



[www.peer2peertutors.com](http://www.peer2peertutors.com)

## HOW TO IMPROVE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING: READY-TO-USE MATERIALS

Meredith Briggs Skeath, M.A., M.F.A.

The Marshmallow Test	2
(the story of the famous experiment that showed the importance of response inhibition— the ability to delay gratification, a fundamental part of executive functioning)	
<b>Brain Care Materials:</b>	
My Alertness Through the Day	3
Sleep Problems Questionnaire	4
Sleep: What's It Good For?	5
Brain Care	9
Brain Care Goals Chart	10
<b>Fundamental Academic Skills Inventory</b>	11
<b>Strategy Instruction</b>	
How to Teach a Strategy	12
How to Build an Executive Functioning Skill: An Example	13
How to Build an Executive Functioning Skill: Template	14
Ten Tips to Develop a New Habit / Strategy	15
<b>Materials to Teach Students to Organize Their Stuff</b>	
Common Misconceptions about Organizational Challenges	16
Where's My Stuff? How to Tame Chaos	17
The Launching Pad	18
Recommendations for School Supplies	19
Traveling Paper: So Many Choices!	20
Clutter Busting: Recipe for Organizing Papers	21
<b>Materials to Teach Students to Organize Their Time</b>	
Time Estimation Chart	23
Master Schedule	24
Brain Time	25
Procrastination	26
Multitasking	27
Resources	28

**Note: These materials are all © Meredith Skeath, 2011. They can only be copied and used by Peer2Peer tutors in their teaching of Peer2Peer students.**



How long can you wait to get something you want?

In the 1960's, researchers tested over six hundred 4-year olds to see how long they could wait for a marshmallow, and what they found out made this experiment *famous*. Each child was left alone in a school room, with one marshmallow on a table. If the child could wait until the adult returned in a few minutes, the child would get *two* marshmallows. What would you do?

Only 30 out of 100 children could wait to get *two* marshmallows. When the researchers studied these same children in high school, the children who could wait had better grades, better behavior, and more friends than the students who could not wait. A child who could wait for the *two* marshmallows at an SAT score an average of 210 points higher than a child who gobbled up one marshmallow after 30 seconds. Waiting for something good is a skill worth developing!<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>“Don’t!: The secret of self- control.” Jonah Lehrer, *The New Yorker*, May 19, 2009. Accessed April 23, 2011. [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/05/18/090518fa\\_fact\\_lehrer](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/05/18/090518fa_fact_lehrer).

## MY ALERTNESS THROUGH THE DAY

Directions: Plot your alertness for a typical school day by drawing:

1. a line across the graph, starting when you wake up in the morning and ending when you go back to sleep at night..
2. X's to mark when you eat.
3. a line along the time axis when you do homework and mark it HW.
4. two vertical lines marking when school begins and ends.
5. a horizontal line across the chart where your threshold for effective learning is.

### Alertness Level

Extremely alert																									
Alert																									
Somewhat alert																									
Somewhat dull																									
Groggy																									
Asleep																									
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3
	am	am	am	am	am	am	am	am	am	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	am	am	am	am
	<b>am</b>						<b>Time</b>						<b>pm</b>						<b>am</b>						

What do you think you could do to help yourself be above your own threshold for learning during the entire school day?

# SLEEP PROBLEMS—QUESTIONNAIRE

**Check the statements that describe symptoms you have experienced.**

1. I do not look forward to sleep because I always have trouble sleeping.
2. Thoughts flood my mind and prevent me from sleeping.
3. I frequently wake up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep.
4. I wake up too early in the morning.
5. I worry and have trouble relaxing.
6. I lie awake for at least half an hour or more before I can fall asleep.
7. I am sad and depressed; I am afraid to fall asleep.
8. Although I can sleep through the night, during the day I feel muscle tension, crawling sensations, or my legs ache .
9. Except when I exercise, I feel sleepy during the day.
10. My legs hurt at night and feel better when I move them.
11. I have been told that I kick my legs on and off at night.
12. Sometimes I can't keep my legs still at night. I feel that I have to keep them moving.
13. When I wake up, my muscles are sore and achy.
14. I use antacids (Rolaids, Tums, Alka-Seltzer, etc.) frequently for stomach upset and wake up at night with heartburn.
15. I cough when I first get up and I am hoarse all morning.
16. I have a chronic cough and my tests are normal.
17. I wake up at night wheezing or coughing.
18. I often have sore throats.
19. I'm told that I snore loudly.
20. Although I don't remember it when I wake up, I'm told that while I'm asleep I stop breathing or gasp for breath.
21. I have a history of high blood pressure.
22. My friends or family say they have noticed changes in my personality.
23. I have gained weight.
24. I sweat a great deal during the night.
25. My heart seems to pound or beat irregularly during the night.
26. I get headaches in the morning.
28. No matter how hard I try to stay awake during the day, I often fall asleep - even if I've had a full night's sleep .
29. When I feel anger, fear, surprise, or other strong emotions, I get a weak feeling in my knees, jaw, or other muscles.
30. Sleepiness is a problem during work or at school.
31. While falling asleep or shortly afterwards, I experience vivid, dreamlike scenes.
32. I sometimes fall asleep during physical effort.
33. I feel as if I need to do a full day's work every hour in order to accomplish anything.
34. I feel drowsy when driving, even if I've had a full night's sleep.
35. I often feel paralyzed for brief periods while falling asleep or just after waking up.

## **How Did You Do?**

Questions 1-7 describe the symptoms experienced by people who have **insomnia**, the persistent inability to fall asleep or stay asleep.

Questions 8-13 describe the symptoms experienced by people who have **nocturnal myoclonus** or restless leg syndrome, a disorder characterized by abnormal movements or crawling sensations in the legs.

