

Executive Skills Questionnaire —

Peg Dawson & Richard Guare

Step I: Read each item below and then rate that item based on the extent to which you agree or disagree with how well it describes you. Use the rating scale below to choose the appropriate score. Then add the three scores in each section. Use the Key on page 2 to determine your executive skill strengths (2-3 highest scores) and weaknesses (2-3 lowest scores).

Strongly disagree	1	Tend to agree	5
Disagree	2	Agree	6
Tend to disagree	3	Strongly agree	7
Neutral	4		

Item	Your score
1. I don't jump to conclusions	____
2. I think before I speak.	____
3. I don't take action without having all the facts.	____
	YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____
4. I have a good memory for facts, dates, and details.	____
5. I am very good at remembering the things I have committed to do.	____
6. I seldom need reminders to complete tasks	____
	YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____
7. My emotions seldom get in the way when performing on the job.	____
8. Little things do not affect me emotionally or distract me from the task at hand.	____
9. I can defer my personal feelings until after a task has been completed	____
	YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____
10. No matter what the task, I believe in getting started as soon as possible.	____
11. Procrastination is usually not a problem for me.	____
12. I seldom leave tasks to the last minute	____
	YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____
13. I find it easy to stay focused on my work.	____
14. Once I start an assignment, I work diligently until it's completed.	____
15. Even when interrupted, I find it easy to get back and complete the job at hand.	____
	YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____
16. When I plan out my day, I identify priorities and stick to them	____
17. When I have a lot to do, I can easily focus on the most important things.	____
18. I typically break big tasks down into subtasks and timelines.	____
	YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____
19. I am an organized person.	____
20. It is natural for me to keep my work area neat and organized.	____
21. I am good at maintaining systems for organizing my work.	____
	YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____

Strongly disagree	1	Tend to agree	5
Disagree	2	Agree	6
Tend to disagree	3	Strongly agree	7
Neutral	4		

Item

Your score

22. At the end of the day, I've usually finished what I set out to do.
 23. I am good at estimating how long it takes to do something.
 24. I am usually on time for appointments and activities.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____

25. I take unexpected events in stride.
 26. I easily adjust to changes in plans and priorities.
 27. I consider myself to be flexible and adaptive to change.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____

28. I routinely evaluate my performance and devise methods for personal improvement.
 29. I am able to step back from a situation in order to make objective decisions.
 30. I "read" situations well and can adjust my behavior based on the reactions of others.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____

31. I think of myself as being driven to meet my goals.
 32. I easily give up immediate pleasures to work on long-term goals.
 33. I believe in setting and achieving high levels of performance.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____

34. I enjoy working in a highly demanding, fast-paced environment.
 35. A certain amount of pressure helps me to perform at my best.
 36. Jobs that include a fair degree of unpredictability appeal to me.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: _____

KEY

Items	Executive Skill	Items	Executive Skill
1 - 3	Response Inhibition	4 - 6	Working Memory
7 - 9	Emotional Control	10 - 12	Task Initiation
13 - 15	Sustained Attention	16 - 18	Planning/Prioritization
19 - 21	Organization	22 - 24	Time Management
25 - 27	Flexibility	28 - 30	Metacognition
31 - 33	Goal-Directed Persistence	34-36	Stress tolerance

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Strongest Skills

Weakest Skills

Executive Skill Definitions

- **Response Inhibition:** The capacity to think before you act – this ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it. In the young child, waiting for a short period without being disruptive is an example of response inhibition while in the adolescent it would be demonstrated by accepting a referee's call without an argument.
- **Working Memory:** The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future. A young child, for example can hold in mind and follow 1-2 step directions while the middle school child can remember the expectations of multiple teachers.
- **Emotional Control:** The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior. A young child with this skill is able to recover from a disappointment in a short time. A teenager is able to manage the anxiety of a game or test and still perform.
- **Sustained Attention:** The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom. Completing a 5-minute chore with occasional supervision is an example of sustained attention in the younger child. The teenager is able to attend to homework, with short breaks, for one to two hours.
- **Task Initiation:** The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion. A young child is able to start a chore or assignment right after instructions are given. A high school student does not wait until the last minute to begin a project.
- **Planning/Prioritization:** The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important. A young child, with coaching, can think of options to settle a peer conflict. A teenager can formulate a plan to get a job.
- **Organization:** The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials. A young child can, with a reminder, put toys in a designated place. An adolescent can organize and locate sports equipment.
- **Time Management:** The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important. A young child can complete a short job within a time limit set by an adult. A high school student can establish a schedule to meet task deadlines.
- **Goal-directed persistence:** The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal, and not be put off by or distracted by competing interests. A first grader can complete a job in order to get to recess. A teenager can earn and save money over time to buy something of importance.
- **Flexibility:** The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information or mistakes. It relates to an adaptability to changing conditions. A young child can adjust to a change in plans without major distress. A high school student can accept an alternative such as a different job when the first choice is not available.
- **Metacognition:** The ability to stand back and take a birds-eye view of oneself in a situation. It is an ability to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self-monitoring and self-evaluative skills (e.g., asking yourself, "How am I doing? or How did I do?"). A young child can change behavior in response to feedback from an adult. A teenager can monitor and critique her performance and improve it by observing others who are more skilled.
- **Stress Tolerance:** the ability to thrive in stressful situations and to cope with uncertainty, change, and performance demands.

