

Executive Function Skills in the Classroom



EXECUTIVE  
FUNCTIONS  
AND  
PRODUCTIVITY



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Now that you have a clearer picture of some of the aspects of executive functions, it is time to see how those functions relate to day-to-day behavior. Specifically, what executive skills do students need to be able to independently do seatwork and homework?

## The executive skills required for independent seat work and homework:

- A. Understand directions: *Metacognition*
- B. Get started on his or her own: *Task Initiation*
- C. Be able to keep working despite distractions: *Sustained Attention*
- D. Ask for help when its needed: *Metacognition*
- E. Finishing things you start: *Sustained Attention & Goal Directed Persistence*
- F. Make careless mistakes, fail to check work: *Metacognition*
- G. Finish the work on time: *Time Management*
- H. Remember to turn it in on time: *Working Memory*

Adapted from *Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents* by Dawson and Guare

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Here is a list of behaviors which, according to Dawson and Guare, are necessary for independently doing seatwork and homework.

Looking at your definitions on your last activity sheet, see if you can identify the executive functions that go with each of the different behaviors listed on your screen. Pause the video while you jot down your choice for each letter. When you have given it your best shot, resume the video and I'll give you the answers according to Dawson and Guare.

Ok. That might have been a bit harder than it first looked! Let's see how you did.

1. Understand directions: [BUILD] Metacognition
2. Get started on his or her own: [BUILD] Task Initiation
3. Be able to keep working despite distractions: [BUILD] Sustained Attention
4. Ask for help when it's needed: [BUILD] Metacognition
5. Stick with it long enough to complete it: [BUILD] Sustained attention and Goal-Directed Persistence
6. Make careless mistakes, fail to check work: [BUILD] Metacognition
7. Finish the work on time: [BUILD] Time Management
8. Remember to turn it in on time: [BUILD] Working Memory

## The executive skills required for independent seat work and homework:

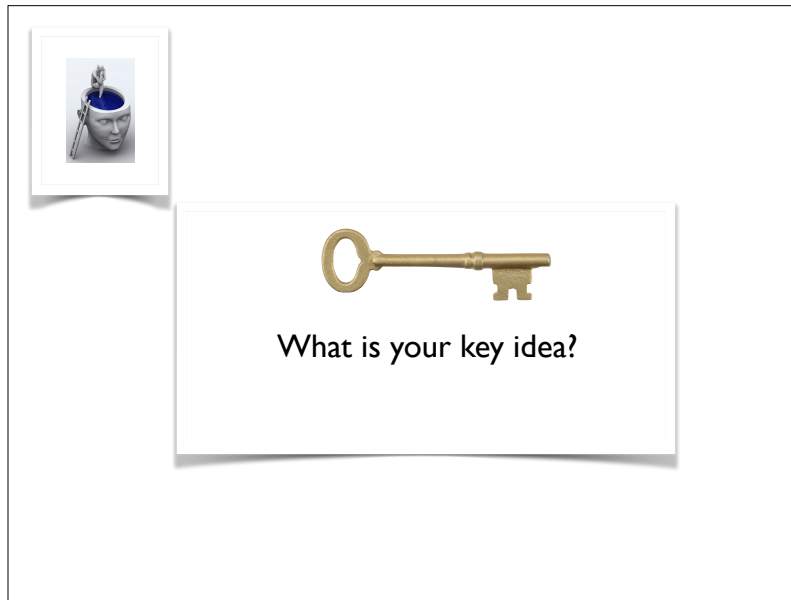
- A. Understand directions: *Metacognition*
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Now, this last one, working memory, REALLY troubles me. I bet you have known students who have completed their homework and have it IN their backpack, but they forget to turn it in. Well meaning (and frustrated?) teachers will often respond to this situation by lowering the student's grade on the work, because it is "late." The assumption is that with the "consequence," the child will "learn the lesson" and not forget to turn it in next time. However, for students with deficits in working memory, they won't necessarily "learn" from the punishment, at least not the lesson the teacher wants. Their brain's weakness with working memory is not going to get substantially better. Unless they actually get an external clue to turn the work in, they won't remember to do it. What they DO learn from this lowering of their grade is to quit trying. Why bother doing homework if you are just going to get a lower grade if you forget to turn it in?

My colleague, Paige Morabito, tells a story about her son and one of his frustrated teachers. He was forgetting to turn in completed work so she told him, "Brad, if only you would try harder to remember." He looked at this diminutive teacher and replied, "It's not that I don't want to remember, but it's like you trying harder to reach the top bookshelf. It's not a matter of wanting to be taller." His example changed the teacher's perception of his behavior. You can't do what you can't do.



This slide is going to become very familiar as you go through this course. You will see it often. It represents a time for you to pause and reflect over what you have learned so far. It is a time to look over your notes and record your key idea for this section of the lesson.

What do you want to remember? Write it down.

As part of this course, you are asked to post comments in the class forum. Your key ideas can be the source of information of your personal reflections. That can save you some time and effort!

In the next lecture we will be looking at additional sources of student struggles beyond their executive functioning skills.

Thoughts for Using this Information