



Future Ready Pathways for School, Work and Life

Executive Functioning Skills

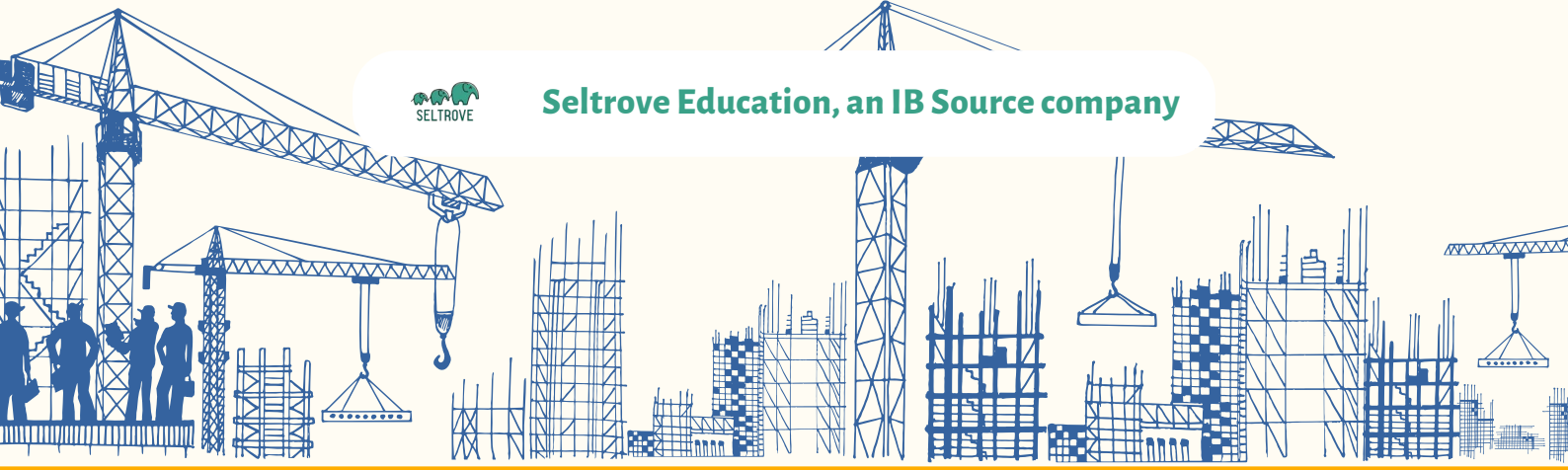
*Lessons for upper elementary students
aged 9-11*

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Executive Functioning Skills

*Lessons for upper elementary students
aged 9-11*

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Teacher/Parent Guide

Executive Functioning Skills

Learning Objectives

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

1. Understand that skills like staying focused, organizing materials, managing time, and planning ahead help them become more independent learners.
2. Use simple strategies to begin tasks, stay focused during work time, and return their attention to the task after distractions.
3. Break larger tasks into smaller, manageable steps and use tools like checklists, schedules, or timelines to plan their work.
4. Remember and follow multi-step directions by using supports such as chunking, visual reminders, and repetition.
5. Keep their learning materials, workspace, and thinking organized so they can find what they need quickly and work more efficiently.
6. Estimate how long different tasks will take and use basic time-management strategies to stay on track.
7. Set personal goals, identify the steps needed to reach them, and monitor their progress along the way.
8. Make simple money decisions by understanding needs vs. wants, planning for savings, and thinking through spending choices.

These lessons help students build practical habits that support independence, confidence, and strong learning skills at school and at home.



Teacher/Parent Guide

Executive Functioning Skills

Learning Rationale

Executive functioning skills become increasingly important in the upper elementary years, as students are expected to manage multi-step tasks, organize their materials, plan ahead, and take more responsibility for their own learning. In grades three through five, students begin facing more complex assignments, longer projects, and greater expectations for independence—both at school and at home.

When students learn practical strategies for staying focused, organizing information, managing time, and setting goals, they become more confident and capable learners. These habits help students handle challenges more smoothly, keep track of what they need to do, and complete their work with greater accuracy and independence.

Building executive functioning skills helps:



Promote independence: Students learn how to start tasks on their own, maintain focus, and use strategies to stay organized without relying heavily on adults.



