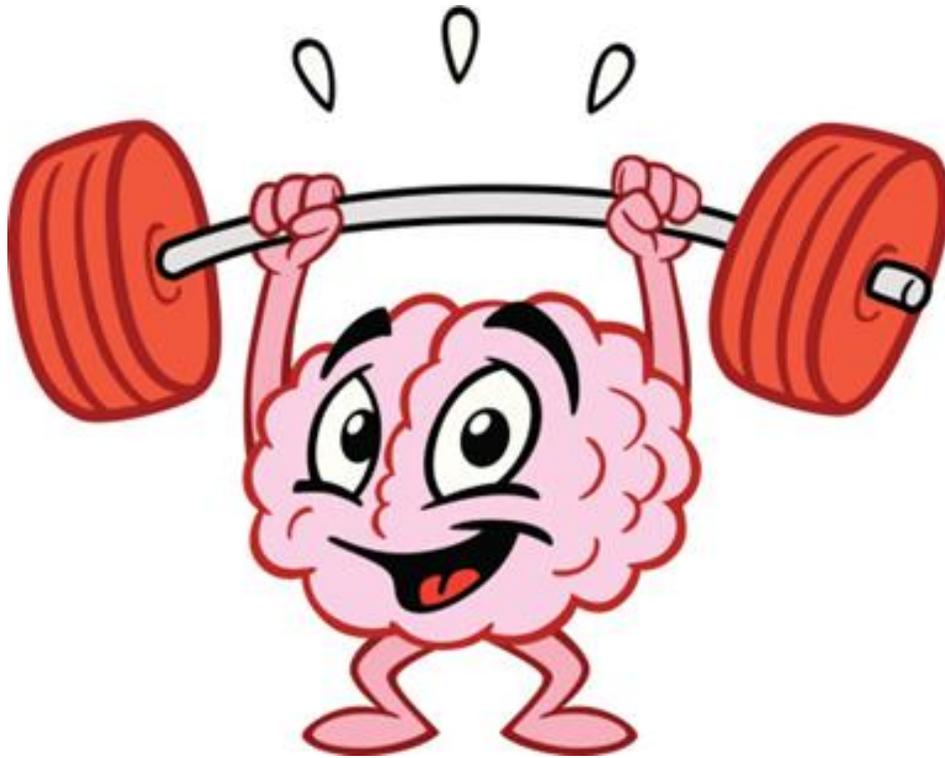


# Executive Functioning: Skills to Empower Your Child



Ali Zidel Meyers MSW  
Meyers Learning Center

Copyright 2018

Please do not distribute without the author's permission. Thank you.

Contact: [ali@meyerslearning.com](mailto:ali@meyerslearning.com)

## Organization: Tools for Structure and Habit-Building

### 1. Structure

- a. Location, location, location
  - i. Space Stations: *A place for everything, & everything in its place* (at home)— school supplies, HW equipment, athletic gear, seasonal storage, select schoolwork (filing system at home for what you don't need to haul around with you daily)
  - ii. Crates, bins, and file systems, oh, my
    1. Drop-box or crates by the house door for backpacks, athletic equipment, items that tend to go back and forth
    2. Shoe stand, coat stand or accessible closet space for these items
    3. Organizing bins can be bought at Target, Big Lots, or Goodwill, and recycled boxes can be used for structure as well
- b. Your stuff:
  - i. Space considerations: form must support function!
    1. Make sure bins, crates, cubbies, shelves, or boxes are accessible, sturdy, and safe
    2. Structural options:
      - a. Shoe shelves/cubbies
      - b. Counter-top organizers for cosmetics/self-care products
      - c. Collapsible bins
      - d. Crates, boxes
      - e. Shelving
      - f. Hanging storage (nets, hanging bins)
      - g. Closet organizers
    - ii. Shuttles: school and home--**Shuttle Folder**, backpacks, lunch container
    - iii. To-do lists and checklists
  - c. Create an effective work space (*A place for everything, & everything in its place*)
  - d. More resources: NAPO ([www.napo.net](http://www.napo.net)), [www.onlineorganizing.com](http://www.onlineorganizing.com) (products/tips)



