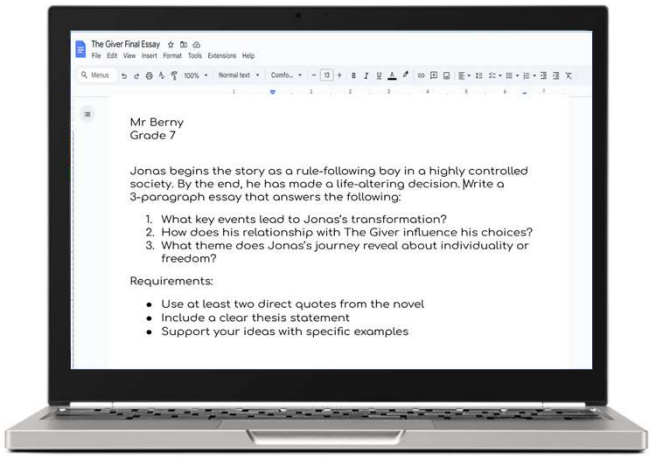
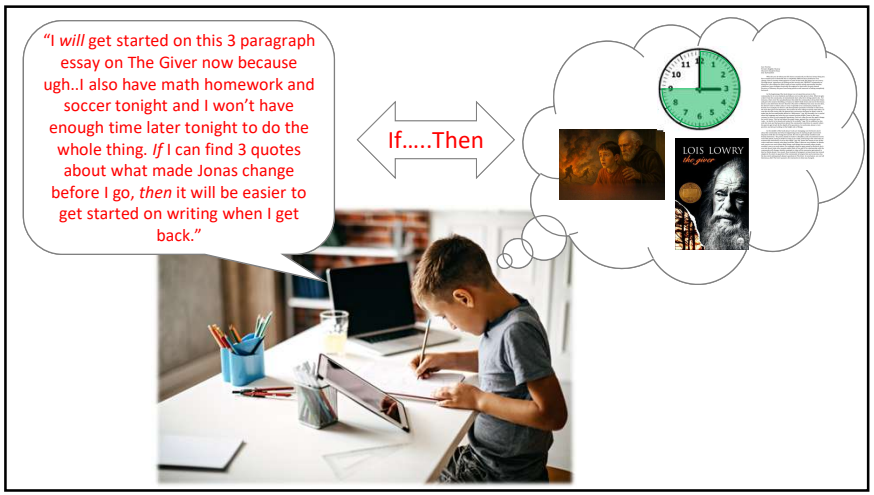
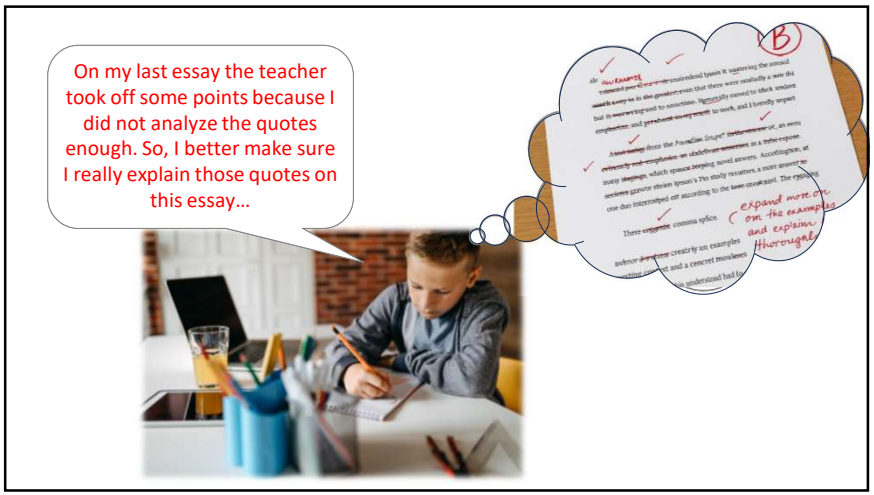
An Innovative Model of Executive Function for Parents

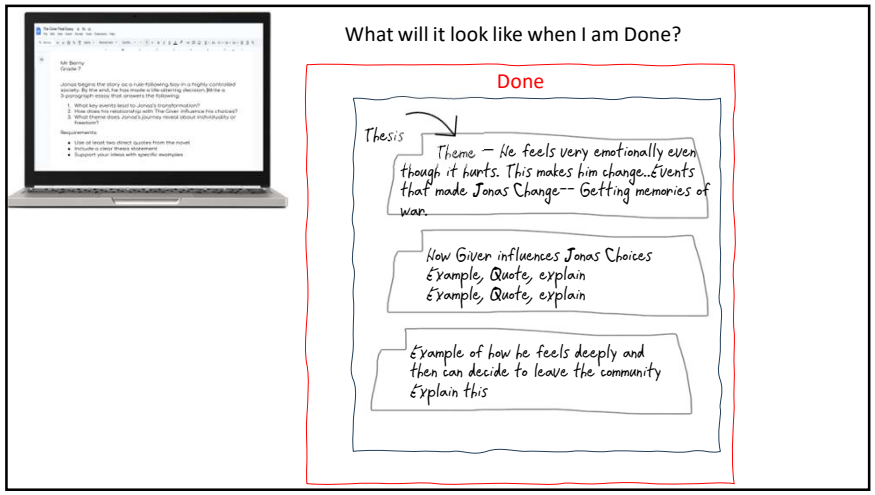
Sarah Ward, M.S., CCC/SLP
Co-Director
Kristen Jacobsen, M.S., CCC/SLP
Co-Director

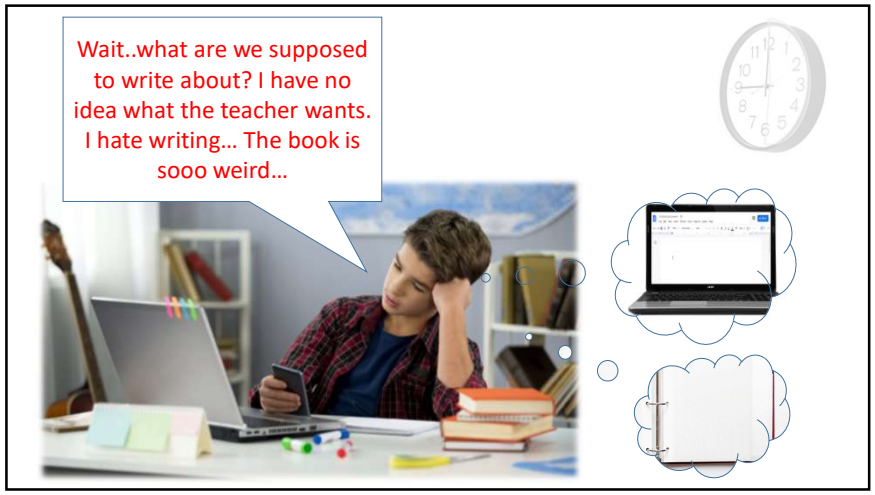
Cognitive Connections | www.efpractice.com
6 Kimball Lane
Lynnfield, MA 01946

