

# **ADDitude Executive Function Skills Resource Packet**

**Brandon Slade**

**Founder and CEO of Untapped Learning**



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## What is executive function?

Executive function (EF) is the complex set of cognitive processes that allow your students to achieve their goals. Whether a goal is as small as turning in a homework assignment on time, or as big as getting into their dream college, these are the skills needed to get them there.



No one is born with executive function skills. For some people, these skills develop naturally over time. For others, they must be learned. Some students who exhibit executive function challenges will have a neurodiverse diagnosis, but many students just require support and accountability while developing these skills. We hope these resources provide ideas and practices you can implement in your classroom to support (all) students (and often save you time!).

## Signs of Executive Function Deficits

Students who struggle with executive function may initially appear to be disengaged or uninterested in school. They may also come to believe that they are incompetent, unintelligent, or incapable of success because of their performance in school.

### **In school, students may...**

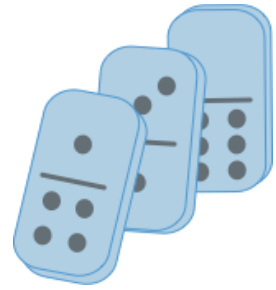
- Struggle to start schoolwork
- Have many missing assignments
- Have trouble breaking big projects down into smaller pieces
- Misplace or forget assignments and class materials
- Not read instructions carefully
- Receive poor grades on assignments due to careless mistakes
- Perform poorly on tests despite understanding class content
- Procrastinate or avoid work in classes they find difficult or uninteresting
- Find it difficult to pay attention for long periods of time
- Be unaware of what homework is assigned
- Be surprised by tests, quizzes, and project due dates
- Find it difficult to plan and prioritize items on their to-do lists
- Struggle to stay on-task during independent work time
- Feel overwhelmed by the amount of work that needs to be completed

### **In life, students may...**

- Have little to no insight in how long it takes to complete a task
- Lose track of time completely when doing something enjoyable
- Have cluttered, messy, and disorganized personal spaces
- Struggle to leave the house on time
- Often misplace or lose important items like their keys or wallet
- Become easily distracted by their environment
- Become easily frustrated by interruptions
- Demonstrate little patience for tedious tasks
- Interrupt others during conversation
- Miss or forget about important appointments and events
- Have trouble predicting the consequences of actions
- Not always understand the emotional reactions of others

## Tackling the Lead Domino

The “lead domino” is the *one* thing you could do to generate the most positive change for you and your students. Use the space below to generate a list of challenges you and your students regularly face in your classroom. Examples include disrespectful behavior, assignment completion rates, missing materials, etc.



### **Identify your lead domino:**

From this list you made above: what is the one thing that, if addressed, would have the greatest positive impact on your classroom experience?

### **Create a routine around your lead domino:**

Generate a few realistic ways you could approach the lead domino in your classroom. Choose the solution that could best fit into an existing routine, or that could be incorporated into a new, simple routine.

## Making Routines Tiny

Complex routines overwhelm students and frustrate teachers. BJ Fogg's book, *Tiny Habits Model*, argues that good habits are easier to form when following smaller, more manageable routines. These habits can then be strung together over time to form a more complex routine, or the individual habits can be practiced separately if they need improvement.

### Complex Routine

Although each step in this routine may appear simple, students may struggle when they are expected to complete every step independently:

1. Get journals from shelf
2. Look at the board for the prompt and then respond in journals
3. When complete, read from a choice book until the rest of the class is done

### Tiny Habit Routine

In order to be successful, each step of this routine needs to be practiced separately. Students should be provided with support and reminders until they are able to complete each step independently, and this process may need to be repeated periodically throughout the school year:

- **Phase 1:** Enter the classroom, get your journal from the shelf and open to a blank page.
- **Phase 2:** Once that first step is a consistent habit, then add that students begin brainstorming possible responses to the prompt.
- **Phase 3:** Once students are mastering the steps above, then practice using that brainstorm to write a 1-paragraph response.

### Adjusting your routines

Which routines do you currently have, or that you'd like to have, that your students struggle to complete independently?

(activity continued on next page)

Select one of the routines you identified above. List each part of this routine, step-by-step, being as specific as possible. For instance: “pull out textbook” should be listed as “enter classroom quietly, take your seat, remove textbook from backpack, open textbook to current chapter.”

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Next, think about the best way to group the steps you identified above into logical groupings. These logical grouping make up the tiny habits that your students can form:

**Phase 1:**

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**Phase 2:**

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**Phase 3:**

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# Movement in the Classroom

Integrating movement into the classroom offers a multitude of benefits for students of all ages, from enhancing cognitive functions to improving social skills. However, successfully incorporating physical activity into the learning environment requires structure and planning. Educators should explain the purpose behind movement activities, set clear expectations for their students, and frequently practice with students how to properly engage in movement in your classroom.

## **Movement for elementary students:**

- Follow-along videos to learn new concepts (like the “water cycle boogie” or Schoolhouse Rock)
- Refocus tools, like using Simon Says to get the attention of all students
- Movement during transitions, like doing a dance together between silent reading time and the next lesson

## **Movement for middle school students:**

- Idea shares using movement, like having students walk or dance around the room until the music stops, then finding a partner near them to share with
- Spreading stations around the room so students get a break from sitting down
- Competition-focused review games - For example: post vocab words around the room. “Contestants” hold fly swatters and are asked to review questions. Whoever swats the correct vocab word first wins

## **Movement for high school students:**

- Daily or weekly brain teasers like trying to pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time
- Spreading stations around the room so students get quick breaks from sitting down
- Guided stretch breaks to help students reset after independent work, quizzes, etc.

## **Movement for post-secondary students:**

- Walking office hours
- Walking to a location to have class outside



## Accommodating All Students

According to [Inside Higher Ed](#), the demand for academic accommodations has nearly doubled since the 2017/2018 academic year, and approximately 20% of college students are now granted accommodations. While some students need individualized learning plans, there are ways to set up your classroom and portals that meet the needs of the most common accommodations and benefit *all* students.

	Most Common Accommodations	Course Recommendations
<b>Elementary School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small group instruction (personalized attention)</li> <li>• Use of visual schedules and directions to aid comprehension</li> <li>• Reading directions aloud</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create independent stations to allow for 1:1 check-ins</li> <li>• Pair directions with icons, visuals, color-coding, and/or symbols</li> <li>• Review instructions as a class</li> </ul>
<b>Middle and High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra time for assignments and tests</li> <li>• Preferential seating to minimize distractions</li> <li>• Use of assistive technology (like speech-to-text tools)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a predictable cadence for assignments</li> <li>• Break large assignments into smaller check-points</li> <li>• Have clear guidelines for assistive tools in course resources</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Secondary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra time for assignments and tests</li> <li>• Preferential seating to minimize distractions</li> <li>• Use of assistive technology (like speech-to-text tools)</li> <li>• Note-taking assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a predictable cadence for assignments</li> <li>• Break large assignments into smaller check-points</li> <li>• Have clear guidelines for assistive tools in course resources</li> <li>• Upload notes and lecture slides ahead of time</li> </ul>

## Practicing Advocacy

Self-advocacy is the ability to speak up for yourself and your needs. Many students have not practiced advocating for themselves and may struggle with knowing what to ask, what language to use, and when/how to reach out to their teachers or administrators. They may also feel intimidated, ashamed, or alone because they have to ask for help.

Let's reduce the stigma! Here are some strategies to help you teach students how you would like to see them advocate for themselves in your classroom.

### **Role-Playing and Scenario Practice:**

Create exercises that simulate real-life situations, like negotiating an extension for a project or asking for help on a difficult assignment. This can be done one on one with the student, or students can pair up during class to practice.

### **Build Advocacy into the Curriculum:**

Incorporate lessons on communication skills, conflict resolution, and effective self-expression into your curriculum. This could be part of a larger, relevant unit or be introduced as a series of mini lessons.

### **Encourage Reflection and Self-Assessment:**

Encourage students to regularly reflect on their learning needs, challenges, and goals through journaling practice, warm-up questions, or one-on-one meetings.

### **Facilitate Student-Led Conferences:**

Implement student-led conferences where students prepare a presentation about their learning progress, challenges, and needs. This empowers students to take ownership of their educational journey and practice advocacy in a supportive setting.

### **Create Peer Advocacy Groups:**

Establishing peer advocacy groups or buddy systems can provide students with a supportive peer network. Peers can practice advocating for one another in smaller, less intimidating settings before moving on to more formal or challenging advocacy situations.



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