Checklist for
Designing Interventions

Intervention Steps

1. Establish behavioral goal

What's the executive skill involved? _____

Problem behavior: _____

Goal behavior: _____

2. What environmental supports will be provided (check all that apply)

Change physical or social environment (e.g., add physical barriers, reduce distractions, provide organizational structures, reduce social complexity, etc.)

Change the nature of the task (e.g., make shorter, build in breaks, give something to look forward to, create a schedule, build in choice, make the task more fun, etc.)

Change the way adults interact with the child (e.g., rehearsal, prompts, reminders, coaching, praise, debriefing, feedback)

3. What procedure will be followed to teach the skill?

Who will teach the skill/supervise the procedure?

What steps will the child follow?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

4. What incentives will be used to encourage the child to learn, practice, or use the skill (check all that apply)

Specific praise

Something to look forward to when the task (or a piece of the task) is done

A menu of rewards and penalties

Daily reward possibilities:

Weekly reward possibilities:

Long-term reward possibilities:

5. What is your outcome measure? How will you know if your intervention was successful?

Environmental Modifications and Teaching Strategies for Specific Executive Skills

Executive Skill	Environmental Modification	Teaching Strategy
Response Inhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase external controls • Restrict access • Post home or classroom rules and review regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt the child (external to internal) • Teach wait/stop • Teach delayed gratification (apps: Token Board) • Discourage “multi-tasking”—e.g., build in technology breaks rather than having kids combine homework with technology use
Working Memory	<p>Use orthotic memory devices Principle of “off-loading”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda books/calendars • To do lists (paper, white board to post prominently) • Electronic devices & apps (Wunderlist, Nudge, BugMe!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directions/Past experience (prompt them to access it) • Generate options for reminders and have them choose (or elicit options from student) • Mentally rehearse association between cue and working memory
Emotional Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce or eliminate triggers • Give child a script to follow • Remove child from problem situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach kids to recognize situations or early signs • Graded exposure/guided mastery • Teach coping strategy • Rehearse the strategy repeatedly until it is internalized • Use Hard Times Board • Teach mindfulness meditation (http://thehawnfoundation.org/mindup/)
Flexibility	<p>General rule: Limit flexibility demand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce novelty • Highlight similarities • Provide a template • Put in place a default strategy • Turn open-ended tasks into closed-ended tasks • Make steps more explicit • “Normalize” errors 	<p>Increase support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present expectations • Walk them through the task • Give plans or rules for managing situations • Think aloud <p>Teach error factor</p> <p>Change tolerance by gradual exposure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce change (lightning bolt-preferred to non-preferred)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce new situations
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Executive Skill	Environmental Modification	Teaching Strategy
Task Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide cues/prompts • Reduce perceived effort/task demand • Walk through first step—build behavioral momentum • Make help readily available • Establish set time to do non-preferred tasks • Apps: Llickety Split, Good Habit Maker, FTVS (First Then Visual Schedule, Chore Pad HD, ChoreMonster) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the child select cueing system • Help the child limit initial demand • Help the child select reinforcer • Help the child make a plan for doing the task
Sustained Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce distractions (seating arrangements, white noise) • Prompt to attend (look, listen, respond) • Modify/limit task length or demand (end in sight) • Build in variety/choice • Choose best time of day • Immediately reinforce (pay attention to them <i>while they're paying attention</i>) • Use sand timers and/or fidget toys such as stress balls (www.officeplayground.com) • App: Llickety Split, Chore Monster, iRewardChart, Motivaider, Chore Pad HD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach self-monitoring/peer coaching • Have the child identify something to look forward to • Teach mindfulness meditation
Planning/Prioritization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate what a plan is • Help child design a plan/template • Provide planning tools (calendar, agenda book, apps – e.g., Choiceworks, CanPlan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk through the planning process (use a template) • Have them apply plan to a simple task and gradually prompt to do more of the planning themselves • Ask questions to get child to prioritize (What do you need? What should you do first?)

