

# Executive Skills Tip Sheets

This sheet gives definitions of each executive skill included in the Executive Skills Problem Checklist, along with tips and things you can say to yourself to get better at that skill. As you read through the suggestions, circle or highlight those ideas that you think might work for you.

**Response Inhibition**—being able to control your impulses so that you can think before you act, resist peer pressure, and make good choices (for example, choosing to study rather than do more appealing activities).

Tips	Self-Talk*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be aware of your unique temptations and make a plan to avoid them.</li><li>• Ask yourself, “Good choice or bad choice?”</li><li>• Practice waiting (for example, add a little more time or work before giving yourself the reward).</li><li>• <b>Other strategies:</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First work, then play.</li><li>• Learn from your mistakes.</li><li>• Stop and think.</li><li>• <b>Your own idea:</b></li></ul>

**Working Memory**—being able to keep in mind everything you have to remember—and remembering what worked the last time.

Tips	Self-Talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Get teachers’ permission to e-mail assignments.</li><li>• Do all work on iPad or tablet so it’s always with you.</li><li>• Use colored markers to highlight instructions (use different colors to signal different things, such as green for the most important, red for things you might be likely to forget).</li><li>• Set reminders with time and sound cue on your smartphone.</li><li>• Make checklists.</li><li>• <b>Other strategies:</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Am I forgetting anything?</li><li>• Check your list.</li><li>• Check your agenda.</li><li>• <b>Your own idea:</b></li></ul>

\*Self-talk means giving yourself instructions, words of encouragement, or prompts to remind you what you’re working on and what your goal is.

## Executive Skills Tip Sheets *(cont.)*

**Emotional Control**—being able to manage your feelings so they don't get in the way of getting work done or meeting goals.

Tips	Self-Talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Label the feeling and let it go.</li><li>• When you can, walk away from the upsetting situation, get ahold of yourself, and come back.</li><li>• Look into learning meditation techniques.</li><li>• Pat yourself on the back when you stay cool.</li><li>• <b>Other strategies:</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take 10.</li><li>• Take deep breaths.</li><li>• This, too, shall pass.</li><li>• Big deal or little deal?</li><li>• <b>Your own idea:</b></li></ul>

**Sustained Attention**—staying on task, getting things done in the time you've given yourself to do them, even if you're tired, bored, or have more appealing distractions.

Tips	Self-Talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set realistic work goals and stick to them.</li><li>• Take planned breaks and get back to work on schedule.</li><li>• Gather all necessary materials before beginning a task.</li><li>• Build in rewards for completing tasks.</li><li>• <b>Other strategies:</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You can't walk away from this.</li><li>• Don't quit now.</li><li>• Back to work.</li><li>• First work, then play.</li><li>• <b>Your own idea:</b></li></ul>

**Task Initiation**—being able to make yourself start a task. If you've seen yourself getting closer to your goal, this is the first step on that path. If you don't take this step, you can't get closer.

Tips	Self-Talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pick the task (make it small).</li><li>• Pick the start time.</li><li>• Pick the minimum work time.</li><li>• Pick the cue to start.</li><li>• <b>Other strategies:</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Just do it.</li><li>• Take baby steps.</li><li>• Start small.</li><li>• <b>Your own idea:</b></li></ul>

## Executive Skills Tip Sheets *(cont.)*

**Flexibility**—the ability to adapt to unexpected events and to come up with multiple solutions to problems.

Tips	Self-Talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Notice the physical warning signs of inflexibility (muscle tightness, breathing changes) and ask yourself if you can find a way to be flexible.</li><li>• Whenever you have to make a decision about something, ask yourself, “What could go wrong and what’s Plan B if this doesn’t work?”</li><li>• <b>Other strategies:</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Big deal or little deal?</li><li>• What are your options?</li><li>• What’s Plan B?</li><li>• Is there another way to think about this?</li><li>• <b>Your own idea:</b></li></ul>

**Planning/Prioritization**—planning is your road map, your GPS. When you have a good plan, you know all the turns you have to make and how to get past the roadblocks along the way. You also know how to focus on what’s most important and let the little things go.

Tips	Self-Talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use the planning forms in this agenda (long-term projects; test study plan).</li><li>• Ask teachers for a preview of a lecture or to tell you what are the most important concepts to focus on when studying for tests. (Teachers who provide study guides for tests make this easy!)</li><li>• When you have written instructions for homework assignments, underline and number each instruction that’s an <i>action</i>.</li><li>• <b>Other strategies:</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What’s your destination?</li><li>• Your plan will be a built-in GPS to get there.</li><li>• Map the route.</li><li>• What comes first, next, and next, and what do you need to give up to get there?</li><li>• First things first.</li><li>• <b>Your own idea:</b></li></ul>

**Organization**—having a system for keeping track of information and materials, especially the things you need every day (homework, notebooks, keys, phone, sports equipment, etc.)—putting everything in its place, so when you look for it, it’s there.

Tips	Self-Talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use laptop or iPad for managing information/ assignments/class notes.</li><li>• Use a note organizer app such as OneNote or Evernote.</li><li>• Spend five minutes every day staying organized.</li><li>• <b>Other strategies:</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A place for everything and everything in its place.</li><li>• Do you have it together?</li><li>• <b>Your own idea:</b></li></ul>

## Executive Skills Tip Sheets *(cont.)*

**Time management**—Each day is a 24-hour shot clock. Time management allows you to manage the tug of war between what you want to do, what you need to do, and what others ask you to do.

### Tips

- Use this planner to make daily plans.
- Estimate how long a task will take—and check to see if you were right.
- Break homework down into short time segments. (Pomodoro is a smartphone app that helps you do that.)
- **Other strategies:**

### Self-Talk

- How much time do you have?
- Are you on track?
- What you need to do comes before what you want to do.
- Honestly, how long will it really take?
- Each day is like a shot clock in a game.
- **Your own idea:**

**Goal-Directed Persistence**—This is a giant version of sustained attention: You have a goal, and you're determined to get there. What you do on a day-to-day basis gets you to that goal, and keeping this in mind helps you connect immediate actions and consequences with other ones down the road.

### Tips

- Make daily study plans to build a sense of accomplishment.
- Set *any* goal related to schoolwork, and if the goal isn't met, make it smaller, more attainable.
- Place a picture of your goal in a prominent place to remind you what you're working on.
- **Other strategies:**

### Self-Talk

- What are you working on?
- Are you on track?
- Don't give up now.
- Keep your eye on the prize.
- Will this help you get to your goal?
- **Your own idea:**

**Metacognition**—What did I do + why did I do it = what will I do the next time? Metacognition is your brain's life lesson machine. It allows you to look at your past actions and behaviors, analyze them, and use that information to make more informed decisions about how to act in the future.

### Tips

- Ask teachers for a test study guide.
- Create error-monitoring checklists (for example, a proofreading checklist).
- Create your own study packets for tests by pulling together all important material and stapling it together with a cover.
- Ask four self-monitoring questions: "What is my problem?" "What is my plan?" "Am I following my plan?" "How did I do?"
- **Other strategies:**

### Self-Talk

- What's the big picture?
- How are you doing?
- What worked for you before?
- What didn't?
- What do you need or want for a grade?
- Have you studied enough to get it?
- **Your own idea:**