

13 Executive Functions Assessment

By Seth Perler, M.Ed., [SethPerler.com](https://sethperler.com)



Directions: Parents, Teachers, Therapists: On this printable pdf, I detail the 13 Executive Functioning Skills I like to look at in order to assess student challenges. Note that these are **skill sets** our brains build to help us “execute” complex tasks, in order to succeed in school, successfully transition into adulthood, etc. In other words, it’s **not** about the pervasive myths of “just trying harder” or “motivating oneself”, it’s about **building skills**. You’ll notice a lot of overlap in the skill areas below, because the brain uses multiple skills **together**. Feel free to **check off problem areas**, or **highlight snippets that resonate**, to help you **strategize solutions** more easily. Next, go deeper with the bonus on page 6.

In gratitude and service,
Seth Perler,

<https://sethperler.com/> , <https://ExecutiveFunctionSummit.com/>

PS - If you like my work, **please** share it with others who may benefit.

The 13 Executive Function Skills	✓ What planning problems might look like?
<p>1) Planning skills: A massive set of time management and/or project/task management skills that help us estimate a <i>realistic</i> perception of the time, energy and steps necessary to “execute” or accomplish a goal/task. Planning is how we break down or chunk tasks into manageable subtasks or babysteps. It includes planning one’s day, reliably using calendars, planners or agendas, scheduling, planning how to write a paper or essay, etc.</p>	<p>What planning problems may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Schoolwork: Always trying to get caught up. Falls behind because of late work, incomplete assignments, zeroes, missing work, misses deadlines.<input type="checkbox"/> Events: Unaware of upcoming responsibilities or events.<input type="checkbox"/> Avoids: Planning and planners feel like a burden. Avoids planning, using planners, calendars, etc. Says, “I don’t need a planner. I hate planners.”<input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination: Does things at the last minute. Says, “I don’t like planning. Planners don’t work for me. I don’t need to write it down, I’ll remember it.” Or, “the teacher has it online already.”<input type="checkbox"/> Execution: Approach homework randomly, chaotically, with no plan.<input type="checkbox"/> Unproductive: Wastes a lot of time, takes “forever” to do things.<input type="checkbox"/> Time blindness: Unrealistic perception of the time, energy and steps needed to accomplish things.<input type="checkbox"/> Writing: Starts writing without a plan. Essays go all over the place, making revision extremely difficult.

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<p>2) Organization skills: Skills for creating reliable structures or systems to keep track of things, so we're prepared with what we need, when we need it. We also build skills to organize our thoughts and our writing.</p>	<p>What organization problem may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Disorganized: Messy backpack, locker, desk, bedroom, etc.<input type="checkbox"/> Piles: Lots of piles that don't get organized.<input type="checkbox"/> Paper management: Loses school papers, papers not in the right folders, papers jammed in the backpack, locker or desk. Notes not in the right notebook, or disorganized note taking on random pages.<input type="checkbox"/> Forgetful: Often forgets things and unprepared, because organizational systems aren't reliable yet.<input type="checkbox"/> Other: Overwhelmed by where to even start organizing. Disorganized written assignments. Disorganized thoughts.
<p>3) Prioritization skills: Executing (doing) the important thing over the preferred fun or easy thing, when it matters. Decision making skills.</p>	<p>What problems with prioritizing may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Avoids: Don't start things they don't feel like doing, so put it off.<input type="checkbox"/> Distraction: Distracted by things that are more fun, or easier.<input type="checkbox"/> Excuses: Great excuses and arguments to justify procrastinating. "I'll do it later, I promise, trust me!" but it doesn't get done, or is done at the last minute, rushed, and of poor quality.<input type="checkbox"/> Can even struggle to prioritize things they want to do, that are important to them.
<p>4) Focus, Attention, Concentration Skills: Skills to stay "on task", without getting distracted. Ability to manage and sustain attention while executing a task until finished. Resist temptation to shift to preferred things. Able to redirect self to the task at hand.</p>	<p>What focus problems may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Unfocused: Distractible, not paying attention, can't concentrate, daydreams.<input type="checkbox"/> Off-task: Needs a lot of redirection.<input type="checkbox"/> Misses details: Doesn't know what the details of the homework are, doesn't know what they were just reading.<input type="checkbox"/> Unproductive: Seems to waste a lot of time, takes forever to finish.