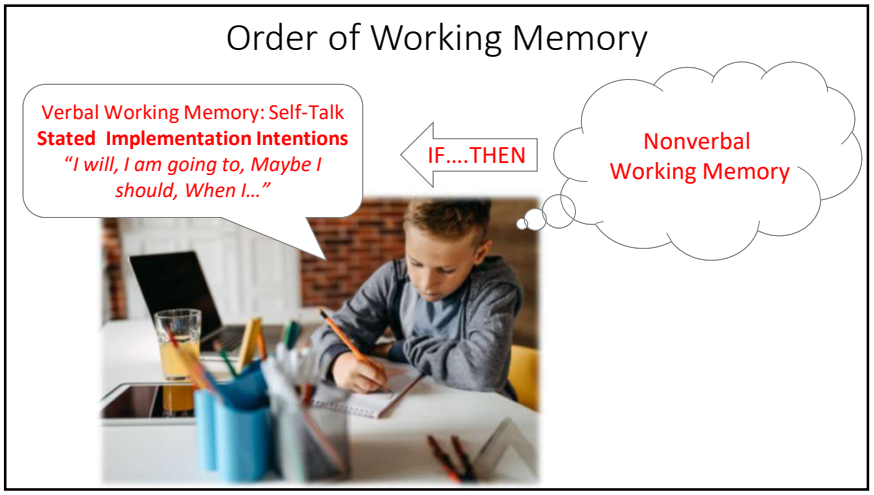












Situational Intelligence: STOP and Read the Room

Space
Navigate the Room

- ❑ Reads The Room – Knows what's going on
- ❑ Understands the Purpose of the Space for the situation
- ❑ Navigates the space efficiently
- ❑ Can shift and transition between spaces

- ❑ Reads the room from the wide angle to the narrow angle by zone

Time

- ❑ Understands Purpose of Activity in this moment in time
- ❑ Aware of time available/time markers
- ❑ Sequence of Actions
  Pace
  - ❑ Reduced Initiation
  - ❑ On pace
  - ❑ Rushing
  - ❑ Reduced Pace

- ❑ Knows what is coming up - Predicts

Objects

- ❑ Has the expected materials/objects for the situation
- ❑ Objects are organized within the personal space
- ❑ Locates objects
  - ❑ Known Location
  - ❑ Hidden
- ❑ Knows what is necessary and relevant and does not attend to/have unnecessary or irrelevant mateirals

People

- ❑ Recognizes Role for the given situation
  - ❑ Own
  - ❑ Other's roles
- ❑ Regulates actions based on Awareness of Others
  - ❑ To Verbal Prompts
  - ❑ To Nonverbal Prompts

The Thinking Process that Allows students to Stop and direct themselves in a given situation

Order of Working Memory

Situational Awareness

Situational intelligence is STOPping and reading the room:

Recognizing the features of–

Space, **T**ime, **O**bjects, **P**eople – in a self-directed way

It is self-directed, because the student is answering
- What do I need to do?
- What is *expected* of me in this setting?

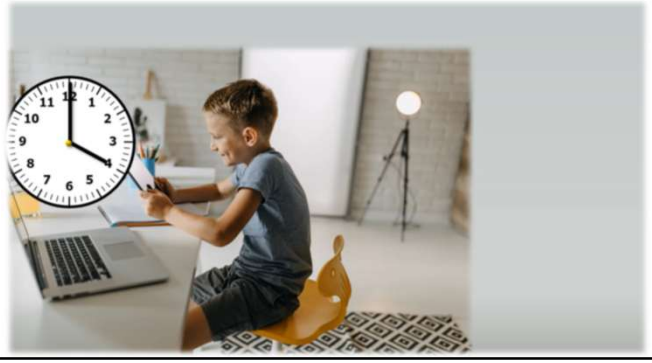
It involves self-directed observation
- What's happening now?
- What matters now?

It is "If … then" thinking
- If this is what it looks like, then what do I need to do?

Situational Awareness + Nonverbal Working Memory =

Mimetic-Ideational Information Processing

(Mental Trial-and-Error Simulation)



Situational Awareness + Nonverbal Working Memory=

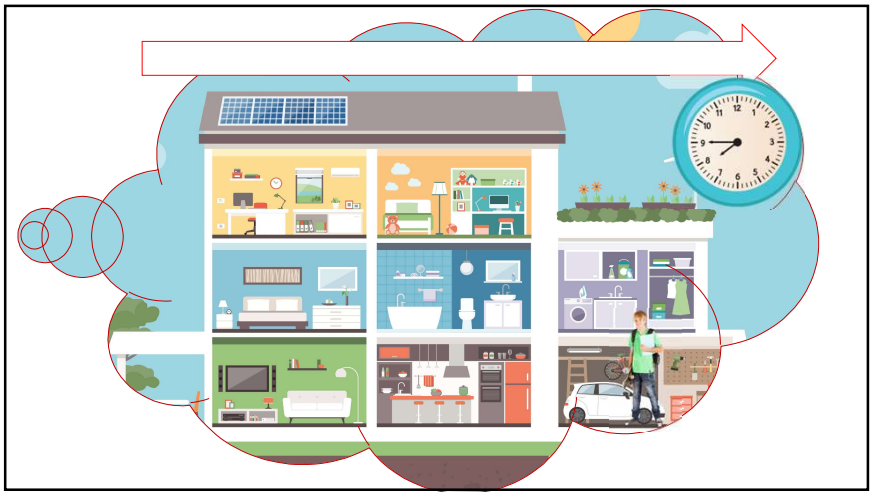
MIMEtic-Ideational Information Processing

(mental trial and error simulation)

Implementation Intentions
"I will, I am going to, Maybe I should, When I…"
*Self-**T**alk*

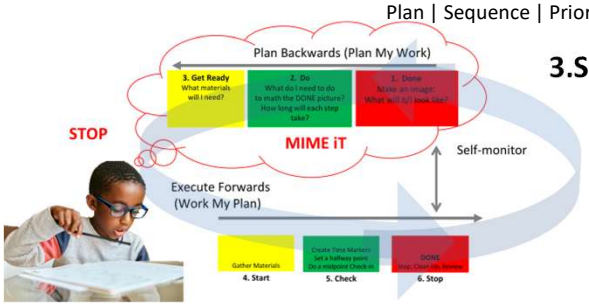
If....then

Make an Image – What will it look like?
I – What will **I** look like?
M – How am I **M**oving?
Emotion – What will I feel like?



