

**Future Ready Pathways for
School, Work and Life**

Executive Functioning Skills

*Lessons for lower elementary students
aged 5-8*

**Shop all our Future Ready
Resource Packs**





Executive Functioning Skills

*Lessons for lower elementary students
aged 5-8*

Editors:

Janna Nobleza
Suresh Korapati
Andrew Culley
Emelen De Jesus

Published 2025 by Seltrove, an imprint of IB Source Inc,
Copyright IB Source, Inc.

Copyright and Use Restrictions

This publication is protected by copyright laws. All rights are strictly reserved by the publishers. Unauthorized duplication, reproduction, storage, or distribution of any part of this work, by any means including but not limited to electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or micro copying, is prohibited without the express written consent of the publishing authorities.

Accuracy Disclaimer

The authors and publishers have exerted every effort to ensure that the information within this publication is both accurate and complete. Despite these efforts, no guarantee is made regarding the content's infallibility. The authors and publishers do not assume liability for any errors, omissions, or inaccuracies found in the publication, nor for any resultant loss or damage. Any questions or inquiries on rights please email info@seltrove.com



Teacher/Parent Guide

Executive Functioning Skills

Learning Objectives

By the end of these lessons, students will be able to:

1. Understand that getting started, staying focused, and finishing tasks are important parts of learning.
2. Use simple strategies to begin work, even when they feel unsure of what to do first.
3. Practice focusing their attention by noticing distractions and bringing their attention back to the task.
4. Remember and follow steps or directions using supports like pictures, checklists, or routines.
5. Keep their materials organized so they can find what they need quickly and work more independently.
6. Check their work by comparing it to the directions or a model.
7. Make simple money decisions by understanding needs vs. wants and saving vs. spending.

These lessons help students build habits that support independence, confidence, and successful learning across all subject areas.



Teacher/Parent Guide

Executive Functioning Skills

Learning Rationale

Executive functioning skills are the building blocks of successful learning, and they begin developing long before children read fluently or solve complex problems. In kindergarten through second grade, students are learning how to start tasks, focus their attention, remember steps, organize materials, and check their work—all essential skills that help them participate confidently in the classroom.

When young learners are taught how to plan, follow routines, and stay on track, they gain a sense of control over their own learning. These habits also reduce frustration, increase independence, and set the stage for positive school experiences.

Building executive functioning skills helps:



Promote independence:
Students learn how to start work, manage materials, and complete tasks with less adult prompting.



Strengthen attention and persistence: Children practice staying focused and working through challenges.



Support memory and sequencing: Visuals and routines help students remember steps and follow directions more accurately.



Encourage responsibility:
Keeping track of materials and checking work teaches ownership of learning.



Build decision-making skills:
Simple lessons on saving, spending, and choosing what matters help children begin understanding how choices work.



Lay the foundation for future academic skills: Strong executive functioning supports reading, math, problem-solving, and later study skills.



An Introduction for Teachers & Parents

Introduction for the Teacher/Parent

These lessons are designed for lower elementary students (ages 5–8) and can be used in classrooms, homeschool settings, or small learning groups. Each lesson includes a short, guided reading section for an adult to introduce the concepts, followed by hands-on activities that help children practice essential executive functioning skills in fun and meaningful ways.

The lessons are:

- **Flexible** – Each lesson contains several activities so you can select the best ones for your learners. There are also optional practice activities, movement games, or extended discussions. You can use them as stand-alone lessons or as a structured weekly routine.
- **Engaging** – Lessons include a variety of activities—such as sorting tasks, simple games, drawing prompts, role-play scenarios, and real-life practice routines—to help learners stay interested and make the skills feel relevant and meaningful. These different activity styles ensure that children with diverse learning preferences can participate and succeed.
- **Practical** – The strategies students learn—such as following steps, keeping their materials tidy, or checking their work—can be used immediately at school and at home. These are real-life habits that support independence, confidence, and task completion.



You do not need to be an executive functioning expert to use this pack. Simply read the **“A teacher, parent, or older sibling should read this”** sections aloud, guide the conversations, and support children as they complete each activity. The icon in the margin will show you exactly what to read out loud.

The goal of this pack is to help children build everyday habits that make learning easier: starting tasks with confidence, staying focused even when distracted, remembering what to do next, and organizing their materials so they can work independently. By practicing these skills early, children develop routines that support success in every subject—setting them up for smoother school days, greater independence, and growing confidence in their own abilities.