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<p>5) Inhibitory Skills: In order to focus, we must also build skills to inhibit thoughts, emotions, behaviors that distract us from our goals or well-being. Inhibition is the opposite of impulsivity or hyperactivity. Inhibition is our ability to hold back, slow down, pause to think before acting/speaking. It's about having self-control, self-restraint, or self-management when it matters.</p>	<p>What problem with inhibition may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Distractible: Doesn't inhibit distractions, gets derailed, off track, off task.<input type="checkbox"/> Can't delay gratification<input type="checkbox"/> Poor self-monitoring<input type="checkbox"/> Poor filter: Calls out answers, blurts things out inappropriately.<input type="checkbox"/> Impulsive: Doesn't think before acting. Mindless choices.<input type="checkbox"/> Bad decisions: Gets into "trouble" or difficult situations. May harm others or self, risky behavior.
<p>6) Task Initiation Skills: Skills to initiate, self-start, activate, get the ball rolling, get the train moving, or begin execution of non-preferred, yet important tasks.</p>	<p>What initiation problems may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Stuck: Doesn't know how to "initiate" or where to get started.<input type="checkbox"/> Inefficient: Wastes time. Unproductive. Poor output.<input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination: Delays starting. Labeled as "lazy" or "unmotivated"<input type="checkbox"/> Excuses: Creative reasons for not starting, homework arguments.<input type="checkbox"/> No plan: Lacks a "runway" for starting things. Doesn't prepare by organizing a plan first, so lacks awareness of where a good starting point might be.
<p>7) Task Persistence Skills: Skills to follow through. Continuing to try until finished, working to full task completion, stick with it, perseverance, persistence. Self-regulates to sustain attention, effort, execution. Tenacity. Grit.</p>	<p>What persistence problems may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete: Starts but doesn't finish, or finishes but doesn't turn it in. Pattern of playing catchup because of missing, late, or incomplete work, zero's.<input type="checkbox"/> Stops: Gives up, gets derailed, off task.<input type="checkbox"/> Studying: Often does test corrections from not persisting with <u>actual</u> studying.<input type="checkbox"/> Output: Might know the content, but doesn't produce or turn in work.<input type="checkbox"/> Reading: Struggles with reading that requires persisting with focus and time.

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<p>8) Transition Skills: Skills to be flexible, to shift from activity to activity or task to task. Adaptable, can change gears, get back on track. Getting from one class to another on time, being prepared, getting out of the house in the morning on time with everything needed, how we transition from one grade level to another.</p>	<p>What the problem may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Bumpy: Transitions can be bumpy, stressful.<input type="checkbox"/> Late: Trouble getting places on time.<input type="checkbox"/> Unprepared: Forgets things during transitions.<input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated: Change or shifting feels overwhelming, lack good routines to manage transitions, haphazard.<input type="checkbox"/> Off-track: Hard to get back on track in a new setting.
<p>9) Working Memory Skills: Verbal self-talk and visual imagery strategies that help us “keep things in mind” as we work through things. Like juggling balls, these are short-term memory skills. Able to track important details during a process.</p>	<p>What the problem may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Forgets multistep directions: Doesn't know what the homework is or important details of it.<input type="checkbox"/> Spacing out: Forgets what they are doing.<input type="checkbox"/> Note taking: Trouble listening & taking good notes at the same time.<input type="checkbox"/> Math: Trouble with math facts, or juggling mental math details accurately.<input type="checkbox"/> Misremembers: “I turned it in, I know I did, I specifically remember turning it in!” Then it turns up weeks later crumpled in the backpack, because it was never turned in.
<p>10) Emotional Regulation Skills: Healthy tools to regulate emotional states, to stay focused on the tasks at hand. Ability to manage, express and work through challenging emotions. Mindfully aware of thoughts and feelings. Has understanding of emotional needs and a vocabulary to describe these things objectively. Not ruled by emotions, the nervous system or the narrative. Responsive more than reactive.</p>	<p>What the problem may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Resistant: Avoids working through difficult emotions.<input type="checkbox"/> Stressed: Overwhelmed, dysregulated nervous system, adrenal fatigue. Fight, flight, freeze. Difficult to calm down.<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks skills, strategies or tools to process emotions intentionally, lacks emotional vocabulary. Doesn't self-regulate well.<input type="checkbox"/> Avoidant, withdrawn, shut down.<input type="checkbox"/> Reactive. Longer than expected reactions.<input type="checkbox"/> Angry, mad, short fuse, running hot, defiance.<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious, depressed, intense.

