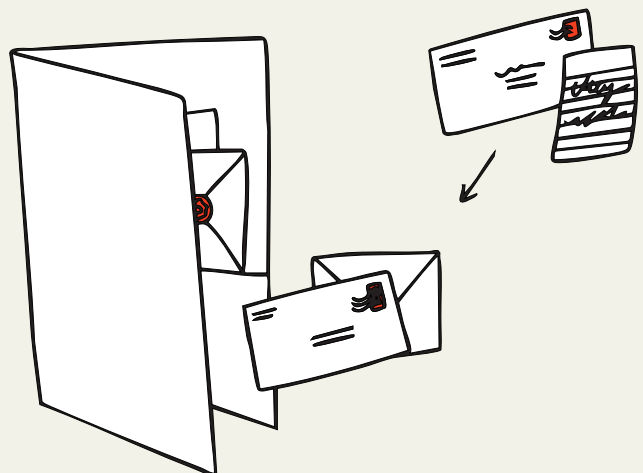
With my ADHD, I find it difficult to hold too many details in my head, so I make a habit of writing things down or recording notes as soon as I hear them. Each mini whiteboard is dedicated to a specific project where I track tasks and action items. It's simple but incredibly effective!

### COMMUNICATION

Constant communication with colleagues ensures that we're aligned on completing tasks. If something slips through the cracks, my team helps keep me on track.

### FILE AND FLAG EMAILS

Managing hundreds of emails every day can be overwhelming. I organize them by project and further categorize them based on topics. This helps me access



# Downloadable Resources

Helpful checklists, guides, templates, and more

- Daily Checklists
- Ready-for-School Checklist
- Estimate Time Log
- Room Clean-up Checklist
- Two-Column Notes Template
- Five-Step Writing Process
- Five-Day Study Plan
- Microuniting Template
- Daily Priorities Template
- Organizing Your Digital Downloads
- Top 10 EF Tips

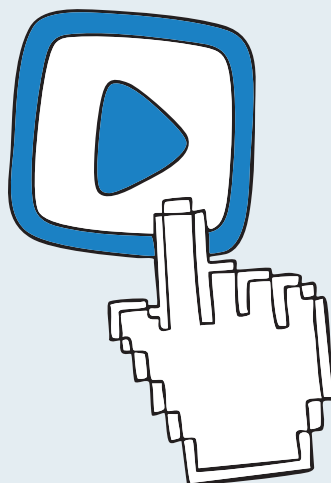
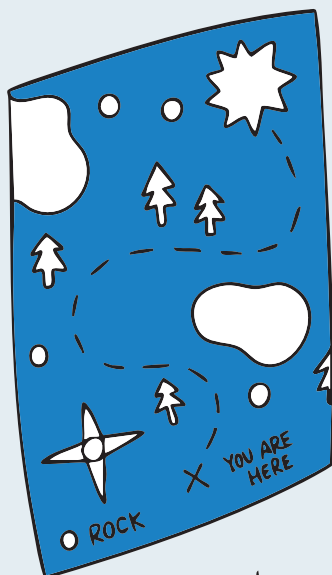
[www.landmarkschool.org/efdownloads](http://www.landmarkschool.org/efdownloads)



## Other publications in our Guidebook Series



[www.landmarkschool.org/guidebooks](http://www.landmarkschool.org/guidebooks)



# Citations

1. *What Is executive function?*. Landmark Outreach. (2024, September) <https://www.landmarkoutreach.org/strategies/executive-function-overview/>
2. Newhall, P.W. (2014). *Executive function: foundations for teaching and learning*. Landmark School Outreach Program.
3. Brown, T.E. (2007). A new approach to attention deficit disorder. *Educational Leadership*. 64, 22-27.
4. Belsky, G. (n.d.). *The 3 areas of executive function*. Understood.org. <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/types-of-executive-function-skills>
5. *Executive function: Skills for life*. Cleveland Clinic. (2024, August 27). <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/executive-function>
6. Cohen, D. B. (2022, April). *7 Myths of Executive Functioning*. drbarbaracohen.com. October 2024, <https://www.drbarbaracohen.com/blog/7-myths-of-executive-functioning>
7. Morin, A. (2022, June). *5 common myths about executive function challenges*. Understood.org. October 2024, <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/executive-functioning-challenges-myths>
8. *Hot and Cool Executive Function Skills*. (2022, November 15). Landmark Outreach. October 25, 2024, <https://www.landmarkoutreach.org/strategies/hot-cold-executive-function-skills/>
9. Heller, C. A., & Cooper-Kahn, J. (2022, September 15). *Executive Function Issues and ADHD*. CHADD. <https://chadd.org/attention-article/executive-function-issues-and-adhd/>
10. Mayo Clinic Health System Staff. (n.d.). Children and screen time: How to set limits. Retrieved November 21, 2024, from <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/children-and-screen-time>
11. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/what-is-executive-function-and-how-does-it-relate-to-child-development/>
12. <https://childmind.org/article/helping-kids-who-struggle-with-executive-functions/#:~:text=How%20do%20you%20teach%20kids,and%20using%20a%20reward%20system>
13. Jacobson, R. (2024, February 5). *Metacognition: How thinking about thinking can help kids*. Child Mind Institute. <https://childmind.org/article/how-metacognition-can-help-kids/#what-is-metacognition-and-how-does-it-work>
14. Understood. (n.d.). Reasonable workplace accommodation examples. Retrieved November 21, 2024, from <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/reasonable-workplace-accommodation-examples>
15. Mayo Clinic Staff. (n.d.). Self-esteem: Take steps to feel better about yourself. Retrieved November 21, 2024, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/self-esteem/art-20045374>

**Executive Function: A Guidebook** was curated and edited by Landmark School and Landmark Outreach with special thanks to:

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

Kimberly Hildebrandt and Susan Tomases

**COLLABORATORS:**

Kristine Burgess, Adam Hickey, Kate Kinsman, Lauren Murphy, Meghan Sebens

**ART DIRECTOR:** Melanie deForest-Malloy

**ILLUSTRATOR:** Olivia Malloy







# LANDMARK SCHOOL

*Harnessing the Power of Learning Differently*

**FOR:**

- › Families
- › Advocates
- › Educational Consultants

**LEARN MORE:**

[landmarkschool.org](http://landmarkschool.org)



# LANDMARK OUTREACH

*PD and Coaching for Educators*

**FOR:**

- › Educators
- › Schools
- › Districts
- › Universities

**LEARN MORE:**

[landmarkoutreach.org](http://landmarkoutreach.org)