Questions 14-18 describe the symptoms experienced by people with **gastroesophageal reflux**, a disorder that results from stomach acid backing up into the throat during the night.

Questions 19-27 describe the symptoms experienced by people who have **sleep apnea**, a potentially life-threatening disorder which causes one to stop breathing repeatedly (possibly hundreds of times) during sleep.

Questions 28-35 describe the symptoms experienced by people with **narcolepsy**, a complex disorder with uncontrollable sleep attacks during the day as one of its symptoms.

**Please note that the above questionnaire is intended only as an educational tool and is not meant to be used for diagnosis or treatment.**

From New York Methodist Hospital web site <http://www.nym.org/services/sleep/sleep2.html>, 2002-5, and from *Sleep to Save Your Life: The Complete Guide to Living Longer and Healthier Through Restorative Sleep*, Gerard T. Lombardo, M.D., Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 2005.



## SLEEP



### What's It Good For?

1. **Growth**: We grow most when we sleep. Adolescents need more sleep than at any time in their lives except infancy. Most are chronically sleep deprived. The average teenager needs 9 1/4 hrs./night of sleep. The average teenager gets only 6 1/4 to 7 hrs./night!
2. **Normal Weight and Metabolism**: Sleep deprivation triggers pre-diabetic metabolism and weight gain. The body “thinks” it is under siege (why else would a sane person keep it up?) and it better store more carbs as fat for the hard times ahead.
3. **Memory and Learning**: During sleep we transform short-term memory traces into long-term memory. Sleep is essential to learning. The first casualty of sleep deprivation is higher order thinking.
4. **Stress Removal**: Sleep allows the body to repair itself from the effects of stress and fatigue.
5. **Happiness**: Sleep deprivation makes the mind more susceptible to depression and other mood disorders.
6. **Longevity**: Death from all causes is lowest among adults who get 7-8 hours of sleep/night.

## Lack of Sleep Is Linked to:

**Impaired learning ; obesity; many illnesses, including diabetes and immune-system dysfunction; increased car accidents and medical errors; and impaired mental health, job performance, and productivity.**

### We Live in a Culture of Sleep Bulimia

**“We are living in the middle of history’s greatest experiment in sleep deprivation and we are all a part of that experiment” (David P. White, director of sleep disorders program at Brigham and Woman’s Hospital, quoted in *Harvard Magazine*, July-August 2005, p. 26).**

**National Sleep Foundation’s 2005 poll showed adult Americans average 6.8 hours of sleep/night, more than an hour less than they need (*Harvard Magazine*, July-August, 2005, p. 26) and 20% less than 100 years ago. Many people get only five hours per night during the week, then log nine hours on weekend nights, purging on weekdays and bingeing on weekends.**

**As the chart below indicates, we are depriving our children of sleep starting in infancy. Such violation of our biological needs cannot be made with impunity.**

Sleep Deprived Youth: National Sleep Foundation Poll-2004

• Age Group	Recommended Norm	Poll Finding
• Infants (3-11 months)	• 14-15 hours	• 12.7 hours
• Toddlers (12-35 months)	• 12-14	• 11.7
• Preschoolers (3-5 yrs old & 6 yr olds in kindergarten)	• 11-13	• 10.4
• School-aged (1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	• 10-11	• 9.5
• 10-14 years old	• 9-10	•
• 15-18 years old	• 8 ½-9 (more during growth spurts)	• 6 ¼ -7

© 2009. by Meredith Skeath, adapted from Daniel Amen, *Healing ADD*, and lectures by Dr. William Stixrud and Dr. Daniel Lewin.



### **How Do You Know If You Are Getting Enough SLEEP?**

**You are probably getting enough sleep if you:**

- 1. Wake up naturally *without an alarm*.**
- 2. Feel rested and alert throughout the day.**



### **Trouble Signs!**

**A third of children have some problems sleeping, i.e., they routinely take more than half an hour to fall asleep or have interrupted sleep. Dr. Daniel S. Lewin, Director, Pediatric Behavioral Sleep Medicine Program at Washington, D.C.'s Children's National Medical Center estimates at least 50% of those diagnosed with ADD/ADHD also have sleep disorders, and that for 20% of those with ADHD, the sleep disorder is responsible for most of their symptoms.**

© 2009. by Meredith Skeath, adapted from Daniel Amen, *Healing ADD*, and lectures by Dr. William Stixrud and Dr. Daniel Lewin.

**Tips on How to Get Enough Sleep!**  
**POST THIS! *Sweet Dreams!***

**1. Make the last 30 minutes before bedtime a regular wind down routine.**

- **Include activities such as: dressing for bed, washing, and reading. If you read before bed, read a boring book, not an action-packed thriller**
- **Keep the order and timing of activities about the same each night.**
- **Dim the lights. Adolescents are more sensitive to light and bright light decreases their melatonin, a chemical that helps them fall asleep.**
- **No technology for one hour before bed. Avoid watching TV or being on the computer for 1-2 hours before bed. It can interfere with sleep. Avoid having a TV in the bedroom. Children with TV's in their bedrooms sleep less. Bedrooms should be technology free zones.**
- **Avoid multitasking, which significantly raises the level of cortisol, a stress response hormone.**
- **Avoid stimulating active play such as wrestling, tickling, teasing, etc. for 1-2 hours before bed. Avoid activities that could cause conflict. No arguments!**
- **Do not study until you drop.**
- **Try a warm, quiet bath.**
- **A bedtime back rub in bed may help, or a foot rub.**
- **Slow, soft music helps some people drift off to sleep. Instrumental, as opposed to vocal music, seems to be most helpful. Use what works.**
- **A mixture of warm milk, a teaspoon of vanilla (not imitation vanilla, the real stuff), and a teaspoon of sugar can be very helpful. This increases serotonin in your brain and helps you sleep.**

**2. Try to go to sleep and get up around the same time each day. If you vary the time of waking or sleeping more than two hours, you induce jet lag. Avoid long daytime naps.**

© 2009. by Meredith Skeath, adapted from Daniel Amen, *Healing ADD*, and lectures by Dr. William Stixrud and Dr. Daniel Lewin.