Strengthen time-management and planning skills: Students practice estimating time, breaking tasks into steps, and following plans through to completion.



Support working memory: Visual tools, routines, and chunking strategies help students remember directions, instructions, and key information.



Encourage responsibility and organization: Keeping materials, workspaces, and ideas organized helps students stay on track and reduces lost work and missed steps.



Build goal-setting and decision-making skills: Students learn how to identify goals, plan the steps needed to reach them, and make thoughtful choices—including simple financial decisions.



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



An Introduction for Teachers & Parents

Introduction for the Teacher/Parent

These lessons are designed for upper elementary students (ages 8–11) and can be used in classrooms, homeschool settings, or small instructional groups. Each lesson includes a teacher lesson plan, a student-friendly reading with an anchor text, guided practice activities, and optional at-home extensions.

Across the six lessons, students learn practical executive functioning skills that help them become more organized, focused, and independent learners. These skills are especially important in grades three through five, as students prepare for the increased responsibility, multi-step assignments, and time management demands of middle school.

The lessons are:

Flexible – Each lesson can be taught in a single session or expanded across several days through discussion, modeling, or project-based practice.

Skill-Building – Each lesson focuses on a core executive functioning skill—focus and attention, organization, time management, working memory, goal-setting, and simple money management—giving students tools they can use across all subjects.

Developmentally Aligned – Lessons match the needs of upper elementary learners, who are beginning to manage longer tasks, keep track of materials, plan ahead, and take greater responsibility for their learning.

You don't need to be a specialist to teach these lessons. Each one includes clear objectives, vocabulary, step-by-step plans, and notes for supporting neurodiverse students. Student pages are written in accessible language so learners can understand what the skill is, why it matters, and how to practice it.

As students move toward middle school, these lessons help them build confidence, independence, and the habits needed to succeed—as learners and as growing members of their community. The goal is to equip them with everyday strategies they can rely on, both now and in the years ahead.



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The Table of Contents

Pre-Assessment – A brief check-in to see how students currently manage focus, organization, time, planning, remembering steps, and making simple decisions.

Lesson 1: Focus & Attention – Learning how to notice distractions, shift attention back to the task, and use simple strategies to stay engaged during work time.

Lesson 2: Organization Skills – Understanding how organizing materials, workspaces, and information helps students stay prepared, reduce stress, and complete tasks more efficiently.

Lesson 3: Time Management & Planning – Practicing how to break work into steps, estimate how long tasks will take, create simple plans, and follow routines to stay on track.

Lesson 4: Working Memory – Exploring how to remember directions, hold information in mind, and use supports like chunking, repetition, and visual cues to follow multi-step tasks.

Lesson 5: Goal-Setting – Learning how to set achievable goals, outline the steps needed to reach them, monitor progress, and make adjustments along the way.

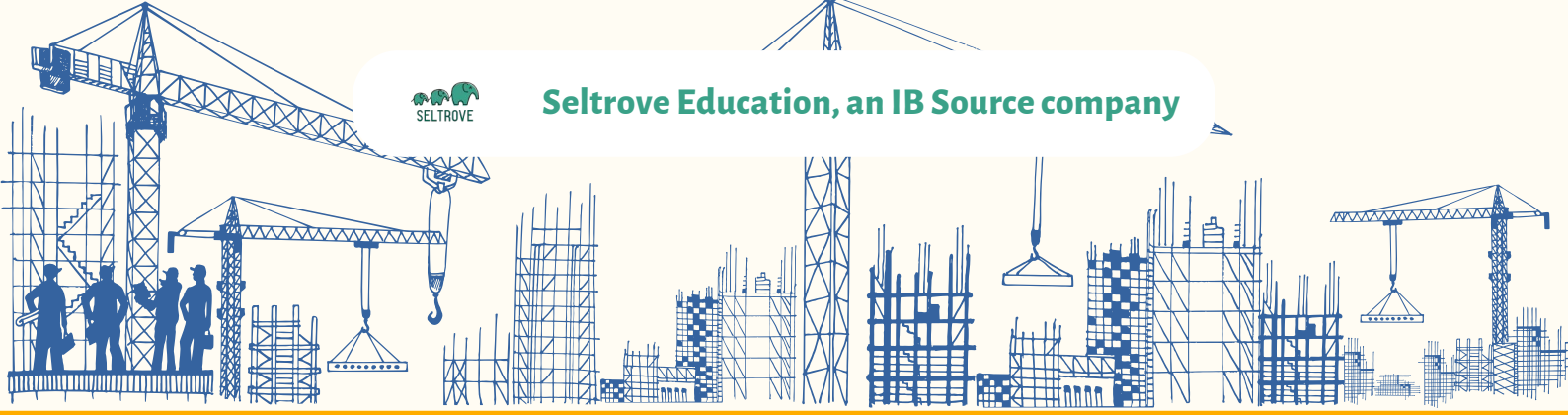
Lesson 6: Money Management – Understanding needs vs. wants, planning for saving, making thoughtful spending decisions, and connecting financial choices to goal-setting and independence.