### 2. Habit

- e. Home Routines
  - i. **House jobs:** Share household or classroom responsibilities. You can have a job chart posted on the wall or pick jobs out of a hat. Alternate weekly or monthly.
  - ii. Make de-cluttering a **household routine:** weekly, monthly, or seasonally. Make piles or places for these three categories and have everyone contribute: **Give away. Throw Away. Put Away.**
  - iii. **Community:** set up a book rotation. Set up a FREecycle list for your school.
  - iv. **Time-of-Day routines:**
  - v. **Morning**
    1. Hygiene
    2. Self-Care (breakfast, lunch, stuff for the day)
    3. Checklists w/ visuals can be helpful (put it where you'll see it).
  - vi. **Afternoon/Evening**

1. After-class (or after-work) routine/assignment review, study, completion/submission of work
2. Nighttime rituals: prepare clothing/materials for next day, bathroom, power down, bed
3. Do as much as possible the night before school: make lunches, organize backpack, lay out clothes and shoes...whatever will make the morning less hectic.

**vii. Any time**

1. A **place for everything, and everything in its place** (Put away old before taking out new.)
2. Choose a daily/weekly/monthly day and time to weed out, de-clutter, and organize

**f. School routines**

- i. Planner check (before leaving school, materials checklist)
- ii. *Planner system*
- iii. *Binder system*
- iv. Shuttling: school and home: shuttle folders, backpacks...

**g. Additional resources:**

- i. The **OHIO** principle: **O**nly **H**andle **I**t **O**nce!
- ii. Homework/study tracking apps:
  - iii. <https://myhomeworkapp.com/>
  - iv. <https://www.mystudylife.com/>
  - v. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/istudiez-pro-legendary-planner/id402989379?mt=12>
- vi. Time Timer: for building time awareness and time management skills  
[www.timetimer.com](http://www.timetimer.com) (a kitchen timer/analog clock with alarm works fine too)

# Nine Steps to an Organized Backpack

1. Empty your backpack. Yes, every scrap, book, paper, and crumb. Even your cell phone, wallet, and keys should be in the pile on the floor.
2. Sort into piles: PUT, THROW, AND PLACE (for later). *Put all items you want to save (and USE) in their place, throw away what you don't need, and place any items to take home in a specific place too.*
3. Make it part of your **daily routine** to de-clutter your backpack. Conduct **weekly** weed-outs and 10-minute tune-ups. Remember, this will SAVE YOU TIME in the long-run.
4. Set up an organizing system at home for unloading your backpack and putting everything in a place (a filing system for storage).
5. Plan ahead for each day (in the morning) and the next day (the night before). Gather the materials you need and organize them.
6. Create a dedicated space for the one thing you often lose and practice putting it there over and over and over again.
7. Re-organize as your needs change.
8. Label anything you care about losing.
9. Don't use your backpack as a storage device. Remember this and practice it: *"A place for everything and everything in its place."* Maintain your system every day.



# Planner System\*

## 1. Tracking Your Weekly Assignments

### a. **Classes and dates.**

- i. List **ALL** assignments for all subjects. (NAW—No Assigned Work, if no work assigned for that day. Does that mean you have nothing to do? No!)

### b. **Materials needed.**

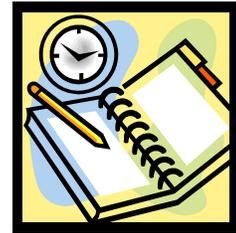
- i. For each assignment, write down materials you need to take home, to complete it (i.e. TB for textbook, WB for workbook...etc.). Before you go home, make sure those materials are in your backpack.

### c. **Assignments.**

- i. Each time a new assignment is made, put it down in the planner, every day until it's done

### d. **Prioritize.**

- i. Number them in order: easiest to hardest. (usually best to do easier first). Prioritize based on grade weight of assignments and due dates.



### e. **Time estimate.**

### f. **Actual start/finish time**

- i. Write down start and finish time. Compare to estimate. (In 2-4 weeks, if you do this, you'll find you're able to accurately estimate how long work will take you. Most people guess wrong, underestimate, and plan their time poorly. You can stop once you have a good sense of how long tasks will take you.)

### g. **Cross out number when done.**

## 2. **3 Names and Phone numbers of classmates:** you must have these for each class/subject (you only have to do this once—at the beginning of the year).

- a. There's no good excuse for not knowing what to do for HW.
- b. Being sick doesn't mean you don't have to do the work (unless you're severely ill). Complete work at home while sick (if possible) or you'll have double when you return.

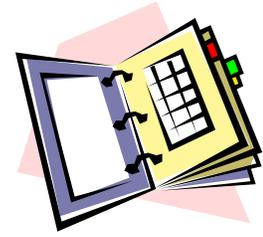
Remember!