# BRAIN CARE

School is an *athletic* event for your brain. Take care of your brain, so your brain can perform well for you. 9

Use the acronym SEEDS to remember the basics of brain care.

**S**leep I need \_\_\_\_\_ hours of sleep/night to feel rested and alert through the day. This means I have to go to bed at \_\_\_\_\_. The average teenager needs 9 ¼ hours of sleep, but gets only 7. Do not vary the time you get up or go to bed, by more than 2 hours, even on weekends, or you will induce jet lag.

**WHY?** Sleep is vital for memory, higher order thinking, alertness, immunity, emotional stability, alertness, physical growth, removal of stress, and yes, sanity.

**E**at Breakfast should include at least 10 gr./protein and 10 gr./fiber and less than 10 gr. sugar. How much protein does a bagel and cream cheese have? Zip nada, my dear, zip nada (this means next to none). A recent study at Tufts showed those who ate oatmeal with milk for breakfast (higher protein and fiber) performed 20% better on a memorization task than those who ate a sugar-packed cereal). Examples of protein sources: eggs, milk, cheese, yogurt, meat, beans, nuts, nut butters.

**WHY?** Unprocessed foods with protein and fiber and low sugar help stabilize blood sugar, alertness, and the ability to concentrate. The brain is very picky. It likes a *steady* supply of blood sugar, not a roller coaster.

**E**xercise Use as study break or to wake up completely before school.

**WHY?** Aerobic exercise increases blood flow to the brain, resulting in greater alertness. When doing homework, set a timer for what you think your attention span will be, then reset it for a 5-10 minute study break. During a study break drink some water, and exercise enough to raise your heart rate. Dr. Amen (*Healing ADD*) recommends 30-45 minutes aerobic exercise at least 5 days/wk. for anyone with ADD/ADHD. See <http://esl.about.com/od/englishlessonplans/a/braingym.htm> for PACE Brain Gym exercises.

**D**rink Your weight/2=number of oz. water you need to drink/day.

Divide by 8 to get the number of glasses of water/day you need to drink (more if you are hot or exercising). I need to drink at least \_\_\_\_\_ glasses of water.

Try to drink one or two glasses of water before going to school, but not with breakfast.

**WHY?** The brain is about 75% water. If it is not kept moist enough, it cannot think well. Even 1% dehydration decreases brain performance, yet many of us do not feel thirsty until we are already that dehydrated.

**S**tress Reduce or eliminate it. Do not overschedule! The Transcendental Meditation® (TM) technique is the most thoroughly researched meditation technique to eliminate stress. TM produces approximately twice the rest of deep sleep coupled with increased alertness. It reduces anxiety and the biochemical markers of stress, such as cortisol, and improves every brain function researched, including memory, IQ, moral reasoning, creativity, and grades. For more information, consult [www.tm.org](http://www.tm.org).

**WHY?** Stress torpedoes learning and stops the growth of new brain cells. *Nasty*.

**BRAIN CARE GOALS**

**S**leep: \_\_\_ hours

**E**at: 10 gr protein  
at breakfast

**E**xercise: daily \_\_\_\_\_

**D**rink: \_\_\_ oz.

**S**tress: I did something  
today to increase my calm and joy!

## FUNDAMENTAL ACADEMIC SKILLS INVENTORY

*These skills need to be in place by junior high to ensure efficient output and academic success. If any of these fundamental skills are not in place, begin explicit, targeted, and, if needed, intensive intervention. Do not assume these skills will develop on their own or the school will automatically develop them.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Decoding** on grade level. If your student misreads more than one word per twenty in grade-level text, ask parents to get a thorough reading evaluation and specialized help.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Fluency**: 125-150 words correct/min.=50<sup>th</sup> percentile for upper grades (from *Read Naturally Master Edition Teacher's Manual*, 5). I recommend *Read Naturally* ([www.readnaturally.com](http://www.readnaturally.com)) for grades 1-8, and *One Minute Reader* ([www.oneminutereader.com](http://www.oneminutereader.com)) for tutor and parent-supervised affordable yet effective fluency work, grades 1-5.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Spelling** on grade level
4. \_\_\_\_\_ **Vocabulary** on grade level. For junior high students I recommend Take Aim vocabulary program (<http://www.readnaturally.com/products/takeaim.htm>). For high school students I recommend *Vocabulary for the High-School Student* and *Vocabulary for the College-Bound Student* by Harold Levine et al., Amsco School Publications, Inc., New York, 1994.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ **Automatic math facts**
6. \_\_\_\_\_ **Efficient handwriting** including cursive. (See *Handwriting without Tears*, ([www.hwtears.com](http://www.hwtears.com)) and Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center ([www.asdec.org](http://www.asdec.org)) for handwriting programs for students, parents, and teachers.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ **Efficient keyboarding** (at least 35 words/min with very few errors by middle school.) See [www.superkids.com/aweb/pages/reviews/typing/](http://www.superkids.com/aweb/pages/reviews/typing/) for a review of keyboarding software programs. At least 15 mins. 4x/wk. is required to produce automaticity. Chart progress, provide incentives.