Post-Assessment – Reflecting on growth by reviewing the skills practiced in each lesson. Students share how their focus, organization, planning, and decision-making have strengthened.

Resources – Extra supports for teachers, parents, and students, including routines, visual organizers, goal-setting charts, extension ideas, tech tools, and strategies for building executive functioning habits at school or at home.



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Pre-Assessment





Lesson Plan: Pre-Assessment

Learning Objectives

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

1. Show what they already understand about staying focused, organizing materials, managing time, remembering steps, and setting goals.
2. Share how they currently approach longer tasks, keep track of assignments, move through routines, or make simple decisions.
3. Demonstrate the strategies they naturally use when they get distracted, feel overwhelmed, or are unsure how to begin a task.
4. Reveal their current level of independence with planning, organizing, following directions, and completing multi-step work.
5. Establish a baseline for key executive functioning skills before beginning the lessons, helping teachers and parents understand where students are starting from.

Learning Rationale

The pre-assessment helps teachers and parents understand how upper elementary students currently manage the everyday skills that support successful learning. Because these executive functioning abilities develop at different rates, students often enter grades 3–5 with a wide range of strengths and needs.

This activity is not a test. Instead, it is a chance to observe how students think about their work, how they plan their actions, and which habits they rely on when tasks become more complex.

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

- Tailor instruction to meet students where they are, strengthening the skills they need for upper elementary and preparing them for middle school.
- Identify habits that may interrupt learning—for example, underestimating how long a task will take or relying on memory instead of using supports.
- Document how students grow across the unit in focus, organization, planning, and independence.
- Encourage self-awareness by helping students recognize their current strategies and begin thinking about how to refine or expand them.
- Create a supportive learning environment that normalizes challenges and highlights the skills students will be building throughout the lessons.



Lesson Plan: Pre-Assessment

Step 1: Introduce the Activity

- “Today we’re going to think about how we learn, stay organized, focus, and complete our work. There are no right or wrong answers — this is just to see what you already do when you’re working on tasks at school or at home.”
- Show the response icons (😊 happy face = I know this well, 🤔 thinking face = I’m not sure yet, 😕 confused face = I don’t know this yet).
- Explain: “When I read a statement, point to or circle the face that shows how you feel about it.”

Step 2: Read Statements Aloud

Read each statement slowly, pointing to the icons.

Step 3: Clarify the Format

- If working individually: Students can circle, color, or mark the face that matches their answer.
- If working in a group: Students can point to a large set of visuals posted in the room, or hold up a card with the face on it.

Step 4: Optional Discussion

- After each statement, invite short examples or stories:
 - “What helps you stay focused when work takes a long time?”
 - “Can you tell me one way you keep your materials organized?”
 - “What do you do when you forget one of the steps?”
 - “What’s a goal you’ve tried to reach at school or at home?”
- Do not correct answers — just listen and note what they share. This is about discovering what they already understand, not teaching yet.

Step 5: Record Insights

- Teachers/parents may jot down short notes about common responses or gaps.
- This will serve as a baseline to compare with the post-assessment later.

Step 6: Set the Tone

- Reassure students: “You’re going to learn new strategies that can make schoolwork feel easier and help you become more independent. It’s okay if your answers change later — that means you’re growing your learning skills.”
- Keep the activity light and positive, framing it as a fun exploration, not a test.

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 😞

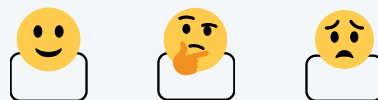
I know how to notice when I'm getting distracted.