- Put finished HW/materials in a **shuttle folder** or section of your binder where you know they'll be. Pack in backpack for school the next day.

Make a cue to remind yourself to **TURN IN the HW** when you get to class. (Wear a rubber band, a colored bracelet, put a bright sticky note on your pencil pouch or a part of your backpack that you will definitely see when you get to class. Other ideas?)

\*Planners aren't for everyone. If you prefer a different approach, explore alternative options, whether **low-tech** (a small notebook or pre-populated chart covered in plastic where assignments can be written with dry erase marker and wiped clean later) or **high tech** (smart phone calendar/notes/apps like myHomework, Google calendar—explore options to find what fits for you).

## Binder Guide



### What kind of binder should I use?

- a) Choose something sturdy that you like. Avoid anything larger than 1.5", and use it for no more than 2 subjects (one binder per subject is ideal).
- b) Some students prefer an accordion file, **but only use one if you will maintain it** (put each subject in its own section with newest papers in front **every day**).

### Make a Rainbow

- c) Use a different color binder for each subject and a matching colored notebook (i.e. red binder and red notebook for English, orange binder and orange notebook for math, etc.) if you need notebooks for each subject. You can also cover each subject's textbook in a shade of paper that matches the subject's binder and notebook colors.

### Organizing your binder

- d) How should I organize it?
  - ⇒ If your professor says to organize a certain way, follow his or her instructions.
  - ⇒ Make four (or five) sections divided with Tabs:
    - (1) Notes
    - (2) Handouts
    - (3) Homework (finished to turn in, or returned...When you do it, put it in, and bring your binder to class, you'll always turn it in.)
    - (4) Tests/Quizzes
    - (5) (optional) Vocabulary, terms, lab reports—depends on class

### Maintaining Your Binder

- e) How do I keep it from looking like a tornado hit it?
  - ⇒ Do a Weekly Weed-out and a 10-Minute Tune Up (every day). Start your study routine with a 5-10 minute organizational weed-out during which you take all those loose papers that have gathered in your backpack and binder all day long, and put them in their dedicated places in your binder.

If your binder falls apart (i.e. the rings stop working, the cover falls off or flaps around), replace it with a new one! Some students need to replace binders once a year, and others need to replace them every couple of months. It all depends on the wear and tear on your binders.

		<b>TIME CHART</b>					
Name							
	School Time						
	Essential Activities						
	Study						
	Free Time						
Hours	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
<b>A.M. 12-5</b>							
5 - 6							
6 - 7							
7 - 8							
8 - 9							
9 - 10							
10 - 11							
11 - 12							
<b>P.M. 12 - 1</b>							
1 - 2							
2 - 3							
3 - 4							
4 - 5							
5 - 6							
6 - 7							
7 - 8							
8 - 9							
9 - 10							
10-11							
11-12							

## Prioritization: Easy as “ABC”

### The ABC daily to-dos



1. Write out your daily to-do list the night before, consisting of everything you want to accomplish (be reasonable!).
2. Label each task “A”, “B”, or “C”.
  - “As” are the most important tasks—assignments due or jobs needing completion. They also have serious consequences if they do NOT get done.\*
  - “Bs” on your list are important, but less so than As. Bs might become As eventually. Consequences of NOT completing Bs are less serious.
  - “Cs” do not require immediate attention—often small, easy jobs. There are little to no consequences if you don’t do these on a given day.
3. Schedule time for all of the As. The Bs are next. Cs can be done as time permits.

\*If you have multiple “A tasks”, designate them: A1, A2, A3...etc.

*(from Take Control of Your Time and Life, by Alan Lakein)*

## Project Planning: Chunk It Out



Do big projects give you the willies? No need to freak out. It's all do-able. The best thing to do is CHUNK IT OUT. Imagine your project is like a huge sheet cake. You're not going to eat it all at once, right? No, you're going to cut it into manageable chunks and eat a little each day (unless you want to be sick, which I am guessing you don't). Here are the most important steps to saving your sanity on those long-term projects:

<p><b>1. COPY</b></p>	<p>When you get the assignment, make a copy. Put one copy in your binder, and give another copy to someone you trust who never loses stuff. Hopefully this person lives in your home. Now you have a back-up copy, in case you need it.</p>
<p><b>2. GET THE DETAILS</b></p>	<p>Spend some time getting to know your project. Sit down and highlight all of the action words (verbs) and items to do, as well as due dates for any individual parts of the assignment (like getting the topic approved by your teacher, doing research, creating a bibliography, making an outline, writing a rough draft, making the final draft, creating a presentation, etc.).</p>
<p><b>3. CHUNK IT</b></p>	<p>If your teacher doesn't have the tasks or steps broken down, go ahead and do this yourself. For example, if your teacher just says to "do research", you'll need to break that down into CHUNKS or steps, like 1) go to library to find printed resources (no teachers will let you do it all online), 2) find reliable internet sites and print out articles, 3) read and highlight articles, 4) take notes on articles... Chunking your project into steps make it more manageable.</p>
<p><b>4. TO-DOS AND DUE DATES</b></p>	<p>By assigning yourself due-dates, you will prevent yourself from getting overloaded and overwhelmed with one whole chunk of work to do all at once. Create a master list of all the action items (things to do) for the project, as well as the due dates. (Does it sound like a lot of writing? Well, it actually helps cement the information in your brain to write it down. This is good!)</p>
<p><b>5. CALENDAR AND BACKWARDS PLANNING</b></p>	<p>Once you have the list, grab a calendar. You're going to do some "<b>backwards planning</b>" now—that means you will start with the last date that something is due (i.e. the FINAL PROJECT) and put that in your planner or calendar. Then, you will find or assign yourself a due date for every other thing that is due up until the final project must be turned in. For each due date, put a note in your calendar or planner the day before it is due until you have all action items and due dates input in your calendar or planner.</p>
<p><b>6. REMINDERS</b></p>	<p>If you are not in the habit of looking ahead in your planner or looking on your calendar, find a back-up method for checking in on your progress and getting reminders for your project. You can use an iPhone, Google calendar, or other technology solutions to give yourself alerts/reminders to stay on track. Set those up now.</p>
<p><b>7. FOLLOW-THROUGH</b></p>	<p>Execute your plan! Stay on track with the due dates you set and check each task off as you do it. If you think you might have trouble staying on track, share your plan with a buddy or one of your parents and ask for their help; they can check in with you and hold you accountable to the plan that you made.</p>

# 10 Tips for Overcoming Procrastination

## 1. The Five-Minute Method

Tell yourself, "I am going to work on this for only 5 minutes," then start. At the end of five minutes, decide whether you want to continue or if you want to stop. Sometimes, you'll forget to stop and just keep going! It's surprising how quickly those five minutes can add up.

## 2. Make a Molehill out of a Mountain

As soon as you receive a big assignment, chunk it out into manageable parts and set aside a little time each day to work on it. By dividing the task and stretching it out over time, you make it less overwhelming.

## 3. Use the time you have.

Remember - even a few minutes is enough time to accomplish some things – finishing an assignment, wedding out a backpack, organizing your binders, etc. You can also use the time while you are waiting in line or for a ride, to take care of small tasks.

## 4. Start at a point that makes sense to you.

You don't have to start every project at the beginning. Start in the middle, start at the end - start anywhere you have to; just get started! If the first step is hardest, and if the other steps don't rely on the first one, then start wherever you can.

## 5. Post reminders in a prominent place.

Hang a dry erase board on the wall across from your desk. Post projects and deadlines so they're easy to see. Use your smart phone as an alert system too.

## 6. The OHIO Principle:

When mail or other stuff comes into your life, *Only Handle It Once*. File it, trash it or respond to it, but only do it once.

## 7. Talk to yourself...nicely!

Use words to encourage yourself, not to justify your actions or defeat yourself. Try saying things like "The sooner I start, the sooner I can finish," or, "If I work more efficiently, I'll have more time to play." Another good one: "I can do this." What kinds of messages do you give yourself?

## 8. Manage your stress.

Try deep breathing, progressive relaxation, visualization, physical exercise, guided meditation, a walk through a park, or whatever works for you. Connect with people who can support you.

## 9. Don't minimize your accomplishments.

Getting ANYTHING done is better than nothing. Don't allow an "all or nothing" mentality to make stop you from starting (or make you feel defeated).

## 10. Ask for help.

Ask a coach, enlist a friend, reach out to a teacher/counselor, or find someone to who can be your Accountability Partner.

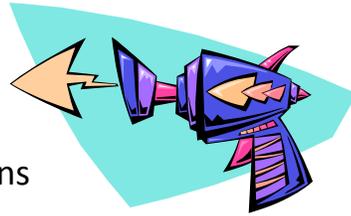
# Be PAPared! Predict, Anticipate, Plan.