## HOW TO TEACH A STRATEGY



1. Always teach a strategy in the context of student's actual work.
2. Make the strategy easy to remember, with cue sheets.
3. Be honest. Explain using a strategy will take more time at first, but will produce better and more efficient work over time.
4. Offer 3-4 strategies to choose from. Encourage student to design or modify a strategy.
5. Teach strategies *periodically*, to help student tackle more demanding tasks.
6. Structure the strategy use as an experiment. "Let's try this for a week. If it doesn't work, there are plenty of other strategies to try."

## THE STEPS OF STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

1. **Assess** what strategy student needs. You can use the Learning Toolbox student questionnaire (designed for high school and college students) at <http://coe.jmu.edu/LearningToolbox/printer/stQuest.pdf>. Each question is matched with a strategy at <http://coe.jmu.edu/LearningToolbox/printer/match.pdf>. Then access the needed strategy description at [http://coe.jmu.edu/LearningToolbox/site\\_map.html](http://coe.jmu.edu/LearningToolbox/site_map.html).
2. **Explain what a strategy is:** a conscious, intentional way of doing a task. Like a tool such as a hammer or a map, a strategy helps us accomplish what we want. A strategy answers the question, "What is the best way to do this?" Please ask this question often with your student!
3. **Explain rationale and steps of the specific strategy** you are going to teach: what it is, why, when, how we use it.
4. **Written agreement** to try strategy: Structure as an experiment, with time period, measurable goal. Ex: "Let's set up a homework folder in your binder and a launching pad for your backpack and use it for two weeks to see if this strategy increases the number of homework assignments you turn in on time."
5. **Model strategy**, using student assignments.
6. **Guide student in practice**. . Fade supervision (scaffolding) gradually.  
 Stage 1: Direction Supervision: "Show me your assignment book, please. That's the first step on your homework checklist."  
 Stage 2: "Look at your list."  
 Stage 3: "What do you need to do?" By asking rather than telling, we prompt the child to retrieve from his/her own memory.
7. **Independent practice**.
8. **Generalization**—applying strategy to other subjects/settings. This is the payoff!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from "Directions for Teachers, How to Teach Strategies," *Learning Toolbox*, <http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/>; *Academic Success Strategies for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities and ADHD*, Esther Minskoff and David Allsopp, Paul H Brookes Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD, 2003 (38-42); *Strategies for Success*, Lynn J. Meltzer et al, Pro-Ed, Austin, Texas, 2006 (13-30).





## HOW TO BUILD AN EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILL: AN EXAMPLE

13

Define **problem** precisely: *Derek completes, but does not turn in 30% of his homework. This averages out to 3 assignments not turned in per week.*

Define **interim behavior goal** precisely: *Derek will turn in 80% of his homework. There will be a maximum of 2 assignments per week not turned in.*

**ANTECEDENT:** Change the **environment** to support the new behavior.

- X Change physical or social environment *Provide check list in assignment book*
- X Change nature of task (shorten, take breaks, give choice, create schedule) *Have teachers agree on standard method they use to collect homework*
- X Change way adult interacts with child (rehearse, prompt, remind, coach, praise) *Have homeroom teacher initial that homework has been turned in*

**BEHAVIOR:** Explicitly teach new skill / behavior

Who will teach skill? *Homeroom teacher and parent*

What steps will child follow? Turn these steps into a simple list /picture schedule/ audiotape the child will follow.

1. *Put completed assignment in homework to turn in folder in binder as soon as assignment is completed.*
2. *Put binder in backpack when assignments are completed for the day.*
3. *Put backpack on launching pad, ready to go next morning. Homework is not done until this step is complete.*
4. *Check homework to turn in folder in each class. Turn in homework and check off in assignment book.*
5. *Check homework to turn in folder at end of school day to make sure all assignments have been turned in.*
6. *Check in with homeroom teacher and have her initial assignment book that all homework is turned in for the day.*

**CONSEQUENCE:** What **incentives** will be used to encourage child to learn and practice this skill?

- X Specific praise—“one of the most underappreciated and underused tools for promoting behavior change” (Dawson and Guare, 112). For every correction there should be at least 3 positive statements that are:

\_\_\_\_\_ Something to look forward to when task (or a section of it) is done

- X A menu of rewards and penalties

Daily reward possibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Weekly reward possibilities: *points toward gift certificate for bookstore / iTunes, trips to library*

Long-term reward possibilities: *approval to take on another extracurricular activity.*

## HOW TO BUILD AN EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILL

(Based on *Smart but Scattered*, by Peg Dawson EdD and Richard Guare, PhD, New York: Guilford Press, 2009, especially pp. 127, 112.)

Define **problem** precisely: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Define **interim behavior goal** precisely:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ANTECEDENT:** Change the **environment** to support the new behavior.

\_\_\_\_\_ Change physical or social environment \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Change nature of task (shorten, take breaks, give choice, create schedule)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Change way adult interacts with child (rehearse, prompt, remind, coach, praise)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**BEHAVIOR:** Explicitly teach new skill / behavior

Who will teach skill? \_\_\_\_\_  
What steps will child follow? Turn these steps into a simple list /picture schedule/  
audiotape the child will follow.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

**CONSEQUENCE:** What **incentives** will be used to encourage child to learn and practice this skill?

\_\_\_\_\_ Specific praise—"one of the most underappreciated and underused tools for promoting behavior change" (Dawson and Guare, 112). For every correction there should be at least 3 positive statements.