I know strategies to help myself refocus when my mind wanders.



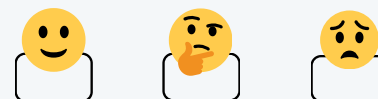
I understand how to stay focused on a task even when it gets challenging.



I know how to keep my materials, folders, or workspace organized.



I understand how organizing my things helps me work better.



I know where to put my school supplies so I can find them quickly.



I know how to break a big task into smaller steps.





Pre-Assessment

I understand how to estimate how long a task might take me.



I know how to make a simple plan or schedule to help me get work done on time.



I understand how to remember multi-step directions.



I know strategies (like repeating, chunking, or using visuals) that help me remember what to do next.



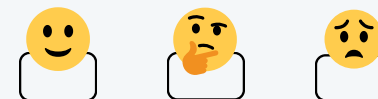
I understand how to set a goal and plan the steps to reach it.

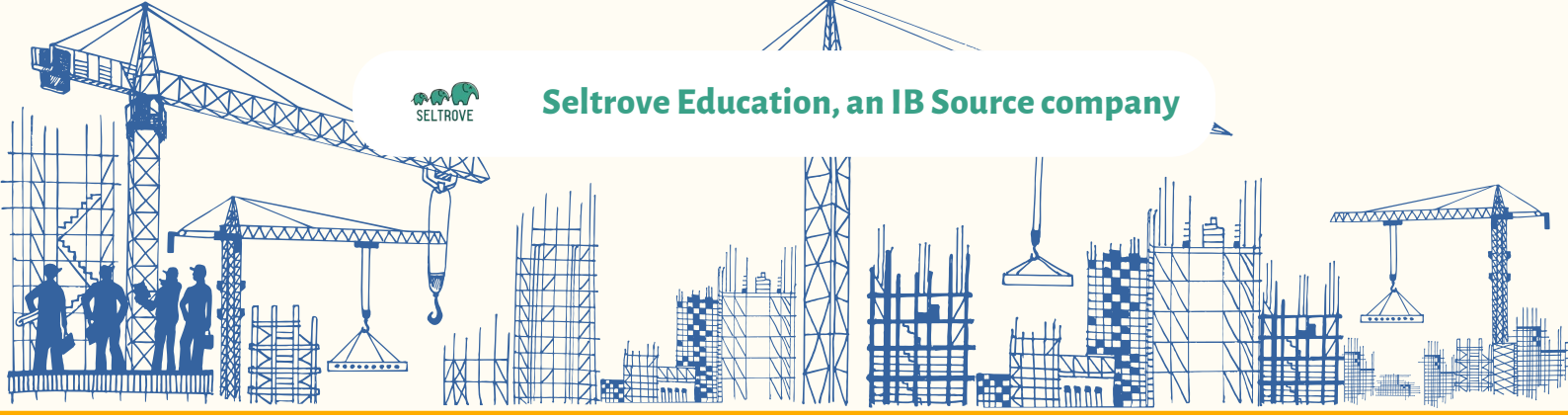


I understand the difference between a “need” and a “want.”



I know how to make simple money choices, like when to save and when to spend.





Lesson 1

Focus & Attention

Essential Question

How can I notice distractions and bring my attention back to the task so I can work more effectively?

Core Idea

Staying focused is not about paying attention perfectly—it's about noticing when your attention drifts and using simple strategies to bring it back.





Lesson Plan: Focus & Attention

Learning Objectives

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

1. Explain what it means to focus their attention and why it matters for learning.
2. Identify common distractions and how these affect their work.
3. Practice strategies for refocusing, such as pausing, taking a breath, rereading directions, or resetting materials.
4. Notice moments when their attention drifts and choose a strategy to bring their focus back.
5. Reflect on which refocus strategies work best for them during independent or group work.

Learning Rationale

As students move through upper elementary grades, schoolwork becomes longer, more detailed, and more independent. Being able to direct—and redirect—their attention is a key skill that prepares them for the increased expectations of middle school. Students who understand how attention works can:

- Stay on task more consistently
- Use time more effectively
- Complete work with fewer errors
- Build confidence in handling multi-step or demanding tasks
- Reduce frustration by recognizing when they need a strategy to get back on track

Rather than expecting perfect attention, this lesson helps students recognize that focus is a skill, not a personality trait—and that everyone benefits from tools and strategies to strengthen it.