Murphy's Law says that "anything that can go wrong, will"! Even though it's not an absolute truth, we can plan for important events and responsibilities as if things might go wrong. Then, we're prepared, in case they do!

<b>Predict</b>	<b>Anticipate</b>	<b>Plan</b>
My math homework will take 20 minutes	It might take 45 minutes or an hour if it's hard for me.	I'll set aside an hour to do it and make sure I have someone to ask for help if I need to.
My English paragraph will take half an hour.	It should take half an hour, but it might take an hour. Our printer is almost out of ink, so it might take longer to print than usual. If the printer doesn't work, I'll a new ink cartridge or to go to a library to print out the document (or ask mom or dad to take me to school early to use the printer there).	I'll check the printer before I start. I'll ask for an ink cartridge and install it. I'll make a plan for printing outside the house if it doesn't work. I'll give myself an hour for writing the paper.

# Supporting Attention, Focusing Skills

- **Laser beam, light bulb**
- **Tunnel Vision**
- **Instruction**
  - Make eye contact, then give instructions
  - Be clear and concise
  - Sequence logically
  - Verbally rehearse with student ("what should you do?")
  - Write on board/reference handout, planner, or notebook
- **Chunking: don't feed them the entire cake at once**
  - Chunk information: give information in small digestible pieces
  - Chunk work tasks: break large assignments down into smaller tasks with the child, to help him/her focus on finishing each part.
  - Students can be overwhelmed when given too much information at once.
- Involve the senses—the more the better
- Tie low motivation tasks to high motivation rewards (make a Bliss List)
- Give 'em a break!
- Change it up: Shift subjects, study methods, location...
- Ask a simple question if the child's attention is beginning to wander (to aide in refocusing)
- Develop a private running joke, signal, or **keyword** between you and the child that can be invoked to refocus the child (ZEBRAS!)
- Stay nearby and **touch** him or her on the shoulder or hand if you notice attention wandering
- **Self-monitoring** strategies: role-model, then build self-monitoring
  - Thought Box or notebook for distracting thoughts—schedule time later to come back to them
  - Checkmarks
  - Pebble/button/stone jar
  - Set a timer, watch, or smart phone app to chime at certain intervals—cue to refocus
- Give immediate positive (and specific) feedback for reinforcement of behaviors you want to see replicated



# Resources and Apps

EF: [www.lynnkenney.com](http://www.lynnkenney.com), [www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org), <http://www.beyondbooksmart.com>

## Time and Productivity

- <https://www.rescuetime.com/>
- one-thing-at-a-time to-do app:
  - <http://www.nowdothis.com/>
- <http://www.tudumo.com/>
- <http://doominow.com/>
- <http://www.rememberthemilk.com/>
- For time awareness and time management [www.timetimer.com](http://www.timetimer.com), app available too (a kitchen timer or analog clock w/ alarm works fine as well)

## Google Calendar (or similar platform)

- Input all due dates for assignments, commitments.
- Use daily, weekly, and monthly view.
- View upcoming week on the weekend, to plan ahead.
- Set alerts/reminders. Switch them up if they become dull/dim.

## Google Docs

- Great platform you can share with collaborators and view from anywhere you have internet access (free tutorials available online)
- Create folders in GSuite—teach students organization through naming conventions, folders, assignment titles and date-stamping
- If you have students who often lose things, teach them to take a screen shot of online submissions with a date/time stamp, so they can find it and share it, if there is confusion or disagreement about having turned it in

## Time and Personal Organizing

- <https://www.rescuetime.com/plans>
- <https://web.any.do/#signup>
- <http://www.tomighty.org/>
- Pomodoro technique: <https://tomato-timer.com/> (online timer)

## Extreme Alarm and Walk Me Up!

- **Extreme Alarm** enables you to put math operations, which if you don't solve, the alarm won't stop ringing. You can also limit the number of snoozes.
- **Walk Me Up!**--The alarm on this app won't stop ringing if you don't take the number of steps you set. You have to get up and walk, in order to turn off the alarm.

## Note-taking

- **Evernote, AnyDO or Google Keep**
- These apps will keep those notes synced, organized and stored. You can convert speech to text, take pictures, record speech, share your notes on cloud storages, so you, your friends or college buddies can use them. \*Always ask teachers for permission to record lectures.

## Document/Image capture and send

- Handy Scanner Free PDF Creator
- Handy Scanner turns your phone into a powerful document scanner. Say goodbye to piles of paper. **You can scan multipage documents, whiteboards**, business cards and so much more.