\_\_\_\_\_ Something to look forward to when task (or a section of it) is done

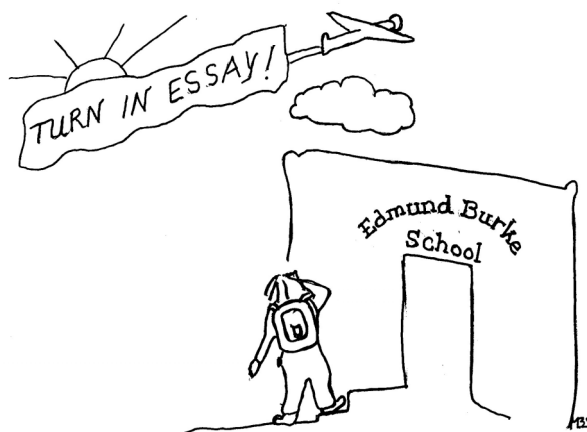
\_\_\_\_\_ A menu of rewards and penalties

Daily reward possibilities: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Weekly reward possibilities:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Long-term reward possibilities:  
\_\_\_\_\_

## TEN TIPS TO DEVELOP A NEW HABIT/STRATEGY



<p><b>1. Tie a new habit to an old one.</b> Most of us have some ingrained habits. It's easiest to develop a new one if it's tied to an old one. For example, place your vitamins next to your tooth brush to better remember to take your vitamins each morning.</p>	<p><b>6. Practice instant corrections.</b> If you forget to practice the new habit, go and do it the <i>instant</i> you remember it, if at all possible, even if it's not convenient.</p>
<p><b>2. Make the habit hard to ignore.</b> Put bells on it, put it in a place where you'll trip over it, make it impossible to leave the house without it (tie your car keys to it).</p>	<p><b>7. Get back on the horse and ride.</b> Habits take time; forgetting is <i>not</i> failure. It is part of developing a habit.</p>
<p><b>3. Make the habit as easy as possible.</b> For example, pick a convenient, visible place to put your keys, a place that makes sense, such as by the door you leave the house from.</p>	<p><b>8. Problem-solve if it's not working.</b> Maybe you need a different reminder, Perhaps you need to tie it to a different habit. Perhaps it would fit better into a different time of day.</p>
<p><b>4. Put reminders everywhere.</b> When you are first starting out, put sticky notes where you are sure to see them that remind you to act on your new habit. Change where you put them often so you will keep noticing them.</p>	<p><b>9. Practice the habit for at least 30 days in a row.</b> Make a calendar in the kitchen and check off the days. Enlist your friends and family to cheer you on.</p>
<p><b>5. Visualize yourself doing the new behavior.</b> For example, if this is a morning habit, imagine yourself going through your morning routine, including your new habit at the appropriate point in the routine.</p>	<p><b>10. Reward yourself.</b> Celebrate when you reach your thirty-day goal.</p>

From *ADD-Friendly Ways to Organize Your Life*, by Judith Kolbert & Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D., p. 22, with some additions from Meredith Skeath..

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES 16

Misconception	Reality
Being organized means my things are neat.	Being organized means I can find what you want when you need to find it. It does <i>not</i> mean my things are necessarily neat.
Once I get organized, I'll be set.	Organization is a process, not an event. Learning how to maintain an organizational system is more important than which system you choose.
Organization is instinctive, something I should be able to do.	While some people have an innate ability to be organized, many do not. They need explicit instruction, at each level of increasing organizational demand.
There is sufficient instruction at school on how to organize.	While many teachers in grades 2-4 create formal structure and organization in their classrooms, they do not usually explain <i>why</i> they are doing what they are doing. This makes it difficult for students to adopt these behaviors as their own (Goldberg 5). Middle and high school teachers typically are more content-bound and give even less attention to teaching and assessing organizational strategies.
One way of organizing will work for large groups of students.	An adult-imposed one-size-fits-all strategy will not generally work. The organizational strategy needs to suit the student's learning style and specific breakdown points. The student needs to be engaged in developing the strategy to be invested in implementing it.
Disorganized students are lazy. They just need to try harder.	A problem with organization is as real as a problem with reading or any other academic area. <i>The student's education is deficient if he is disorganized.</i>

# WHERE'S MY STUFF? HOW TO TAME Chaos



## 1. EVERYTHING DESERVES A HOME

- Close to where you use it (We don't put our toothbrush in the fridge.)
- Reserve for just that item. Label to remember.

## 2. O.H.I.O: ONLY HANDLE IT ONCE

- Put it where it belongs, in its home
- Anchor all papers in rings/binders/folders. Loose papers have legs and walk away. Live as if you are in a hurricane. Anchor that homework!

## 3. TRANSITIONS SPELL DANGER

- Most things are lost when we go from one place to another.
- Make up a self-check for vital items, repeat it whenever you leave a place. Dr. Mel Levine, for example, has a "three lump check," for his organizer, cell phone, and wallet.

## 4. KEEP IT VISIBLE

- If you are an "out of sight, out of mind" person, use translucent folders and files and pouches, desk top files that are vertical, etc.