1. Mental Rehearsal -Task Simulation:

Plan | Sequence | Prioritize | Organize



3.Self-monitoring:

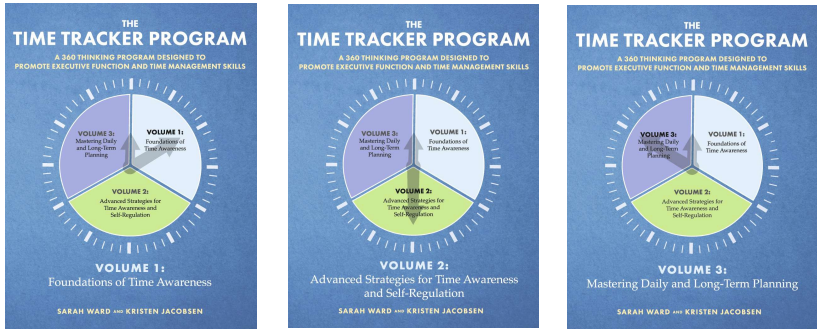
Problem Solve |

Control Emotions |

Shift

2. Task Executing: Initiate | Inhibit | Pace | Complete

Spatio -Temporal Frame



Executive Function Skills Checklist

Cleaning

Tidy a space (reading corner, playroom) (5-7years old)

Clean a Room (8-11years old)

Develop and maintain a system of organization/cleaning (12-14years old)

Manage Laundry, Keep Dorm/Apartment clean, deep clean at reasonable intervals

EF Age:

Errands

Simple: get your shoes from the bathroom (3-4 years)

2-3 step direction put the placement on the table and then get the napkins (5-7 years)

With a time delay – to and from school w/out reminders (8-11years)

Follow complex school schedule & multiple transitions with teachers and classrooms (12-14 years)

Independently plan and follow school/work and leisure activities, drive own car

EF Age:

Self-regulation

Inhibit unsafe or inappropriate behaviors (3-4 years)

Inhibit behaviors; follow safety rules, use appropriate language (e.g. not swearing or using bathroom language when not appropriate), raise hand before speaking in class, and keep hands to self (5-7 years)

Inhibit/self-regulate behaviors; maintain composure when teacher is out of the classroom; inhibit temper tantrums and bad manners(8-11 years)

Inhibit rule breaking in the absence of visible authority (12-14 years)

Avoid reckless or risky behaviors (e.g. use of illegal substances, sexual acting out, shoplifting, or vandalism) (high school on)

EF Age:

*Adapted From: Dawson, P. and Guar, R. Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents. New York: The Guilford, 2004

Executive Function Skills Checklist

Time

Understand sequence, past/present/future tense, causality (3-7 years)

Independently remember changes in daily schedule including different after school activities (8-11 years)

Follow complex school schedule involving multiple transitions with teachers and classrooms (12-14 years)

Plan time effectively, including after school activities, homework, family responsibilities (12-14 years)

Establish and refine a long-term goal and make plans for meeting that goal; collegiate or other vocational goals. Independently organize leisure time activities, including obtaining employment or pursuing recreational activities during the summer (high school)

EF Age:

Projects/Exams

Plan simple projects: e.g. book report: select book, read book, write report (8-11 years)

Plan and carry out long-term projects, including tasks to be accomplished and a reasonable timeline to follow (12-14 years)

Create, plan and follow timelines for long-term projects, tests, after school activities, family responsibilities

Study for tests, create and maintain learned material for midterms/finals (high school)

EF Age:

Papers

Bring papers to and from school (5-7 years)

Bring papers, books and assignments to and from school (8-11 years)

Track belongings when away from home

Appropriately use a system for organizing schoolwork (12-14 years and beyond)

EF Age:

*Adapted From: Dawson, P. and Guar, R. Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents. New York: The Guilford, 2004

Executive Function Skills Checklist

Homework

Complete -20 min max (5-7 years)

Complete – 1 hour max without assistance (8-11 years)

Manage schoolwork effectively on a day-to-day basis, including completing and handing in assignments on time – 2 hours (middle through high school)

Establish and refine a long-term goal and make plans for meeting that goal; collegiate or other vocational goals (high school)

EF Age: ☐

Work

Simple chore – self care-brush teeth (3-4 years)

Simple chore/self help – make bed, make a bowl of cereal (5-7 years)

Chores 10-30 min in duration; set the table, vacuuming (8-11 years)

Help out with chores around the home, including both daily responsibilities and occasional tasks that may take 60-90 minutes to complete; emptying dishwasher, raking leaves, shoveling snow etc. (12-14 years)

Safely babysit younger siblings (12-14 years)

Part time work: house sit, dog walk, mow lawns Independently obtain employment and or work during the summer (late middle and high school)

EF Age: ☐

Money

How to spend (5-7 years)

Save money for desired objects and plan how to earn money (8-11 years)

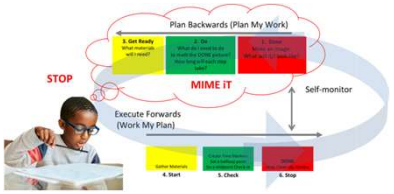
Save money to meet a financial obligation (college savings/spending money, car payment/insurance, etc.) (middle and high school)

EF Age: ☐

Chronological Age ☐ Average EF Age: ☐

*Adapted From: Dawson, P. and Guar, R. Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents. New York: The Guilford, 2004

Teaching Students *HOW*
to Independently Execute Tasks
Teach Students to be a Mind MIME



Repeatedly practice:

Self-monitoring, self-STOPping, **see**ing the future, **say**ing the future, **fEEl**ing the future, and **play**ing with the future so as to effectively "**plan and go**" toward that future. (Barkley 2012)

Barkley, Russell A. Executive Functions: What They Are, How They Work, and Why They Evolved. New York: Guilford, 2012.

See and Sense the Passage of Time

MIME What does Time look like?
What do I look like?
How am I moving across time?
Emotion of time

Verbal Working Memory
~~(Self-Talk)~~

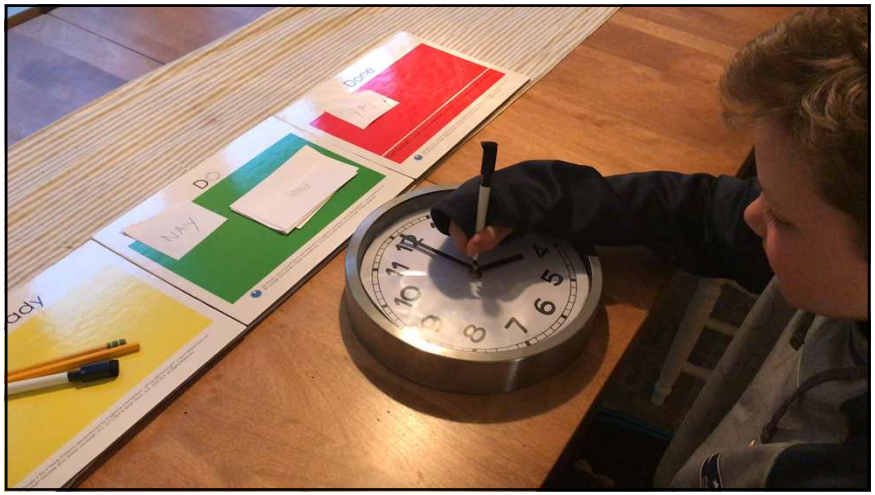
It is a about 10 past 1. We are going to leave at a quarter after to go to your friend's house…