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Executive Skill	Environmental Modification	Teaching Strategy
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate principle of off-loading with example from their lives • Work with them to create scheme, template or picture/photograph • Show organizational tools and have them try them out (e.g., Inspiration) • Structure the environment to promote organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them walk through the process. Have them motorically practice it (a long-term process, requiring that they put a system in place that's monitored, initially on a daily basis). • Give them choices of organizational systems and have them choose/modify the one they like best. • Ask students to evaluate current systems and challenge them to improve them.
Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make schedules and time limits explicit • Work with kids to make a schedule to follow and prompt each step of the way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Picture schedules ◦ Clocks, alarms ◦ Tablet/phone apps (Choiceworks, Pomodoro) ◦ Timers (app: Sand Timer; www.timetimer.com) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show them ways to mark time and let them practice. • Practice estimating how long it takes to do something. • Help them to follow schedules (daily events to homework plans).
Goal-Directed Persistence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish goals with kids • Reward kids for persistence (sticking with difficult tasks)—use verbal reinforcers as much as possible • Make sure the goal or benchmark is in sight • Apps: Token Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point out to kids how they already set goals but they may not know what they are. Define goals as something that people want to get better at or to change. • Ask kids to set small, achievable goals, or a goal for something they want to do outside of school, or set class goals.
Metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify what is to be evaluated and how (goal or objective) • Evaluate performance for the student • Provide sample to match or error-monitoring checklist • Embed metacognitive questions into instruction/conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help child decide on how performance will be evaluated • Have the child evaluate her performance • Compare evaluations • Teach students to ask questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ What's my problem? ◦ What's my plan? ◦ Am I following my plan? ◦ How did I do?

Sample Questions/Statements to Promote Executive Skill Development

Adapted from: Executive Skills in Children and Adolescence: A Practical Guide to Assessment and Intervention (2011)

Executive Skill	Question/Statement/Prompt
Response inhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you do to keep from losing your cool on the playground? • What can you tell yourself while you're in line to keep from touching the child in front of you? • Is there something we can give you to hold to help you remember to raise your hand before speaking? • Good job keeping your hands to yourself during circle time today!
Working memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some ways you could remember everything you have to bring home at the end of the day? • Some of you seem to have trouble remembering to put your homework in your backpack after you've finished it. What's something you could do to help you remember to do that?
Emotional control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We've had some problems with fights and arguments on the playground. What are some ways you can handle this that solve the problem and keep kids out of trouble? • Sometimes kids get nervous when they take tests and it makes it hard for them to focus and remember what they studied. What are some things kids could do when that happens? • You did a nice job of controlling your temper at lunch today. What helped you do that?
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me three things you can do if you start your math homework and realize you can't remember exactly how to do the assignment. • Let's talk about what you can do if you get stuck on part of this assignment and start feeling frustrated or angry.
Sustained attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes it's hard to keep working on your homework until it's done. What are some ways you could motivate yourself to keep working? • A lot of you talk about how hard it is to stay focused on your classwork because of distractions. Let's make a list of distractions and then brainstorm ways to manage them better.

Executive Skill	Question/Statement/Prompt
Task Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's hard to get started on homework because there are so many other fun things to do at home. Let's think about ways to get ourselves to get the homework out of the way first. I like the way you jumped right into your writing assignment. That's been hard for you to do. Take out your assignment books. Next to each homework assignment, I want you to write down what time you plan on starting each one.
Planning/prioritization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One reason we assign kids projects is because we want them to learn how to plan. Let's talk about the steps you need to do in order to complete this project. What do you have to do first? Let's make a homework plan. Make a list of the work you have to do and the order in which you plan to do it.
Time management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long do you think it will take you to finish your spelling homework tonight? Write down your guess and then see if you're right. Let's talk about how you manage your time at home to fit in all your homework. Let's make lists of "have-tos" and "want-tos" and then decide how much time we can spend on each group.
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We're going to spend the last 20 minutes of the day cleaning out our desks. Let's make a list of the steps we have to go through to do this. We need a system for organizing our science notebooks. What are some sections we need to include?
Goal-directed persistence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I like the way you stuck with that math problem even though it frustrated you. Successful people are those who make goals and go for them, even if there are obstacles along the way. What's a goal you might want to work for? Maybe something you want to build or create, or something you want to learn, or something you want to save up money to buy? Let's set a goal for the month and see if we can help you reach your goal.
Metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good question. How you could find the answer? Nice job on that math problem. Tell me how you figured out the answer. Class, we have a problem. Too many kids are...[losing things, forgetting their homework, not asking for help when they don't understand, saying hurtful things, etc.] What are some things we could do to solve this problem?

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Helpful Websites:

<http://smartbutscatteredkids.com>

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<http://www.efinthe classroom.net>

<http://efs2therescue.ca>

<http://learningworksforkids.com>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/view/>

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu>

<http://www.brainfacts.org>

[http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/09/15/health/20080915-brain-development.html? _r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/09/15/health/20080915-brain-development.html?_r=0)

<http://www.toolsofthemind.org>

<https://www.gonoodle.com>

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