## 5. KEEP IT UP

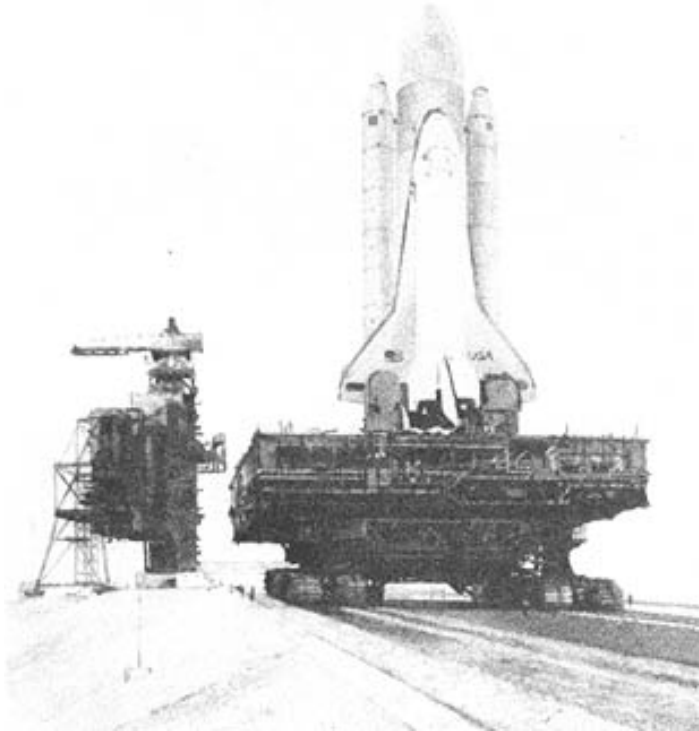
- *Maintaining* a system is more important than which system you choose. Make an appointment (a few mins./day or week) to clutter-bust critical areas, e.g. binders or files.
- Enlist clutter-busting buddies—friends, family, or professionals if necessary. Set a time limit and a reasonable goal; make it fun! (music, popcorn, etc.).

## 6. HAVE COMPASSION

- Habits take at least a month to develop!

## THE LAUNCHING PAD: A STRATEGY FOR GETTING EVERYTHING YOU NEED BACK TO SCHOOL

A launching pad is a place, conveniently located near the door—



it is the home for your backpack (and other gear) you have to take back to school—*nothing else*. It can be a *labeled* crate or shelf or hook.

### **Your homework is not done until**

- ✓ it is put back into its folder/home within your backpack, and
- ✓ your backpack is put on its launching pad the *evening before* you leave for school.

Remember, most things are lost when we move from place to place, so prevent the morning rush to find that assignment.

With your backpack on its launching pad, you can be semi-comatose and still arrive at school with everything you need. Kudos.

© Meredith Briggs Skeath, 2008, based on *Healing ADD: Simple Exercises That Will Change Your Daily Life*, Thom Hartmann, Underwood Books, Grass Valley, California, 1998.



### Guiding principles:

1. No one organizational system or product suits all people. Children should be active participants in designing their organizational system and choosing their supplies. Each system chosen is an experiment. If it doesn't work, there are others to try.
2. If one is organizationally challenged, keep everything as sturdy and visible as possible.
3. Unless your child is color-blind, make strategic use of color. Have your child pick a color for each subject. Binders, files, and book covers should all be in this color. Presto—running to class, just grab the red objects!
4. Bear in mind binders must be set up differently for left-handed students to allow a flat surface to write on.
5. Mark your territory. Name and phone in indelible ink, on every binder, book, assignment book, etc.
6. More important than the organizational system chosen is the explicit teaching of how to maintain it. The second law of thermodynamics (increasing entropy) will prevail without our intelligent action to reclaim order on a regular basis.

### Recommendations:

1. *Binders*: the sturdiest brand I've found is Avery, Heavy Duty, at Staples. I do not recommend zipper binders. The temptation to just stuff papers randomly in them is too great for almost any mortal to resist.
2. *Pens, highlighters, and pencils*: do not buy anything with a cap. The world is full to bursting with homeless caps.
3. *Dividers*: I recommend translucent, double pocket ones: Avery Big Tab Two Pocket Insertable Plastic Reference Dividers, 5 or 8 tab packages because some teachers hand out papers without holes, that cannot be put in binders. These dividers make it possible to at least get them in the right section of the binder. However, they have to be cleaned out weekly.
4. *Filing at home*: forget conventional filing cabinets. I do not know any students who actually use them. For most, out of sight is out of mind. Use a portable file, without a lid if it will stay in one home and is not likely to be knocked over or put through the wash. Staples sells one with colored hanging folders for about \$14. It can easily sit on top of or below a desk.
5. *Hole punch*: the ones that look like rulers with rings are a waste of money. The rings typically break in two weeks, after which these artifacts grace the darkest recesses of the student's locker. Mead sells a "punch 'n pouch" hole punch with durable rings, that is sturdily attached to a pencil case. I've seen it only at Office Depot. It lasts, and there is a chance it will be used.
6. *Post-it durable tabs* can be used to mark the student's place in assignment and textbooks.
7. Post-it also sells *portable flags* and notes which have holes to fit the rings of any binder, so there is a chance the flags will be accessible when needed and used.
8. *Locker*: Some students effectively use magnetic pencil baskets and white boards mounted inside the locker

## TRAVELING PAPER SYSTEMS: SO MANY CHOICES!

<b>Option</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>	<b>Who This Suits</b>
1 binder for everything	Only one thing to remember—what a relief! Even the assignment book and pencil case can be put in one binder.	By junior high school this will mean a 3-inch-binder, which is unwieldy for many students to use. The binder will have to be clutter-busted each week. Papers will have to be taken from the binder at least every 2 weeks and filed to avoid the binder exploding. If you lose this one binder, you are in TROUBLE.	A student who has profound difficulty keeping track of anything and has the willingness and support at home to file papers from the binder often.
1 binder for 2-3 subjects	These can be 2-in binders in junior and high school, lighter and easier to use than 3-in. ones. Each should be a different color.	More to remember. Need weekly clutter busting but filing can be as infrequent as monthly, depending on subject.	Most students in junior and high school prefer this system.
1 binder for each subject	These can be 1 or 2-inch binders—lighter to carry. Can be color-coded. Useful for college students especially, who don't go to one class after another all day. If you lose one you still have the rest.	Even more binders to remember: there can be a jumble of 5-8 binders helter-skelter in a locker, making it hard to get the trig binder out of the wreckage.	A student who cannot carry much weight. A very well organized student who can keep track of 8 binders and tends to put things back in a designated place.
Accordion file (portable)	Like one binder for every subject, but much lighter.	You cannot see the papers without pulling them most of the way out of the file, then you have to put them back. Some students can't remember whether a paper goes in front of or in back of the tabs. Papers must be filed into a permanent file at home weekly, or this accordion file will be quickly stuffed and useless.	Only a few, very organized students find this system useful. Worth a try if a student hates binders, prefers to write with a pad, and is generally well organized.
Spiral notebooks	Lighter than binders. Some have pockets where you can put handouts.	If you put more than one subject in each notebook, you inevitably run out of paper in one subject before the rest, and then what? The pockets tend to get stuffed and useless.	Student with one subject/notebook where not many notes will be needed or handouts given.
Clear plastic envelopes	Velcro one envelope per subject onto textbook.	Clear plastic envelopes must be kept closed, either with Velcro or string closures. They must be emptied and filed into binders or file at home, at least bi-weekly, or chaos will ensue. Student will probably need a filing buddy.	Students who are allergic to binders and notebooks and needs to physically attach papers to related textbook.