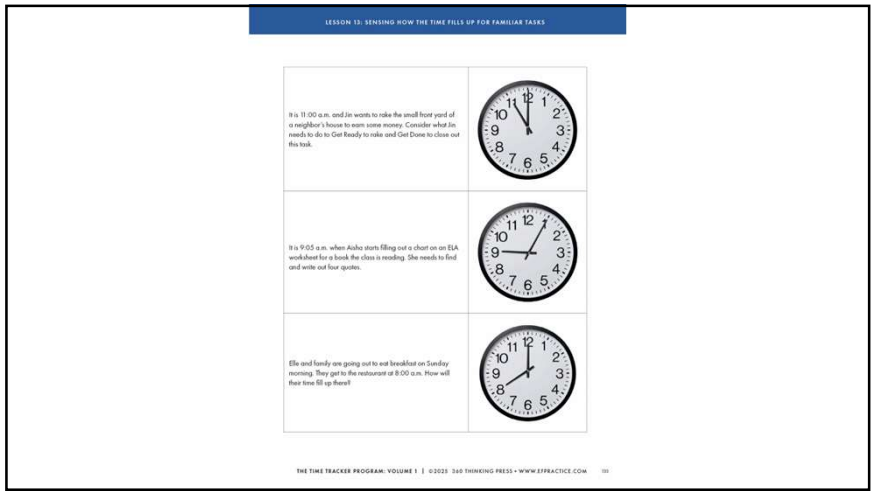
The **Wall** Clock

- Have Analog Clocks in the Room (Make sure they are not Roman Numeral!)
- Try to not only have digital clocks (alarm clock, cable box, microwave, etc.)

See Time: The **WORKING** Clock

Sketch the Volume of Time The Student Has
Always Start in the center of the Clock
Draw out the Minute Hand in a Clockwise Direction



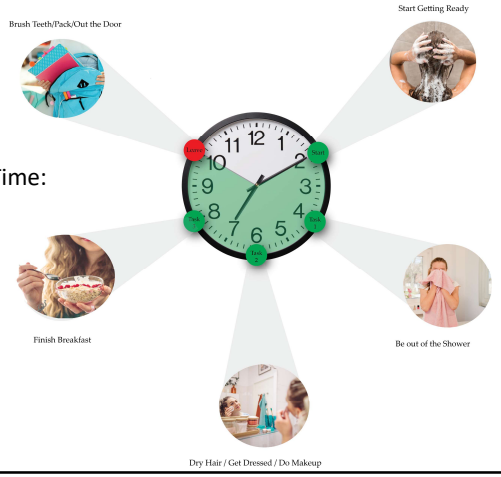


The Do and Don't of Making Time Visible

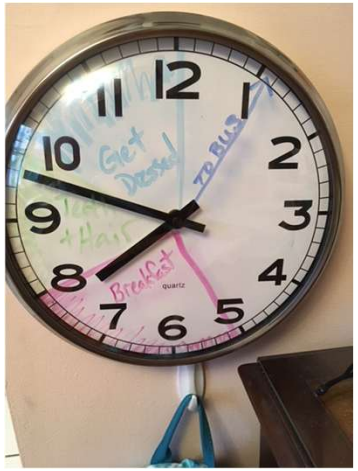
1. Start in the middle of the clock and draw out the minute hand
2. Count by 5's the volume of time needed
3. Draw back to the center of the clock
4. Shade in time how time will fill up.

MIME iT

From Seeing Time to Planning Time:
People Think in Time Markers

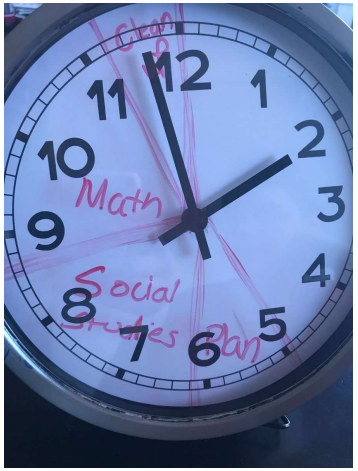


See Time
Plan Time



The Working Clock

See Time
Plan Time



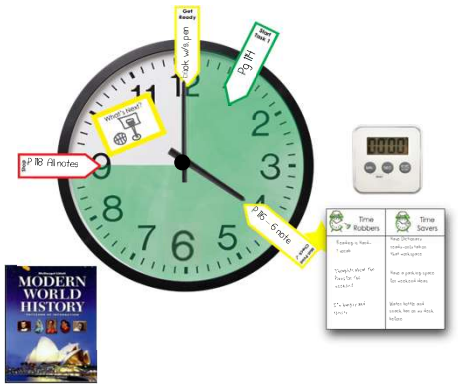
Upstairs

Downstairs

MIME : See Yourself in a Future Space:
Task Planning Happens in a Different Space than Where you Execute the Plan

Read Chapter 19 – The End of an Era (Pages 114-118)

Provide at least 2 – 3 bullet point details per main idea



World and American History
Ms. Privolos
Summer 2011

Ch. 19.5 - The End of an Era

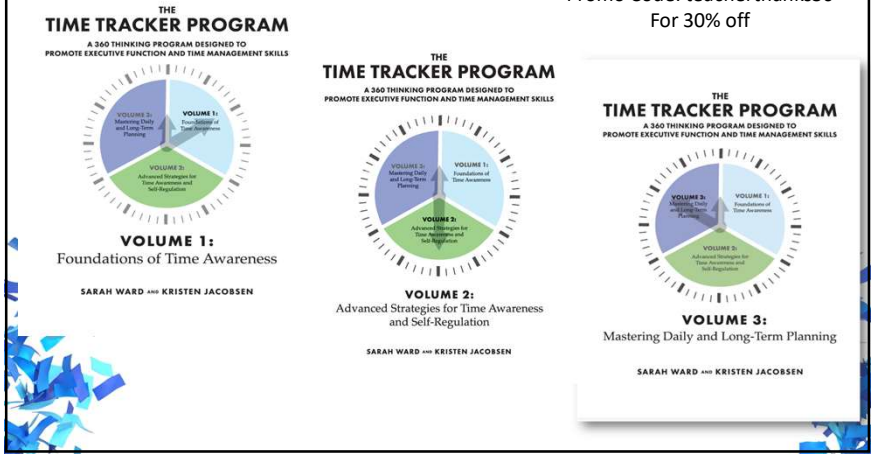
Main Idea	Details
Challenges to Napoleon's Empire	● 1000 mile journey back home, and turned into a battle for survival ● Spaniards remained loyal to their former king and devoted to the church ● French subjects used it to overthrow, not support, French rule
Challenges to Napoleon's Empire: Impact of Nationalism	● ● ●
Challenges to Napoleon's Empire: Resistance in Spain	● ● ●
Challenges to Napoleon's Empire: War with Austria	● ● ●

Self-Monitoring Time: The Mid-Point Check In

- Check in with my Task
- Check in with any Distractions

  Do I have Time Robbers?
  Do I need Time Savers?

