

Executive Function Skills List

When students have strong executive function skills, we observe the following abilities in them. Please keep in mind that these skills represent some of the observable behaviors, but this list is not exhaustive.

Future Skills

- Plan tasks, free time, and self-care at hour, day, week, month, and year scales.
- Use a calendaring system.
- Use time organizers like clocks, watches, and timers.
- Organize their physical space.
- Organize their digital space.
- Break tasks into steps or chunks, assigning due dates to each step.
- Use strategies to initiate tasks, even when they're dreaded or boring.
- Use a work management system to capture their tasks, schedule their completion, and remind themselves in the future.
- Use the backward plan technique to create short-term deadlines from a due date.
- Prioritize actions based on urgency or importance.
- Develop routines for common tasks (making food, getting ready, completing homework, and so on).
- Develop to-do lists as well as master lists of important tasks and due dates for future tasks.
- Write an email and reply to a colleague, peer, or teacher.
- Ask for help in specific, productive ways
- Set short-term goals, including working on skills, and monitor them
- Manage independent time (in class and at home) to complete tasks.
- Charge devices and bring chargers as necessary.
- Estimate the time a task will take within five to ten minutes of reality.
- Process through directions with a plan and in order.
- Write due dates at the top of assignments and in their calendar system.
- Organize workspace, removing distractions and gathering necessary materials.
- Schedule and use regular time to organize and clean spaces (physical, digital)

Emotions and Attention

- Recognize distractions.
- Avoid distractions (as possible).
- Plan workspaces and approaches that support focus.
- Regain focus after a distraction.
- Use methods for increasing focus.
- Use methods for increasing mental or physical energy.
- Manage breaks and rest for refocusing and reregulating.

- Self-monitor during work time.
- Express and receive attention and emotional needs to and from others.
- Recognize signs of stress and overwhelm.
- Use tools to manage stress and overwhelm.
- Communicate needs proactively to others.
- Use tools to regulate emotions when upset.
- Understand their sensory needs and limitations.
- Recognize when technology is helping versus hurting their focus.
- Self-advocate for what they need.
- Work in a group effectively (meet deadlines, communicate with group, and so on).
- Know and use their accommodations (as applicable).
- Know and use campus resources.
- Anticipate impulses and temptations, planning strategies to avoid taking unproductive actions.
- Use self-talk to manage emotions and attention.
- Raise hand instead of impulsively shouting out.
- Move on flexibly from a topic (even one of choice or of emotional significance).
- Transition between work and play or between activities and tools for maintaining focus and energy with ease.
- Tolerate schedule changes.
- Use tools to get back on task when distracted or engaged in off-task activities.
- Use reminders and notifications.

Learning and Memory

- Use systems to manage learning.
 - Review or rewrite notes.
 - Study in an active way.
- Maintain awareness of short-term memory and its limitations.
- Use systems of offloading working memory (writing things down, using references).
- Develop shorthand techniques for notes.
- Use strategies for note-taking, including personal ways to capture and organize ideas.
- Use assistive technology for academic tasks.
- Know their brain's strengths and struggles with academic tasks.
- Use strategies for reading and understanding large amounts of text.
- Use teacher feedback and assessment scores to recognize growth areas.
- Create strategies to develop in recognized areas.
- Evaluate their understanding of a topic, using this evaluation to organize studying efforts.
- Check grades periodically and adjust academic approach as necessary.
- Use a syllabus or online resources to manage approach to class.
- Create visuals and references for multistep processes.

- Process through an academic task in sequence, beginning to end.
- Organize research for easy use.
- Use writing tools (like outlines) or oral rehearsal, matched with their need.
- Solve problems flexibly.
- Adjust mental approaches when schedule or situation changes.
- Take perspective of characters, peers, or teachers.
- Organize their thoughts for speaking and writing.
- Annotate directions or prompts to make a list of steps.

References

- Baggetta, P., & Alexander, P. A. (2016). Conceptualization and operationalization of executive function. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 10(1), 10–33.
- Barkley, R. A. (2012). *Executive functions: What they are, how they work, and why they evolved*. Guilford.