# CLUTTER BUSTING: RECIPE FOR ORGANIZING PAPERS

## 1. **Goal: Put each piece of paper securely in its correct home.** 21

WHY BOTHER? So we can find our work. If we can't find it, we might as well not have done it. Ability is good, but output wins the day

## 2. **Assemble all ingredients:**

- a. All the possible homes:
  - i. All school binders
  - ii. Assignment book
  - iii. Waste basket
  - iv. Files: I recommend:
    1. files in a crate with wheels, so it can be wheeled wherever you want to organize your papers.
    2. file folders, book covers, and binders color coordinated from year to year—the same color for each subject.
    3. a manila folder with the subject and school year written on it, as well as a hanging folder with a tab with the subject and year written on it.
- b. Timer
- c. Paper 3-hole punch. Use a sturdy one if possible (not the kind that goes in a school binder). Get one that can easily punch 5-10 pieces of paper at a time.

## 3 **Procedure: Cardinal rule: O.H.I.O=Only handle it once.**

Pick up each piece of paper and decide where its proper home is and put it there.

We do not put it in an intermediate pile, or folder, or way station.

- a. Establish a time and place each day when you will meet your clutter buddy to do ten minutes of organizing papers. If you only do it once a week, schedule more time.
- b. Decide whether your clutter buddy will actually help you by picking up papers and finding their homes too, or simply watch and help you focus and decide, if necessary, where a given paper goes. Decide whether you want to have music on, if that will help you focus. Decide what you would like to do right after organizing, to reward yourself.
- c. Set the timer for ten minutes, after you have assembled all materials. If you can focus for longer, set the timer for a longer time. Ten minutes a day is minimum. After you catch up with a backlog and start putting each paper in its proper home **as you get it**, you will not need this much time.

# CLUTTER BUSTING: RECIPE FOR ORGANIZING PAPERS

- d. Pick up one piece of paper (or one stapled bunch of papers) at a time. Look it over. Decide where its proper home is.

- **Current, finished work** in an academic subject from this trimester, (such as returned homework or tests or notes):

**punch 3 holes in it and put it in that subject's binder after the last work currently in the binder.** Every piece of paper should have your name and be dated, in the right upper corner. If it does not have a date, put in an approximate date. Why? If you loan a paper to a friend or take it out of the binder, it will be more likely to find its way back to you, and you will be able to put it back where it belongs, by date.

- **Homework TO DO: goes in the IN folder stapled inside the front of your assignment book.**

No piece of paper should simply be stuffed in a bag, book, or binder. Homework to do has to be put inside the IN folder, so it won't fall out of the assignment book.

- **Finished homework TO TURN IN: goes in the OUT folder stapled inside the BACK cover of your assignment book.**

No papers should be here except completed homework to turn in.

- e. Keep in file:

- homework for a given trimester. Why? To prove you did the work. To help you study for future classes/tests.  
➤ quizzes and tests.  
➤ notes and handouts

- f. Throw out: scribbles, duplicate papers.

- g. Work until the timer goes off. When it does, put all your materials in their proper places and congratulate yourself. Well done!

When binders get too full to be easy to use (usually every 2-3 weeks) transfer unneeded papers to files for each subject. At the end of each trimester, go over binders and keep papers in binders for courses that will continue. For courses that will be referred to in the future or provide the basis for future courses, transfer all papers to files. For courses that will NOT be referred to in the future and hold no interest to you ever, ceremonially dispose of those papers. Roast marshmallows!

# TIME ESTIMATION CHART

*Why does this matter? If you can't estimate time well, you can't plan. If you can't plan, you can't get big things done in a relaxed way. Give your time sense a boost: practice estimating time! Look for patterns: For example, do you always underestimate or overestimate how long math homework takes? Do you overestimate how long something will take when you are tired, or not interested in doing it? You can make your estimates more accurate when you know your patterns.*

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:
	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:
	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:	Assignment:  Estimated Time:  Actual Time:
<b>My Time Estimation is :</b> <input type="checkbox"/> very accurate <input type="checkbox"/> somewhat accurate <input type="checkbox"/> somewhat inaccurate <input type="checkbox"/> wildly inaccurate	<b>Patterns I see in my time estimates:</b>		<b>How I can improve the accuracy of my time estimates:</b>		

# Master Schedule

	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
6-7							
7-8							
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1							
1-2							
2-3							
3-4							
4-5							
5-6							
6-7							
7-8							
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1							

This schedule helps you visualize the blocks of time you have free after you put in your fixed activities, including school, eating, sleeping, commuting, sports, etc.