Promo Code: teacherthanks30
For 30% off

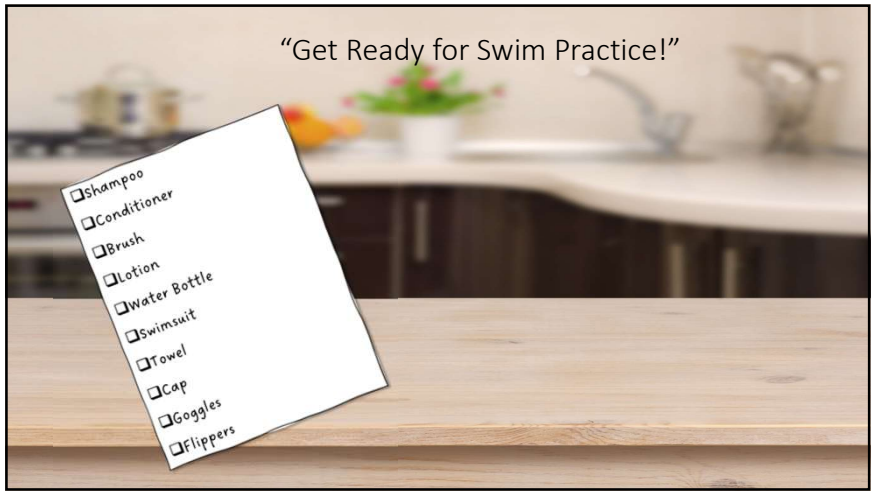


SEE and **FEEL** the Future
What will **it**/**I**/ (**Name**) look like?

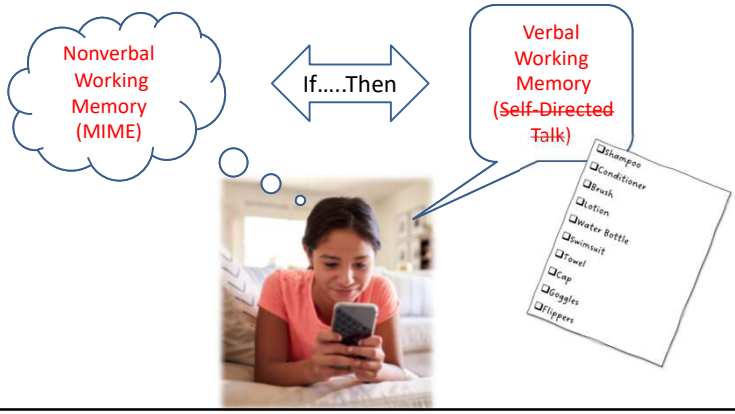
Becoming a Mind MIME

WHY DON'T WE START WITH GET READY?

"Get Ready for Swim Practice!"



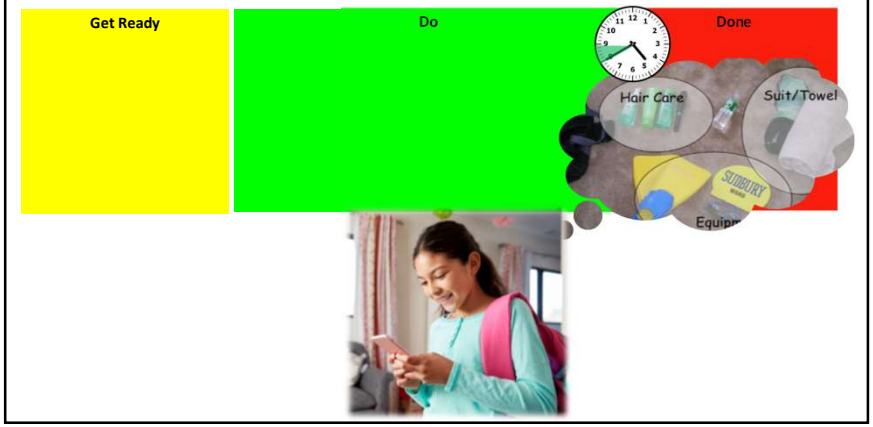
Role/Order of Working Memory in Executive Function Skills



SEE the Future
What will it/I look like?

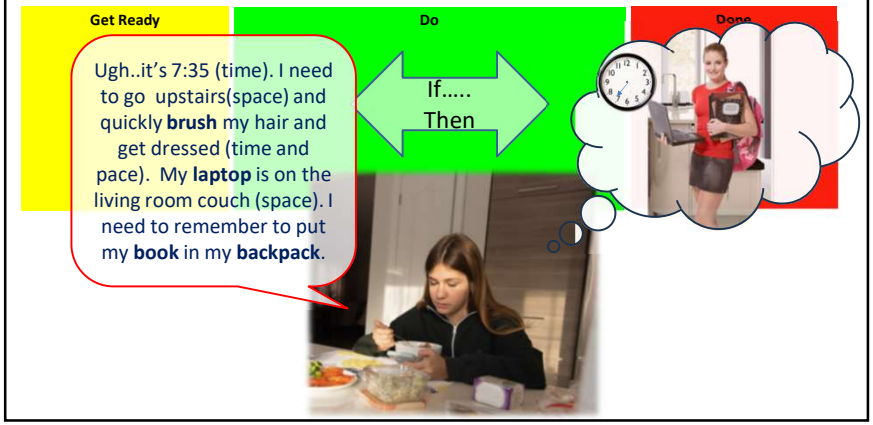
Becoming a Mind MIME

Role/Order of Working Memory in Executive Function Skills



"Get Ready for School!
Show and Tell Me Your Plan!"

Role/Order of Working Memory in Executive Function Skills

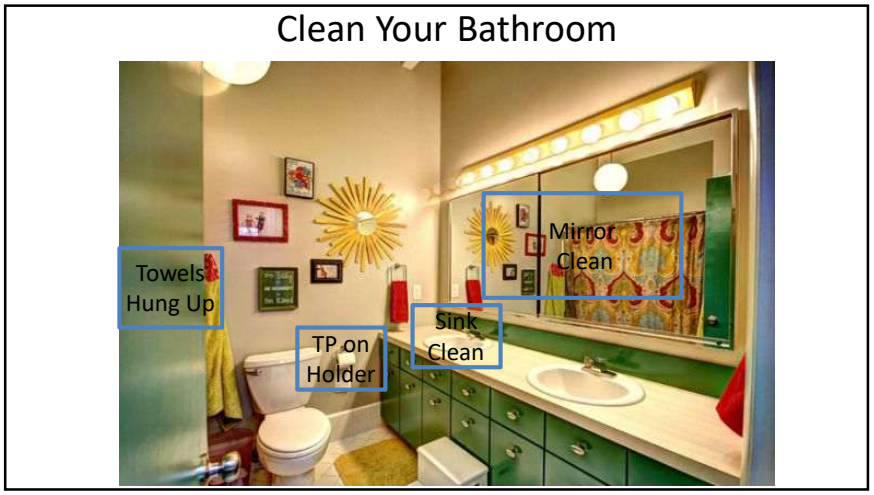


"Time for Soccer.
Show & Tell Me Your Plan!"

How am I Moving?