Key Vocabulary

These words should be introduced and used throughout the lesson:

- Focus – Paying attention to one thing on purpose.
- Distraction – Anything that pulls your attention away from what you are trying to do.
- Refocus – Bringing your attention back to the task after it wanders.
- Attention Shift – The moment your mind moves from one thing to another.
- Strategy – A tool or action you use to help yourself stay focused or get back on track.



Reading Guide: Focus & Attention

Why use a reading guide?

This guide helps you connect the goals of Lesson 1 to whatever text your students are currently reading. By paying attention to how characters manage distractions, stay on task, or shift their focus, students deepen their understanding of the lesson's core idea: Staying focused means noticing when your attention drifts and choosing strategies to bring it back.

Guiding Questions for Any Text

Use these during read-alouds, literature circles, partner reading, or after independent reading.

Noticing Focus & Distraction

- What is the character trying to do or accomplish in this scene?
- What distractions (internal or external) get in the character's way?
- How does the character react when they lose focus?

Strategy Use

- Does the character do anything to refocus or get back on track?
- What strategy—big or small—helped the character return to their goal?
- Does the character ask for help, take a break, or change their approach?

Perseverance & Awareness

- How does staying focused (or not staying focused) affect the character's progress?
- Does the character become more aware of their choices or behavior as the story moves forward?
- What might the character do differently next time to stay more focused?

Connecting to Students' Lives

- Have you ever been distracted like this character?
- What strategies do you use when your attention drifts?
- What can we learn from this character about paying attention and getting back on track?

Tips for Use

1. Encourage students to give examples from the text.
2. Create a "Focus" chart, adding strategies characters use to regain or maintain attention.
3. Invite students to compare two characters and how each handles distractions.
4. Remind students that losing focus is normal; what matters is recognizing it and choosing a strategy to refocus.



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Supports

Lesson 1: Focus & Attention

Engagement — Multiple Ways to Motivate & Sustain Interest

- Normalize distraction to reduce shame and increase willingness to practice strategies.
- Offer strategy choice so students feel ownership.
- Use short, structured work intervals (2–5 minutes) to maintain persistence and reduce overwhelm.
- Provide optional movement breaks before and during independent work to support attention regulation.
- Allow students to set a personal focus goal (“Today I will try to notice when my mind wanders”).

Representation — Multiple Ways to Understand the Skill

- Use visual icons to represent each refocus strategy (breath icon, checklist, clean desk).
- Provide written and verbal explanations of what distraction and refocusing mean.
- Demonstrate the skill by modeling it: show your own attention “drifting” and refocusing.
- Give examples and non-examples of distractions and strategies to clarify understanding.
- Connect the skill to characters in books or classroom read-alouds to make the concept more concrete.

Action & Expression — Multiple Ways to Show Learning

- Allow students to draw, write, or verbally explain moments when they lose focus.
- Provide sorting activities for students who think best visually.
- Let students practice strategies physically (moving objects off a desk, whispering steps).
- Offer sentence starters for students who need help verbalizing strategies:
 - “One thing that distracts me is...”
 - “A strategy that helps me refocus is...”
- During activities, invite students to choose one strategy to try and reflect on it.

Additional Supports for Neurodiverse Learners

- Provide noise-minimizing headphones or a quieter workspace if needed.
- Use predictable routines: same work-time structure each day to reduce cognitive load.
- Give directions in small chunks and allow students to check them off as they go.
- Provide fidgets or movement supports with clear expectations for quiet use.
- Encourage students to pre-select a strategy before beginning work to reduce decision fatigue.



Lesson Plan: Focus & Attention

Lesson Plan

Read the **Student Lesson** out loud. Ask students to share their ideas after reading the Reflection Question, if they wish.

Activity 1: Find the Focus

- Read the directions to your students and walk around to help them, if they need it.
- Encourage students to explain their thinking rather than focusing on “right” answers.
- Reinforce that something distracting for one student might not distract someone else.
- Use the “I’m Not Sure” category for deeper discussion or small-group conferencing.