An Introduction for Teachers & Parents

Table of Contents

Pre-Assessment – A simple check-in to see how students currently begin tasks, follow directions, stay focused, and keep materials organized.

Lesson 1: Getting Started – Learning how to begin tasks with confidence by understanding what to do first, breaking work into small steps, and building routines that make starting easier.

Lesson 2: Staying Focused – Exploring strategies for paying attention, noticing distractions, keeping effort going, and feeling proud for trying their best.

Lesson 3: Remembering the Steps – Practicing how to remember directions, follow a sequence, and use supports like pictures, checklists, and routines.

Lesson 4: Keeping My Things Organized – Understanding how organizing materials and having a “home” for supplies helps children work more independently and stay prepared.

Lesson 5: Checking My Work – Learning to compare finished work to directions, notice simple mistakes, and take responsibility for completing tasks correctly.

Lesson 6: My Money Choices – Exploring needs vs. wants, saving vs. spending vs. giving, and making simple decisions about how to use money wisely.

Post-Assessment – Reflecting on what students have learned. Students show what skills they’ve strengthened and how their habits have grown.

Resources – Additional ideas and supports for teachers, parents, and students. Extra routines, visual supports, mini-games, and practice ideas for building executive functioning skills at home or in the classroom.



Seltrove Education, an IB Source company

Pre-Assessment





Pre-Assessment Lesson Plan

Learning Objectives

By the end of the pre-assessment activity, students will:

1. Show what they already understand about starting tasks, staying focused, and following simple directions.
2. Share how they currently keep track of materials, remember steps, or check their work.
3. Demonstrate which strategies they naturally use when they get distracted or feel unsure about what to do next.
4. Reveal their current level of independence with organizing, beginning tasks, and completing routines.
5. Establish a baseline for understanding key executive functioning skills before beginning the lessons.

Learning Rationale

The pre-assessment helps teachers and parents understand how students currently approach everyday learning tasks. Young children vary widely in their executive functioning skills, and these differences often shape how they participate in class, complete assignments, and manage routines. This activity isn't a test; it is an opportunity to observe, listen, and begin conversations about the habits that help learning go smoothly.

By exploring what students already know and do, adults can:

- **Tailor instruction** to each child's strengths and areas of need, ensuring the lessons meet them where they are.
- **Identify misconceptions** or habits that may be getting in the way—for example, believing they must start working without first knowing the steps, or thinking they don't need to check their work.
- **Document growth** in focus, independence, and routine-following across the unit.
- **Encourage self-awareness**, helping students recognize the skills they already use and the ones they will learn next.
- **Create a supportive environment** that normalizes learning routines and helps children feel confident as they build new habits.

The goal is not to measure mastery but to spark curiosity and awareness—to help children begin thinking about how they start, focus, organize, and follow steps as learners who are growing every day.



Pre-Assessment Lesson Plan

Step 1: Introduce the Activity

- “Today we’re going to think about the things we do when we start our work, pay attention, remember steps, and keep our materials organized. Everyone is still learning these skills, and we all get better with practice. There are no right or wrong answers — we just want to see what you already know and do.”
- Show the response icons (😊 happy face, 🤔 thinking face, 😞 confused/upset face).
- Explain: “When I read a statement, point to or circle the face that shows how well you understand or do this in your everyday work.”

Step 2: Read Statements Aloud

Read each statement slowly, pointing to the icons.

Step 3: Clarify the Format

- If working individually: Students can circle or mark the face that matches their answer.
- If working in a group: Students can point to the face they agree with.

Step 4: Optional Discussion

- After each statement, you may ask quick, open-ended questions, such as:
 - “What helps you remember the steps?”
 - “What do you do when you get distracted?”
 - “Can you show me how you keep your materials organized?”
- Do not correct their answers — just observe and listen. This is not a teaching moment yet; it is for learning about their current skills and habits.

Step 5: Record Insights

- Adults may take notes about student responses, patterns, or areas of uncertainty. This information will serve as a baseline when comparing growth at the end of the unit. Some things to listen for:
 - Do they have routines for getting started?
 - Can they explain how they stay focused?
 - Do they talk about where materials go?
 - Do they understand what it means to check their work?
 - Do they have any idea of needs vs. wants?