Facilitating Independent Executive Function Skills: STOP and MIME

MIME : Task Planning Happens in a Different Space than Where you Execute the Plan
Point Out Your Plan



MANAGING MATERIALS:

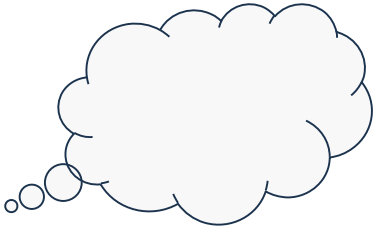
START WITH THE END IN MIND WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?

Ready for Squash

Role/Order of Working Memory in Executive Function Skills

Managing Materials: Have Students Use Devices to Create an Album of Materials

Goal is forethought and cognitive flexibility
If tonight is a swim practice simulate how will it be the same but differernt



Cognitive Connections, LLP
www.efpractice.com

If you share our ideas, please make attribution to Sarah Ward and Kristen Jacobsen.

Please reach out to us! We love to hear from you!

Kristen Jacobsen, M.S., CCC/SLP
Speech and Language Pathologist
kjacobsen@efpractice.com

Sarah Ward, M.S., CCC/SLP
Speech and Language Pathologist
sward@efpractice.com

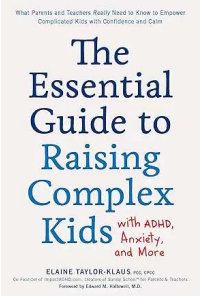
Decreasing Dependence on Adults

Increasing Independent Executive Function Skills

"Adults at times feel they do so much compensating for kids' executive function deficits that they struggle with knowing how/when to disengage themselves in the interests of helping the student become more independent."

"In other words, where is the line between helping the student and "enabling" the student? I think that's a constant concern for many parents and educators."

Enabling vs Supporting



Enabling = Overhelping

Supporting = Clearing the Path to Independence

Becoming Independent Learning Something New !

❑I Do It /You Watch Me - *We Talk* — External Regulation

❑I Do It/You Help Me – *We Talk*

❑We Do It Together/I Help You – *We Talk* — Other Regulation

❑You Do It /I Watch You – *We Talk* — Internal Regulation

Gradual Release Of Responsibility Method

Gradual Release of Responsibility

- I do, You watch, We talk
  - I organize the space
  - I figure out what done looks like
  - I give you a list of what to do
  - I provide the materials
  - I monitor the time and your progress
  - *BUT, we you explicitly watch what I'm doing, and we take time to talk about it.*
- I do, You help, We talk
  - I set up the organization, time, and space, but you help me think it all through
- You do, I help, We talk
  - You set up the organization, time, and space, but I guide you through it with questioning
- You do, I watch, We talk
  - You set up the organization, time, and space while I watch
- You do, Someone else watches
  - You set up the organization, time and space at a time place without me present

Supporting Nightly Homework

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
Parents set up a structured homework routine—organizing the space, gathering materials, and monitoring time. They narrate their process: "Here's your assignment list. Let's sit together, and I'll help you stay on track."	The child helps organize the workspace or materials while the parent guides the thought process with questions like, "Where do you think you'll work best? How will you reward yourself when you're done?" If...then prompt: "If you want to finish your homework before dinner, then when would you need to start working on it?"	The child creates their own homework routine while the parent provides occasional reminders. "What's your homework plan for tonight? Do you need any help getting started?"	The child works independently but checks in with the parent if they face challenges. The parent encourages self-evaluation: "How do you think it went? What could you change tomorrow?"

Cleaning a Room

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
The parent models how to clean the room, explaining the steps: "Let's put your clothes away first, then we'll change the sheets and make the bed."	The child helps in some tasks. "Where do you think things should go? How do you want to start?" If…then prompt: "If you want to have time to play later, then when do you think would be the best time to start cleaning your room?"	The child takes the lead on cleaning, with parents offering guidance when asked. "What's your plan for keeping your room cleaned up?"	The child cleans independently. Parents might say, "Looks great! How did you decide where to start?"

Using Job Talk (with Examples)

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
Mentor introduces assigning roles to tasks. "You'll be a 'notetaker' for history and a 'grapher' for math."	"You'll be the 'quote analyzer' for your English assignment and the 'materials recorder' for science. How does taking on different roles help you focus?"	"Did you figure out your roles for your tasks. How did assigning roles help you get through each task?"	"You'll assign your own job titles for tasks, adjusting if needed to stay focused and organized."

Point out My Plan (with Examples)

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
Parent introduces the concept of simulating actions using gestures for getting ready for soccer. Example: "Let's stand at the bottom of the stairs. Point to your bedroom and say, 'I'm going to get my shin guards and long socks.' Then point towards the bathroom and say, 'I'll braid my hair.' What will you do after that?"	"Let's walk through this together. Point to your bedroom and say, 'I'll get my shin guards and long socks,' then point towards the bathroom and say, 'I'll go braid my hair.' What's your plan after that?"	"Point out your plan to be ready for soccer." "You're planning your path now. Where are you going first? What will you do next? How is this process helping you make sure you don't forget anything?"	"Show me your plan to get ready for soccer. If something doesn't go as planned, or you forget a step, how will you adjust your plan for next time?"

Point out My Plan (with Examples)

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
Parent introduces the strategy by helping the teen visualize each step, using gestures to simulate gathering gear and including specific locations. Example: "Let's start by pointing to your ski bag in your room and say, 'I'm going to pack my boots and goggles in my ski bag.' Then, point towards the downstairs hall closet and say, 'I'll grab my ski jacket and pants from the closet.'"	Parent and teen work together to visualize and plan each step, with the teen pointing and describing each action along with the corresponding space Example: "Now, you point to your ski bag in your room and say, 'I'll pack my gloves and extra socks,' then point to the garage and say, 'I'll grab my helmet from the garage shelf.' Where will you go and what will you do next to make sure you have everything?"	The teen takes more responsibility for planning and pointing to each piece of equipment while including specific locations, with occasional support or checks from the parent. Example: "You're planning each step now. Where is your ski bag, and where will you get your helmet and jacket? How is pointing to the locations and talking through your plan helping you stay organized?"	The teen independently plans getting ready for practice using gestures and locations, making adjustments if they encounter issues or forget an item. Example: "Now, you'll plan your preparation for practice, using gestures to point to each piece of gear and the locations where you'll find them. If you miss something or run into a problem, what changes will you make for next time?"

Prioritizing Homework Based on Energy Levels

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
Mentor explains how energy levels impact task prioritization. "Let's plan to do the hardest work when you have the most energy."	"You'll start with the task you can do when you are tired. Then when you have more energy you can to the most difficult subject, like math, and save easier tasks like reading for later when you're more tired."	"You'll organize tasks based on your energy level. How did doing the harder tasks at peak energy level help you stay on track?"	"You'll independently organize tasks based on your energy levels, adjusting if you find yourself getting tired earlier than expected."

Supporting Nightly Homework

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
Parents set up a structured homework routine—organizing the space, gathering materials, and monitoring time. They narrate their process: "Here's your assignment list. Let's sit together, and I'll help you stay on track."	The child helps organize the workspace or materials while the parent guides the thought process with questions like, "Where do you think you'll work best? How will you reward yourself when you're done?" If…then prompt: "If you want to finish your homework before dinner, then when would you need to start working on it?"	The child creates their own homework routine while the parent provides occasional reminders. "What's your homework plan for tonight? Do you need any help getting started?"	The child works independently but checks in with the parent if they face challenges. The parent encourages self-evaluation: "How do you think it went? What could you change tomorrow?"

Shading Time on a 'Working Clock

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
Mentor explains how to use a clock to block out time for work sessions. "We'll shade time on the clock to show how much time you have for homework."	"You'll block 45 minutes for math and 15 minutes for breaks. How will you adjust your time if math takes longer?"	"You'll follow the shaded blocks for each task. How did marking out time for breaks help you stay focused?"	"You'll independently block time for tasks and breaks, adjusting if some tasks take longer or shorter than planned."

Creating Time Markers for Start, Stop, and Midpoint Check-ins

I Do	We Do		You Do
Phase 1 Example: Prompting and Direction	**Phase 2 Example: Motivation and Modeling**	**Phase 3 Example: Ownership and Support**	**Phase 4 Example: Empowerment and Troubleshooting**
Mentor explains how to set time markers for start, midpoint, and end. "Let's plan when you'll start, take a midpoint check, and stop your task."	"You'll start math at 4 PM and check your progress at 4:30 PM. What will you do if you have some time robbers at the midpoint?"	"You'll track time with markers, checking in halfway through. How did the midpoint check-in help you stay on track?"	"You'll set up your own start, midpoint, and stop times independently, adjusting if tasks take more or less time."

Executive Function Skills Development: Elementary, Middle, and High School Comparison

In elementary school, students are primarily learning executive function skills like attention, impulse control, and basic planning. By middle school, they start to use these skills to support learning in more structured ways, such as sustaining attention during longer lessons or planning out multi-day projects. High school students apply these executive function skills to even more complex learning contexts. For instance, they not only manage academic work but also begin to balance extracurriculars, social obligations, and future planning (college, career).

In short, the skills learned in earlier years evolve into critical tools for managing the increased demands of secondary school education. Just as students first learn to read, then read to learn, they first learn executive function skills, then use these skills to optimize their learning and overall success.

Executive Function Skill	Elementary School (Ages 5-10)	Middle School (Ages 11-13)	High School (Ages 14-18)
Attention	Learning to pay attention during short lessons or activities. Students often need frequent cues to stay on task.	Developing sustained attention over longer periods (e.g., focusing for 30-45 minute class periods). Students are able to filter out distractions more effectively and follow multi-step instructions without constant prompting.	Utilizing selective attention to juggle multiple academic demands (e.g., focusing on a lecture while taking notes, ignoring social distractions). High school students can direct attention to complex tasks like analyzing texts or solving problems over extended periods of time.
Behavior Control	Learning to control impulses (e.g., raising hand instead of blurting out answers). External reminders are often needed.	Developing self-regulation (e.g., recognizing emotional triggers, employing coping strategies like taking deep breaths or using positive self-talk when frustrated). Students begin to reflect on their behavior and adjust it in real-time.	Demonstrating advanced self-regulation (e.g., planning and using personal strategies to calm stress before tests, using time-blocking to manage homework and social activities). High school students are more self-aware and are better at self-monitoring behavior in social and academic contexts.

Following Directions	Following simple sets of directions (e.g., one or two-step tasks like 'put away your books and sit down').	Following complex routines that require remembering multiple steps and planning (e.g., gathering materials, transitioning between classes, completing multi-step homework without constant reminders).	Independently managing school routines and responsibilities (e.g., keeping track of long-term assignments, managing class schedules, using study guides for exam prep without teacher oversight).
Memory	Using working memory to recall basic facts or instructions (e.g., remembering a teacher's instructions for a short activity).	Enhancing working memory for multi-step academic tasks (e.g., solving math problems that require multiple steps, holding onto key points from a lecture and applying them to an assignment).	Utilizing working memory for more complex learning tasks (e.g., retaining large amounts of information for tests, synthesizing knowledge across subjects like history and literature to write essays or presentations). High school students are able to connect prior knowledge to new learning more effectively.
Planning	Basic planning for simple tasks (e.g., organizing items for a craft project or getting ready for recess).	Learning to plan and think ahead for larger assignments (e.g., creating timelines for projects, planning study sessions for quizzes). Students begin to break tasks into smaller chunks but may still need guidance.	Developing the ability to independently create and follow detailed study plans or schedules (e.g., managing a multi-week project by setting milestones, organizing study sessions for exams). High school students often integrate planning into their daily routines to balance academics, extracurriculars, and social life.
Problem Solving	Emerging problem-solving abilities (e.g., figuring out how to build a tower with blocks or resolving minor conflicts with friends).	Developing more advanced problem-solving skills (e.g., using critical thinking to approach word problems in math or scientific investigations in labs). Students learn to apply learned strategies independently.	Applying higher-order problem-solving skills (e.g., using logical reasoning to write argumentative essays, solving complex equations, addressing real-world challenges in group projects). High school students start to understand that there are multiple approaches to solving problems and become more adaptable in their methods.

Self-Reflection	Limited self-reflection (e.g., a student might say 'I'm mad' but cannot yet identify why or how to handle it).	Developing self-reflection skills (e.g., beginning to identify what strategies worked for an academic task, reflecting on their behavior after a conflict with peers or in a classroom setting).	Engaging in deep self-reflection (e.g., evaluating the effectiveness of study strategies and adjusting accordingly, reflecting on personal goals and career aspirations). High school students can assess their academic strengths and weaknesses and take steps to improve.
Organization	Basic organization (e.g., putting away school supplies or organizing a backpack with help from teachers or parents).	Improved organization of materials and thoughts (e.g., managing folders for different subjects, organizing notes for study sessions, keeping track of homework and project deadlines).	Independently organizing complex academic tasks (e.g., managing multiple classes, keeping an agenda for assignments, managing time and resources for standardized test prep and college applications). High school students typically need to prioritize tasks and maintain personal systems of organization without external prompts.
Time Management	Learning how to read an analog clock and understand the language of time (e.g., understanding terms like 'in 5 minutes' or 'by the end of the day'). Limited understanding of how long tasks take, requiring frequent reminders.	Developing time management skills (e.g., allocating time for homework, recognizing when to start studying for a test based on deadlines). Students may still need help prioritizing but begin to better estimate time for tasks.	Demonstrating independent time management (e.g., balancing schoolwork, extracurriculars, part-time jobs, and social life). High school students often create long-term project plans and study schedules, anticipating potential challenges like procrastination or overcommitment.
Task Initiation	Requires external prompting to start tasks (e.g., needing frequent reminders to begin an activity like writing or solving a worksheet).	Improving ability to initiate tasks independently (e.g., starting homework without being told, taking the initiative to ask for help when confused).	Consistently initiating tasks without external prompts (e.g., starting long-term assignments ahead of time, developing self-motivation to complete schoolwork and study sessions). High school students begin to take responsibility for their own academic progress and outcomes.