Activity 2: Distraction Detective

- Read the directions to your students.
- Explain the difference between internal and external distractions before beginning.
- Remind students they cannot control everything—the goal is awareness, not perfection.
- Use this activity to build empathy (“We all get distracted sometimes.”).

Activity 3: Strategy Spotlight Practice

- Read the directions to your students and help them get into small groups or pairs.
- Give students time to work completing the chart.
- Ask students to share their answers and talk about when they may have already used one of these strategies before and which strategy might help them the most.
- This activity pairs well with independent work time or centers.

Activity 4: What Should They Do?

- Read the directions to your students.
- Encourage students to identify multiple possible strategies.
- This activity naturally leads into classroom anchor charts for strategy use.
- Use scenarios to highlight both internal and external distractions.

Activity 5: Fix the Focus

- Read the directions to your student.
- The power of this activity is in the why. Push students to justify their thinking.
- Emphasize that more than one strategy might work — but some are more effective.
- Use student explanations to identify misunderstanding or skill gaps.
- Great for partner or whole-group discussion.



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Lesson Plan: Focus & Attention

Lesson Plan continued...

Activity 6: Design a Focus Plan

- Ideal for older students or small groups.
- Read the directions to your students and walk around to help them, if they need it.
- Use student Focus Plans to check for understanding of strategies vs. distractions.
- Great as an assessment tool at the end of the lesson.

Focus & Attention

What I will learn in this lesson

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

- Explain what it means to focus my attention.
- Notice when something is distracting me.
- Use simple strategies to bring my attention back to my work.
- Understand why staying focused helps me learn and finish tasks more easily.



How can I notice distractions and bring my attention back to the task?

Have you ever tried to start your work, but your mind kept jumping to something else? Maybe someone whispered your name, your pencil rolled off your desk, or you suddenly wondered what's for lunch.

Focusing doesn't mean paying perfect attention all the time. Focusing means choosing what to pay attention to and bringing your mind back when it wanders away.

Your brain is actually very good at noticing things. It notices sounds, movements, thoughts, and feelings. Sometimes, those things are helpful. Other times, they pull your attention away from what you're trying to do.

The first step to focusing is noticing that your attention drifted. Maybe you read a page but can't remember what you just read. Maybe you stare at a math problem for two minutes without writing anything down. These are signs your brain has wandered.

The second step is choosing a refocus strategy—a small action that helps your mind come back to the task. Here are a few examples:

- Take one slow breath to reset your attention.
- Reread the directions to remind yourself what to do.
- Clear your desk so only the materials you need are in front of you.
- Say the step you're on quietly to yourself.
- Check in with your goal: "What am I trying to finish right now?"



Focus & Attention

Each time you notice a distraction and bring your attention back, you are training your brain to stay focused longer. Focus is not about being perfect—it's a skill you build through practice.

Discussion & Connection Questions

Use these questions with your class, in partners, or independently:

Connect to Reading

- Did a character in your current book lose focus or get distracted?
- How did the character get back on track—or what could they have done?

Connect to Your Life

- Think of a time when you lost focus. What happened, and how did it feel?
- What usually distracts you the most during work time?
- Have you ever used a strategy without realizing it—like taking a breath or rereading something?

Connect to Strategy Use

- Which of the strategies from today's lesson feels easiest for you?
- Which one would you like to try during our next work period?
- How might staying focused help you finish tasks more quickly or feel more confident?



Reflection Question

What is one strategy you can try the next time you notice your attention drifting away from your work?



Activity 1: Find the Focus

Read the cards below and color-code them into three groups:

- Helps Me Focus = **GREEN**
- Distracts Me = **RED**
- I'm Not Sure = **YELLOW**

<p>A classmate tapping their pencil</p>	<p>Daydreaming about the weekend</p>	<p>Whispering the step you're on</p>	<p>Using a fidget</p>
<p>Someone walking past your desk</p>	<p>Worrying about a test</p>	<p>Feeling hungry</p>	<p>Helping another student</p>
<p>Rereading the directions</p>	<p>The classroom door opening</p>	<p>Moving an item you don't need off your desk</p>	<p>Telling yourself "I can do this"</p>
<p>Using a bookmark or finger to track your place</p>	<p>Looking at a checklist</p>	<p>Doodling on scrap paper</p>	<p>Working near a window</p>