# Brain Time



*Just as our body needs physical workouts, our mind needs mental workouts.*

**Our family's Brain Time will be from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
Monday through \_\_\_\_\_.**

## **During Brain Time**

- all members of our family work on mentally educational tasks
- there are no recreational electronics (TV, IMing, surfing the web, emailing, videogames, computer games, phoning.)
- if homework is completed before Brain Time is up, we will engage in other mentally stimulating tasks, such as:
  - reviewing school material,
  - teaching our parent(s) the material,
  - practicing a musical instrument, art, or a craft,
  - reading,
  - discussing ideas, or
  - playing games that involve thinking and creativity, such as Scrabble, Trivial Pursuit, etc.
  - working on collaborative projects.

LATER

*What fun! Or is it? Here's how to tackle it.*

NOW!

**CHANGE YOUR HEAD**

26

Use a soft, alluring, positive voice in your head to encourage yourself rather than a nasty, negative, critical voice (Hartmann, 120-1).

*You will feel sooo good when this is done.*

**CHANGE YOUR LIST**

Structure your procrastination by putting a task at the top of your list that has a clear deadline (but really doesn't) and seems awfully important (but really isn't). You will end up doing lots of useful tasks lower down on your list to *avoid* doing what's at the top (Perry, <http://www.structuredprocrastination.com/>)

**CHANGE YOUR TASK**

Break it down into steps. Schedule each step in your planner. Get someone to hold you accountable.

**CHANGE YOUR TIME**

Work for a specific amount of time, even 5 mins., rather than "until it's done." Schedule half hour work or less work sessions in your planner.

**CHANGE HOW YOU START**

Don't sit there if you are paralyzed. Talk your ideas out with a friend, teacher, or advisor. Write them out on a white board, Tape them on a recorder. Or use software to create a mind map of ideas (such as Inspirations software).

**CHANGE YOUR BODY**

Work in the day. Get enough sleep. Exercise, drink water, and eat some protein before asking your brain to work hard for you. If you get stalled, take an exercise and water break. Get your heart rate up. Increase blood flow to your brain (by a shoulder stand, hanging your head down toward your feet, running, dancing, or jumping).

**CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT**

Find a place where you can be productive without distractions. It may *not* be your room.

**REWARD YOURSELF RIGHT AFTER YOU WORK.**





# Multitasking

## Multitasking

**Is an illusion.** “With rare exceptions, people don’t carry out two (or more) tasks literally at the same time; they switch between them, and each switch takes time — a ‘switch cost.’ The switch costs are small but easily measurable in an experimental psychology lab.” *Steven Yantis, professor of psychological and brain sciences, Johns Hopkins University.*

**Leads to sloppy errors.** “Multitaskers believe they’re getting more done, but instead they’re just getting faster and sloppier. . . . in general, multitaskers make more errors than people who focus on one task at a time.” *Gary W. Small, professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences and director, Memory and Aging Research Center, David Geffen School of Medicine, Univ. of Calif. Los Angeles.*

**Prevents deep thinking.** “In addition to the switch cost, each time you switch away from a task and back again, you have to recall where you were in that task, what you were thinking about. If the tasks are complex, you may well forget some aspect of what you were thinking about before you switched away, which may require you to revisit some aspect of the task you had already solved (for example, you may have to re-read the last paragraph you’d been reading). Deep thinking about a complex topic can become nearly impossible.” *Steven Yantis, professor of psychological and brain sciences, Johns Hopkins University.*

**Hurts learning and creativity.** “Our research has shown that multitasking can have an insidious effect on learning, changing the brain systems that are involved so that even if one can learn while multitasking, the nature of that learning is altered to be less flexible. *Russell A. Poldrack, director of the Imaging Research Center and professor of psychology and neurobiology at the University of Texas at Austin.*

Researchers at the University of California San Francisco found that, when the brain is constantly stimulated, you hamper the learning process. . . . Heavy multi-taskers actually have more trouble focusing, are more distracted and, researchers say, experience more stress. People think they're refreshing themselves by filling in small bits of time with games, emails, texts etc, but the researchers say it's actually fatiguing and making people less creative. Dr. Jennifer Ashton, "The Early Show," CBS News Medical Correspondent, *CBS News.com*.

### What to do?

Turn off IM, TV, unneeded websites, email, IChat, phone, music, etc. when you want to *learn, study, or write*. Run the experiment. If you can’t do this, get help!

Excerpted from “First Steps to Digital Detox,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 2010

<http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/07/first-steps-to-digital-detox/> and “Brain Drain: Real Result of Digital Overload?” Dr. Jennifer Ashton, "The Early Show," CBS News Medical Correspondent, *CBS News.com*.  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/08/26/earlyshow/living/parenting/main6807187.shtml>

**The Learning Toolbox** website <http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox>. Superb, free materials to download. Separate sections for students, parents, and teachers, with video clips of teachers demonstrating each step of the instructional process. The companion book is *Academic Success Strategies for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities and ADHD*, Esther Minskoff, Ph.D. and David Allsopp, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co, Baltimore, MD. 2003. Written for use with high school and college students, but can easily be adapted for younger students. Excellent.

***The Organized Student***, Donna Goldberg with Jennifer Zwiebel. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005. A detailed description of how to help a student organize materials and time. Assumes no organizing instinct!

***Smart but Scattered***, Peg Dawson, Ed.D. and Richard Guare, Ph.D., Guilford Press, New York, 2009. The best book I know written for tutors / parents who want to improve their children's (elementary through junior high school age) executive functioning.

**“Why Gifted Isn’t Everything”** Adele M. Brodtkin, *Scholastic*, April 23, 2008. Accessed April 20, 2011. <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3749449>