Job Talk:

Politicians wanted to increase voter turnout and turned to psychological research for help. It worked! Researchers framed voting as either a personal identity label (e.g. "be a voter") or as a simple behavior (e.g. "voting"). This change in phrasing to a personal identity label significantly increased interest in action and a substantially larger percentage of individuals voted! Research has shown that people want to feel like they are a part of something and take ownership of something rather than being told what to do.

Children are no different! Motivation to complete a task is increased by invoking one's sense of self. Subtly manipulating the *verb form* of a behavior ("Brush your teeth please") to feature a *noun label* (Annie is a toothbrusher!) creates an essential part of one's identity. In other words it creates confidence and a positive sense of self that this is "What I can do!" This subtle change in language can change an occasional behavior of helping around the house ("Please set the table.") into a child who has confidence in their permanent trait or skill (I am a tablesetter!). When packing for a ski trip, being asked to be a 'packer' is a positive thing and requires the child to imagine in their mind "what does a *packer* do? What tools will a *packer* need?". On the other hand just asking a child to "Please pack the car with your warm clothing, boots and poles." Just asks the child to do something, does not invoke their reasoning of what is required and likely does not fire them into action except perhaps to make excuses for why they can't! Using the declarative noun form (*clothes gatherer*) creates psychological essentialism and develops in children a positive attitude, a strong and stable sense of self and generalizes to how they perceive themselves and their essential role over time.

Sarah Ward, M.S., CCC/SLP and Kristen Jacobsen M.S.,CCC/SLP have translated this research into a simple trick to help our children to take ownership of and participate in various tasks. They advise to turn the child's task into a "job" and add "er" to the action that you are asking the child to do which gives them the "job title" such as "Washer", "Wiper", 'Tooth brusher", "Listener", etc. Give it a try, it's amazing!

Declarative Job Talk (Noun Form)	Imperative Verb Form
Please be a handwasher!	Wash your hands.
Be a counter wiper!	Wipe the counter off.
Time to be a toothbrusher!	It is now time to go upstairs and brush your teeth.
You are getting ready to be a mathematician!	Please take out your homework and start your math.

Resources:

Bryan, C. J., G. M. Walton, T. Rogers, and C. S. Dweck. "Motivating Voter Turnout by Invoking the Self." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108.31 (2011): 12653-2656.

Gelman, S. A., & Heyman, G. D. (1999). Carrot-eaters and creature-believers: The effects of lexicalization on children's inferences about social categories. Psychological Science, 10, 489-493

Heyman, G. "Talking about Success: Implications for Achievement Motivation." Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology 29.5 (2008): 361-70.

Verbal Mediators:
The Language of Executive Function

Edited by: Kristen Jacobsen & Sarah Ward, MS CCC-SLP

Declarative Language

Authored by: Linda Murphy

Why is Declarative Language so important in fostering Executive Function Skills?

1. **Inner Voice**: Self-narratives help students develop an inner voice. After the initial language spark is ignited, most of us then go on to develop our own voice that we use to share our thoughts, recap experiences, talk about what we are doing, and talk about what we are thinking. Most of us also then go on to create our own inner voice. This is an important by-product of our language learning. We use our inner voice to problem solve and plan. We remember what we have learned or noticed in the past, and apply it to the here and now. For example, imagine you are getting ready to go to work and you can't find your keys. Your inner voice may say something like, 'Hmmm…. Now when did I last see my keys? Where do I usually put them down? What jacket did I have on yesterday?... Maybe they're in the pocket." Your inner voice helps you think through the problem so you can get started on a plan of action to solve it. Children with Executive Functioning difficulties do not usually develop this inner voice to regulate their thoughts and actions on their own. Just as modeling was important when your child was learning to talk, thoughtful modeling now, in this regard, is equally important. So – talk out loud, think out loud, work through a problem, make predictions, ponder opportunities, consider possibilities, and reflect on past experiences when you are with your child. They will learn from your models, internalize the ideas, and begin to form their own inner voice.

2. **Perspective Taking:** Provide a window into another person's perspective. Some children with executive function challenges have difficulty taking perspective. Using declarative language to share your thoughts and feelings provides a student with a regular window into these communication exchanges in an inviting, nonthreatening way. We are providing them information that is critical in a social interaction that we know they may not pick up on their own. When we present declarative language in this way, we are not asking them to provide an answer that may be right or wrong. Rather, we are clueing them into social information and then allowing them to decide what to do with the information. By regularly using declarative language, we are also slowly building episodic memories and awareness that different people have different thoughts, opinions, perspectives and emotions. For example, you say something to your child but he is facing the other way, appearing not to listen. Rather than say to him "turn around!" or "look at me" (both imperatives) share your feelings and perspective with declarative language: "I notice you looking out the window", "What would help me know you are listening to me" or "I feel like you are not listening to me."

3. **Big Picture Thinking:** Students can better see the big picture in order to create multiple solutions to a problem. Declarative language can also help students create a visual image of the gestalt and how they would like to see the outcome of a situation in their "mind's eye". Often times when we focus on having students carry out specific detailed directions, we can all lose sight of the big picture. Because some children with executive

function challenges are strong when it comes to details, but weak when it comes to seeing the big picture, it is important to think about the big picture when we present information. Giving very specific directions or questions that have one right answer promotes that focus on details. For example, if we tell a child to "put the book in the book-box" or "line up at the door for music" we are zooming into the details and creating a situation where there's one and only one right answer. However, if we use language instead to comment on what we see in the big picture: "I see a book on the floor" or "what do you look like if you are ready to go to music?" - we are instead encouraging our children to take a step back, notice the context and situation around them, and subsequently form a plan of action that makes sense to them. We are also leaving open the possibility that there may in fact be more than one solution –i.e., maybe the toy could go on a shelf or in the toy box, maybe the students could put away their work, line up by the door, or collect their music instruments and line up by the door.

4. **Problem Solving Skills**: Declaratives support students ability to develop problem solving skills rather than merely than just following direction skills. When we direct students as to what to do, ask them to follow directions, or ask them to answer questions with a definitive right/wrong answer, we are honing their receptive language skills. This is not a bad thing, but it may not be what the student with an executive function challenge needs most. In contrast, if we use declarative language to present information about the environment or situation at hand, we are instead inviting her to notice this information and develop a plan of action. We are inviting him or her to have an "aha!" moment where he or she figures out what to do with given information. We are giving students an opportunity to think more independently! Problem solving moments are critical for all students as they learn to see themselves as more independently functioning human beings in the world.

5. **Read the Room:** Help your child read what's going on in his environment. We know that it can be difficult for some kids to tune into the social information that is going on around them. Rather than telling them exactly what to do and when to do it, use declarative language to help them notice what is important! For example, if it is time for a transition, instead of telling your child "go to the table for snack" or "put on your coat," direct his attention toward the changes in the environment: "I notice all the kids are at the table" or "I notice all the kids are putting on their coats." This will help internalize the importance of periodically checking in on one's environment; there are visual clues available all the time, and they are important to pay attention to! We want our kids to learn that information is not always going to come to them - they have to become active information gatherers. In contrast, if we are using imperatives all the time with our kids, information is coming to them on a regular basis, and they don't have the same need to look around or read the behaviors of others.