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<p>11) Metacognitive Skills: Skills for self-awareness, introspection, reflection, mindful awareness, self-monitoring, and being conscious of what we are doing. Thinking about thinking. Self evaluation skills to learn from mistakes and successes. Ability to take a step back, reflect and problem solve. Also self-checking quality of work, and monitoring progress.</p>	<p>What the problem may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Denial: Lacking a realistic awareness about one’s challenges. “This school year will be different, this semester I’m turning over a new leaf, I promise, just trust me, I’ve got it handled” but not aware of lagging <i>skills</i>.<input type="checkbox"/> Not reflecting: Unaware of what does or does not work. Doesn’t look back purposefully to say, “wow, that works, I should do that more. And that isn’t working, I should change it.”<input type="checkbox"/> Doesn’t want help: “Leave me alone, get off my back, I’ve got this, just trust me. I’ll figure it out myself. I’ll deal with it later, it’ll take 5 minutes.”<input type="checkbox"/> Avoids dealing with problems, doesn’t think about it.<input type="checkbox"/> Reads but doesn’t monitor comprehension.
<p>12) Skills to Move Through Resistance: This is crucial, and is all about emotional regulation and “fear” of feeling uncomfortable doing a non-preferred task. Any approach to EF coaching that does not help with the resistance is missing the boat. These are skills that must be built.</p>	<p>What the problem may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Resistant: The core problem my students contend with is how to work with the resistance: Resistance to receiving help, implementing strategies that would help, to using planners, to doing non-preferred homework or responsibilities that need to get done, to starting things early, and countless other things that would make life easier and get us closer to our goals.<input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance, procrastination, unwillingness, unmotivated, excuses, arguments.<input type="checkbox"/> Says: “I don’t wanna, I don’t feel like it. This sucks, this is dumb or stupid. Why do I have to do this?”
<p>13) Self-care Skills: While “self-care” isn’t an executive function “skill”, I listed it because one’s ability to practice healthy self-care and wellness habits has a massive impact on EF, and definitely requires EF skills. Restful sleep, food that actually nourishes the body, adequate exercise.</p>	<p>What the problem may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Not rested: Electronics interfering with sleep, poor sleep hygiene. Unable to relax or wind down.<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of exercise: Movement, sunlight, sedentary. Poor posture.<input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition: Doesn’t eat enough healthy food. Eats a lot of processed foods, chips, candy, breads, food with chemicals and dyes.<input type="checkbox"/> Self-care: Not showering regularly, brushing teeth, cleaning clothes. (Picking, cutting, biting nails, self-harm.)<input type="checkbox"/> Irregular routines.

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➤ Now that I know more about these EF Challenges, what can I do next?

These 2 ideas should point you in the right direction:

1. Follow [my work](#) and the amazing work of others who successfully help kids.
2. Build upon **strengths!** See below:

➤ Strength Based Support: Build A Child's Strengths

While the Assessment helps get a clear picture of the challenges, it can be daunting, and it's **absolutely essential** to notice the positives as well: a child's strengths. All kids are **amazing**, and we want to empower them to build a future that capitalizes on their unique strengths, gifts, passions, interests, curiosities, the things that are meaningful, purposeful and that matter to them. Sadly, many neurodiverse kids aren't recognized enough for the positives, and there is too much emphasis on the challenges.

So I invite you to fill out any of the following questions you like, and find a time this week to **sit down with your child/student to share these positives with them.** When you do this, be fully present, smile, make it memorable, meaningful and fun. Try to help them to feel seen, understood and validated. Strength based support is essential!

What are some of the child's strengths, gifts or talents? (get creative in your answer!)

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What amazes you about this child?

How do you hope/wish this child feels about themselves?

What does this child do that makes you smile and laugh?

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What special things do you notice that you wish more people understood about this child?

What has this child taught YOU? How have THEY inspired or positively impacted YOU?

What are your greatest hopes and wishes for this child?

What positive things do you want this child to know **most** about how you feel about them or see them?

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Anything else?

Question for parents: First read through your written responses above. Next, consider how you can creatively use your child's strengths to address some of the challenges. Brainstorm ideas here: