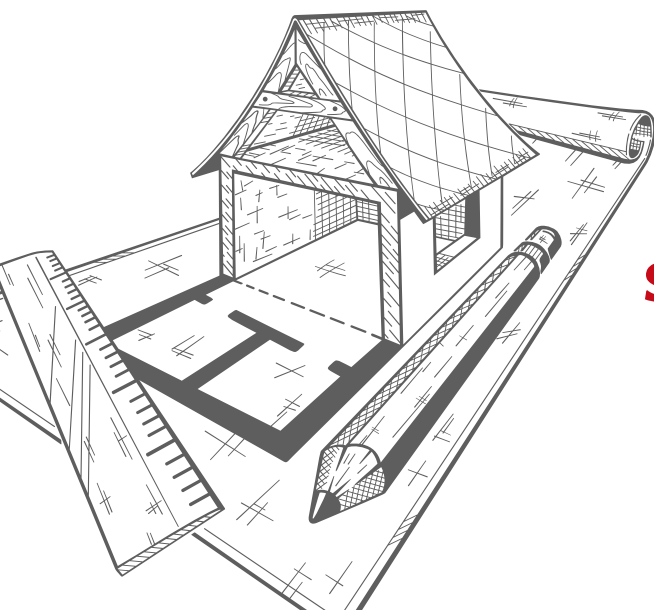


**Future Ready Pathways for
School, Work and Life**

Executive Functioning Skills

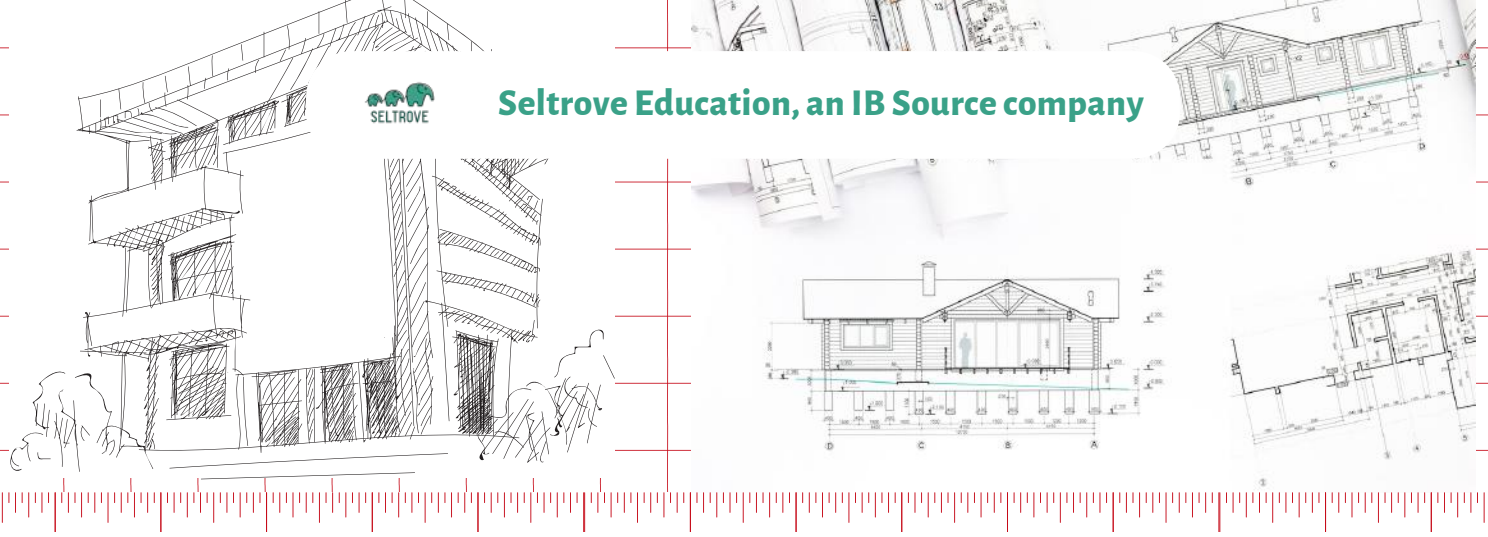
*Lessons for high school students
aged 15-19*



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Executive Functioning Skills

*Lessons for high school students
aged 15-19*

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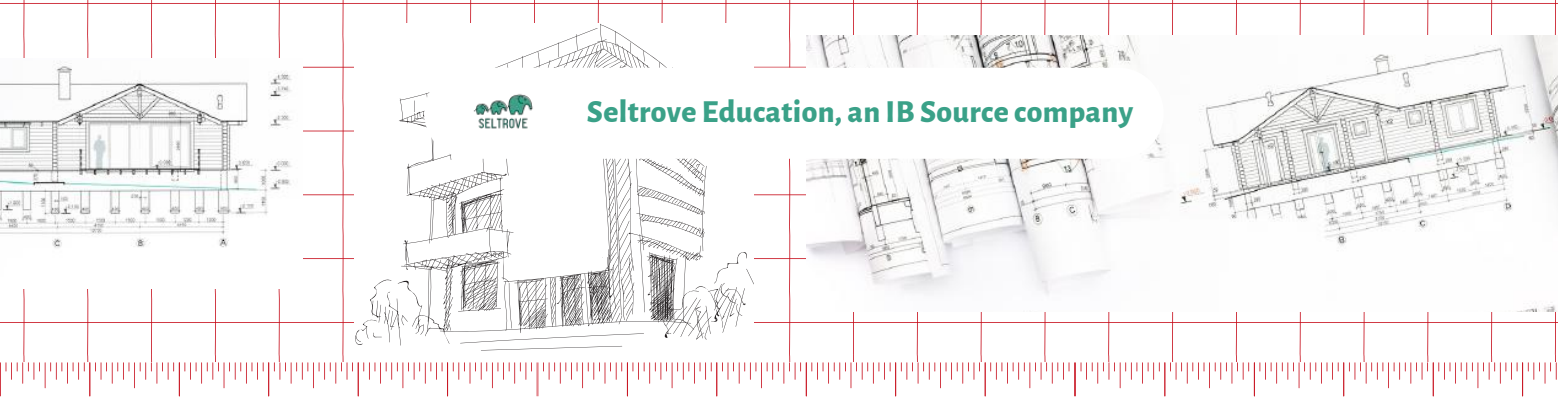
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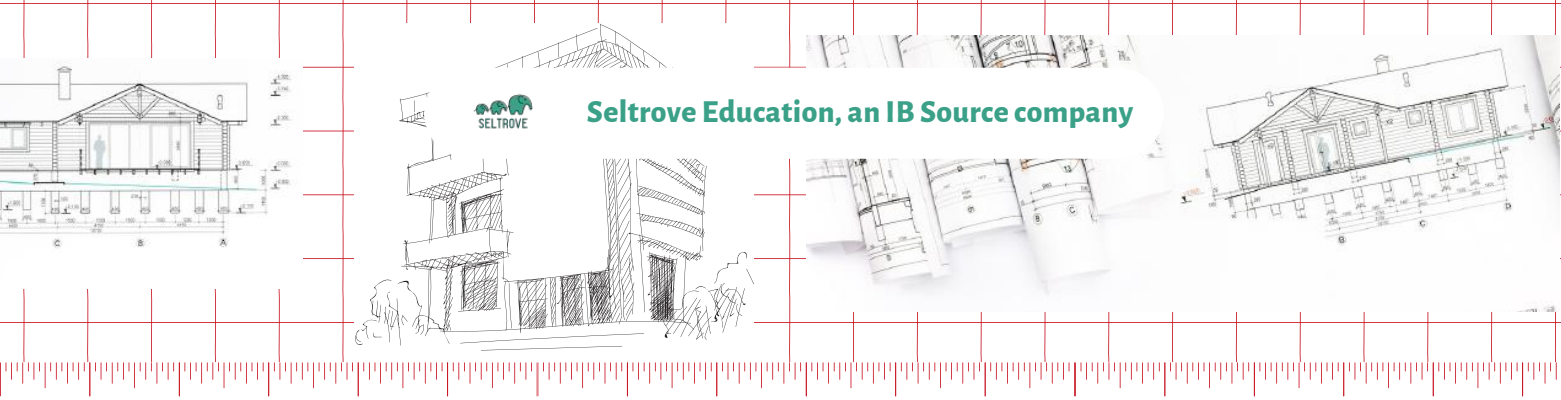
Teacher/Parent Guide

Executive Functioning Skills

Learning Objectives

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

1. Recognize how executive functioning skills—such as organization, time management, focus, motivation, and long-term planning—directly impact their academic performance, personal responsibilities, employment, and overall independence in high school and beyond.
2. Design and maintain personalized organization systems for physical materials, digital files, academic tasks, schedules, and daily routines so they can manage increasing workload demands with less stress and greater efficiency.
3. Apply a range of time-management strategies, including prioritizing tasks, estimating and comparing time, backward planning for long-term assignments, and balancing school, work, extracurriculars, and personal commitments.
4. Use practical strategies to manage attention, reduce cognitive load, and sustain deep focus, even when challenged by stress, digital distractions, or competing responsibilities.
5. Initiate tasks more effectively by using momentum-building techniques, overcoming procrastination, and employing motivation strategies that help them follow through on academic and personal responsibilities.
6. Implement evidence-based academic strategies—including active recall, spaced practice, structured note-taking, and deliberate study routines—to learn more effectively and prepare for assessments with confidence.
7. Set meaningful academic, personal, and future-focused goals, break them into actionable steps, monitor their progress, and adjust strategies when plans shift or obstacles arise.
8. Make informed financial decisions by distinguishing needs from wants, planning and tracking budgets, understanding income and expenses, and applying foundational money-management skills relevant to real-life independence.



Teacher/Parent Guide

Executive Functioning Skills

Learning Rationale

In high school, students juggle increasing academic expectations, extracurricular commitments, part-time jobs, social relationships, and a growing need for independence. They are required to manage long-term assignments, prepare for exams, communicate with teachers, balance multiple priorities, and make real-life decisions that affect their academic and personal success. These responsibilities demand strong executive functioning skills.

When high school students learn practical strategies for organizing their materials, managing their schedules, sustaining focus, and motivating themselves, they build the foundation needed for success not only in high school—but in college, the workplace, and adult life. Strengthening executive functioning helps students break down complex tasks, plan ahead, manage cognitive load, and follow through with consistency. These skills reduce stress, increase self-confidence, and empower students to take ownership of their learning, responsibilities, and future goals.

Building executive functioning skills helps:



Promote independence and personal accountability:
Students learn to manage their materials, deadlines, and routines.



Strengthen time management and prioritization:
Students practice organizing their schedules, estimating time accurately, and planning backward for long-term responsibilities.



Support sustained focus and reduce cognitive overload:
Students learn how attention works, how stress impacts their mental bandwidth, and how to manage distractions.



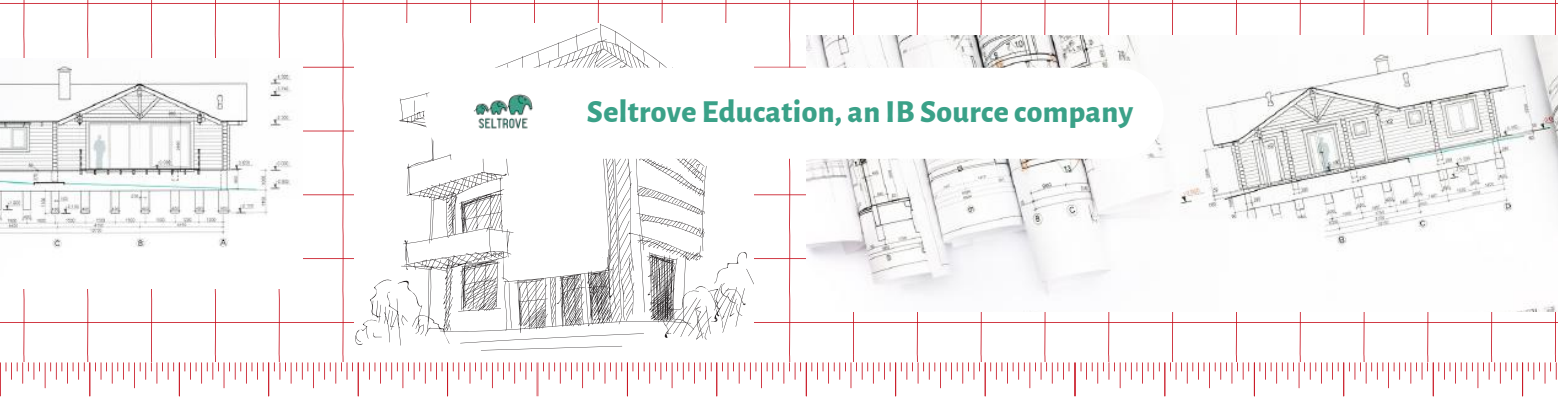
Improve motivation:
Students learn strategies for overcoming procrastination, building momentum, and sticking with tasks.



Enhance goal-setting and adaptability:
Students set meaningful goals, create action plans, monitor progress, and adjust their strategies when plans shift.