Step 6: Set the Tone

- Reassure students: “You’ll be learning lots of new ways to start your work, stay focused, remember steps, and keep your things organized.”
- Keep the activity light, positive, and playful. The goal is to build awareness, not judgment.

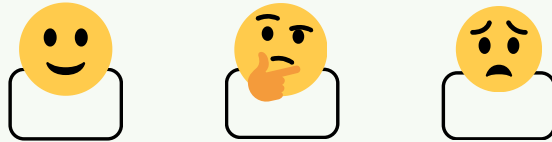


Pre-Assessment

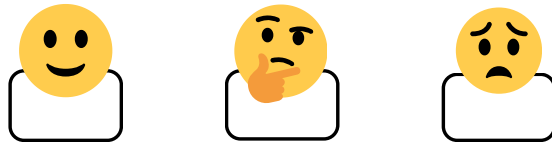
For each statement below, rate how well you understand the idea by choosing one of the following:

- I understand this well 😊
- I am not sure if I understand this 🤔
- I don't understand this well 😞

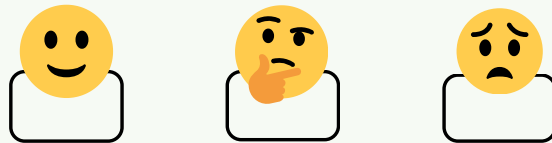
I know what to do first when I start my work.



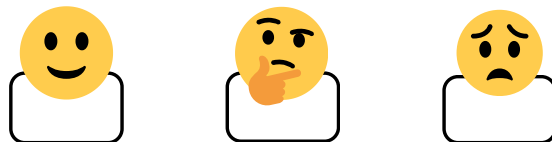
I can begin a task without waiting a long time.



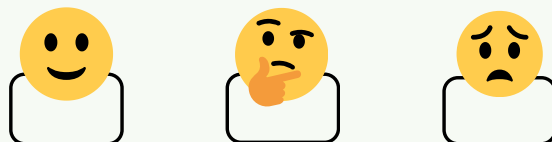
I can pay attention even when there are distractions.



I try to keep going when something feels hard.



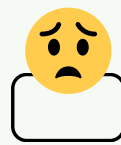
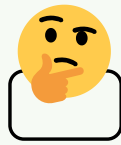
I can remember directions that have more than one step.





Pre-Assessment

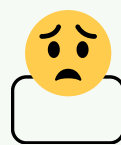
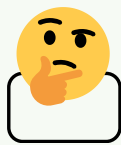
I can follow "first, next, last" when someone explains it.



I know where my school materials belong.



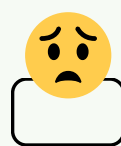
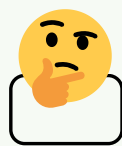
I can put things away in the right place when I'm done.



I look over my work to see if I followed the directions.



I can fix something if I notice it's not done correctly.



I understand the difference between something I need and something I want.





Lesson 1

Getting Started

Essential Question

What can I do to begin my work when I'm not sure what to do first?

Core Idea

When I don't know what to do, I can choose one small thing to start — and that helps me keep going.





Lesson Plan: Getting Started

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand that getting started is the first step to finishing any task.
2. Practice choosing one small step to begin their work.
3. Use simple routines to help them know what to do first.
4. Notice how starting their work helps their brain stay focused and ready.
5. Begin building confidence in their ability to start tasks independently.

Learning Rationale

Children often struggle with knowing how to begin a task. Getting started is an essential executive functioning skill that lays the foundation for independence and learning routines.

When students learn to take the first small step, they feel more capable and less overwhelmed. Like construction workers who begin every building with one first brick, students discover that starting is what makes the rest of the work possible.

Teaching children how to begin tasks helps them:

- Build independence by reducing delays and hesitation.
- Create predictable routines that make learning feel safe and manageable.
- Strengthen confidence by experiencing small successes early in a task.
- Stay engaged longer by getting momentum started.
- Learn that big jobs become easier when broken into smaller steps.

Getting started is not about perfection—it is about beginning. This lesson teaches students that the first step is often the most important one.

Key Vocabulary

These words should be introduced simply and used throughout the lesson:

- **Start** – to begin something.
- **Step** – one small part of a job.
- **First** – what we do before anything else.
- **Plan** – a quick idea of how we will begin.
- **Routine** – something we do the same way each time.
- **Task** – a job we need to do.



Lesson Plan: Getting Started

Lesson Plan

Read the **Student Lesson** out loud. The lesson will lead you into the read aloud story with discussion questions. Read the story to your students and then facilitate a discussion giving students a chance to answer each question out loud.

Activity 1: “Can You Start This?” Challenge

- Read the directions to your students and walk around to help them, if they need it.
- Encourage students to verbalize: “My first step is...”
- If students pick a later step, gently guide: “What would you need to do before that?”

Activity 2: Start Small Drawing

- Read the directions to your students.
- Help students articulate why they chose that step: “I chose the door because it goes in the front.”
- Validate different correct answers—multiple first steps might work.
- Prompt hesitant students by asking: “What’s something small you can start with?”

Activity 3: “Start the Town” Construction Project

- Read the directions to your students.
- Encourage turn-taking and verbalization of first steps.
- Choose simple structures: one building per group.
- Celebrate each first step to reinforce the concept.

Activity 4: My First Step Routine Card

- Read the directions to your students.
- Laminate cards or tape to desks for durability.
- Review the routine before independent work time.
- Model using the routine card yourself: “Hmm... I’m not sure where to start. I’ll stop, look, and choose one small step.”

Activity 5: First, Next, Last Construction Strips

- Read the directions to your student.
- Emphasize that the first step is the most important.
- Use the language: “This is our first brick. Once we lay it down, everything else becomes easier.”
- Let students discuss differences: sometimes more than one correct sequence is possible.



Teacher Tips for Modeling Getting Started

Model one small first step.

- Say aloud: “When I’m not sure how to begin, I choose one small step. First, I put my name on the paper. Then I can do the next part.”

Think aloud during routines.

- Let students hear your planning process: “I’m going to start by getting my pencil ready. That helps my brain know it’s time to work.”

Point out “first steps” during the day.

- Use real examples: “Before we build with blocks, our first step is to make space on the floor.” “Before we draw, the first step is to get crayons and paper.”

Break big tasks into tiny pieces.

- Ask: “What is the very first thing we need to do?”
- Encourage answers like “Find my seat” or “Get out my book.”

Use simple language consistently.

- Repeat phrases like: “Start small.” “Choose one step.” “First things first.”

Celebrate attempts, not perfection.

- Acknowledge effort: “I noticed you got started right away—that helps your brain get ready to learn!”

Model waiting for directions before starting.

- Say: “My first step is listening so I know what to do.”

Cue students visually and verbally.

- Use gestures like pointing to the first item on a list or tapping the corner of the paper where names go.

Connect to the construction theme.

- “Every building begins with one first block. Let’s lay our first ‘learning brick’ by getting started.”

Keep routines predictable.

- Routines help children feel safe beginning tasks. Gently guide them back when they forget: “What’s our first step when we start math? Let’s do it together.”



Getting Started



A teacher, parent, or older sibling should read this:

Sometimes when we start our work, we aren't sure what to do first. Maybe the task feels big, or maybe we feel stuck. Today we're learning a simple trick that helps our brains get ready: We can start by choosing one small first step.

When we start small, the rest becomes easier. That's how builders begin their work too. Before they build something big, they choose the very first brick or board. Once that first step is done, they can keep going.

Now that we know getting started means choosing one small first step, let's listen to a story about a young builder who learns how helpful that skill can be. As you listen, think about the essential question: "What can I do to begin my work when I'm not sure what to do first?"



Story: "Ben's First Brick"

Ben was part of the Busy Builders Club at school. Today, the class was making a cardboard town with roads, buildings, and bridges. Ben stared at the big pile of boxes, tape, and paper and felt a little stuck.

"I don't know what to do first," Ben whispered. "There's too much stuff."

Miss Rosa, the teacher, knelt down beside him. "Builders always start with one small step," she said kindly. "What could your first step be?"

Ben thought for a moment. "I guess... I could pick one box?" he said.

"That sounds like a great first step," Miss Rosa smiled.

Ben picked up a medium-sized box. Then he added tape. Then he drew windows. With each step, he felt a little more confident. Soon he had made a tall building for the town.

"Look what happened!" Miss Rosa said. "You chose one first step, and now you've built something amazing."



Getting Started

Ben grinned. “Yeah! Starting made it easier.”

Just then, a classmate named Jada called out, “Ben, can you help me start my bridge? I don’t know what to do first!”

Ben looked at her supplies and said, “Just choose one part to start with. Maybe the long piece can be your first brick.”

Jada smiled and picked it up. “I can do that!”

Ben nodded proudly. “See? Starting small helps everyone.”

Discussion Questions

1. What was Ben’s first small step?
2. How did taking the first step help him keep going?
3. Why do you think starting can feel tricky sometimes?
4. What could you do first when you are not sure how to begin a task?
5. How is getting started like being a builder?

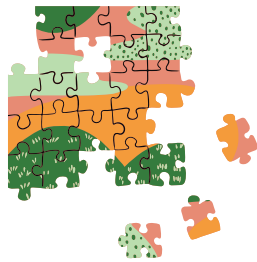


Activity 1: "Can You Start This?" Challenge

Sometimes a job looks big, but every big job has a small first step. Read each of the projects below. What would be the first small step to starting each big project? Write your answer in the square or share your thoughts with a partner.

You want to complete a 500 piece puzzle.

My first step: _____



You want to clean up your messy art table.

My first step: _____



You want to plant flowers in the garden.

My first step: _____



You want to create a gigantic fort.

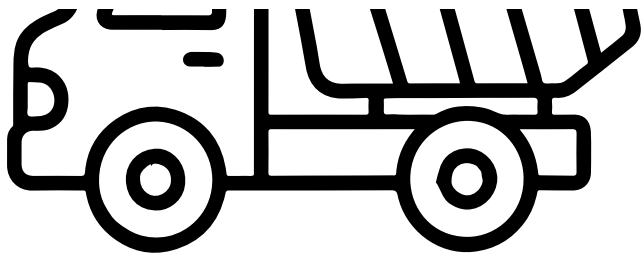
My first step: _____



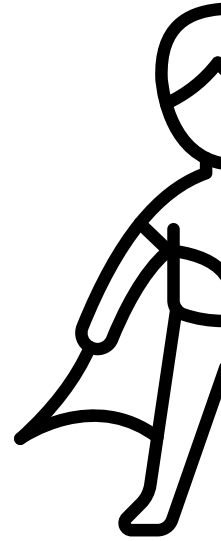


Activity 2: Start Small Drawing

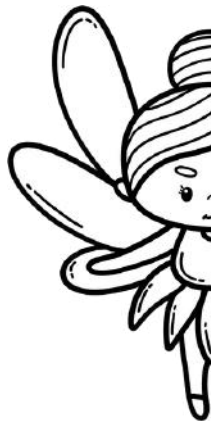
The pictures below are not finished yet. Look carefully and decide what you would do first to finish each picture. Tell your teacher, a grown-up, or a partner what your first step would be. Then go ahead and finish the picture—start with your first step and keep going until the drawing is complete.



Dump Truck

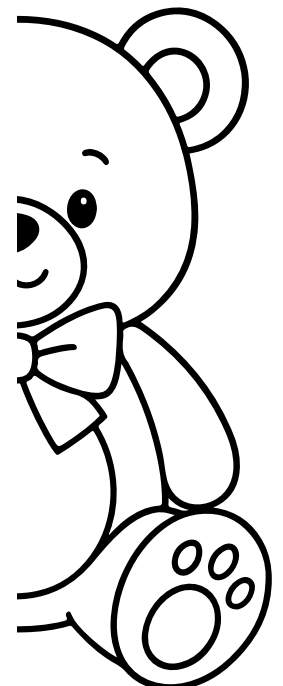
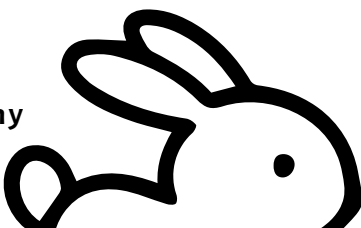


Superhero



Fairy

Bunny



Teddy Bear



Activity 3: “Start the Town” Construction Project

With your class or a small group, work together to build a small town using blocks or paper shapes. Before you begin building, think about your first step. When it’s your turn, say out loud: ‘My first step is...’ Then do your step and work together to put together a town!