Build practical financial awareness:
Students connect executive functioning skills to real-life responsibilities, learning how to make thoughtful financial decisions.



An Introduction for Teachers & Parents

Introduction for the Teacher/Parent

High school brings a rapid increase in responsibilities—multiple classes with long-term assignments, extracurricular schedules, part-time work, digital communication, and growing expectations for independence. Many students are still developing the executive functioning skills needed to manage these demands effectively. This pack is designed to provide clear, practical guidance that helps students build the habits and strategies that support success in high school and beyond.

Executive functioning skills are not personality traits or natural talents; they are learned abilities that strengthen with practice. These lessons help students understand how skills like planning, focusing, organizing, and task initiation work in real-life situations. The instruction encourages students to experiment with different strategies so they can discover what works best for their learning style, daily routines, and individual responsibilities.

This pack is designed to support high school students as they learn to:

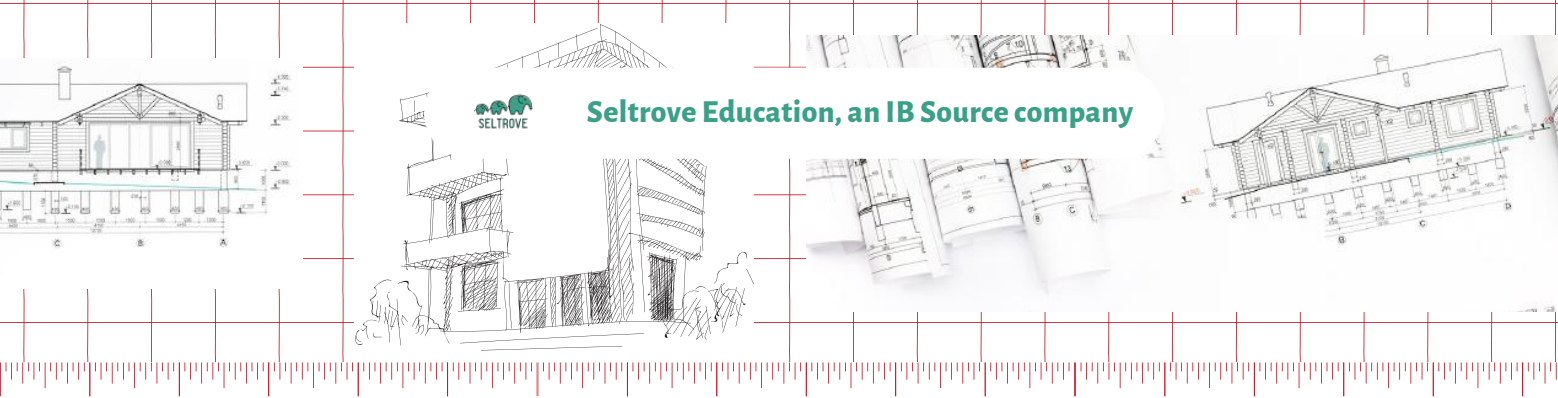
- Manage increasing academic and personal responsibilities
- Navigate distractions and reduce cognitive overload
- Build routines and systems that support independence
- Study effectively using proven, research-backed strategies
- Prepare for the transition to college, career training, or the workforce
- Make thoughtful, practical financial decisions

Each lesson includes a short guided reading section paired with activities that allow students to apply skills immediately. Instead of offering one-size-fits-all systems, the lessons invite students to personalize strategies, adjust as needed, and reflect on what helps them stay organized, focused, and motivated.

The activities in this pack help students build:

- Confidence, by learning strategies they can rely on during stressful or demanding times
- Independence, as they develop systems to manage their own schedules, deadlines, and materials
- Awareness, by understanding how factors like stress, digital habits, and cognitive load affect their performance
- Adaptability, as they learn to adjust their plans, goals, and routines when challenges arise

High school is a time of rapid growth—not only academically, but socially and emotionally. These lessons provide students with tools they can use right now, while also preparing them for the increased independence of college, vocational programs, and adult life. The goal is about empowerment. By practicing these executive functioning skills, students build the foundation they need to navigate challenges with resilience, responsibility, and a greater sense of control.



The Table of Contents

Pre-Assessment – A brief check-in that helps students reflect on how they currently manage organization, routines, attention, motivation, time management, studying, goal-setting, and financial decisions in school, work, and home settings.

Lesson 1: Systems & Routines – Exploring how personalized systems for organizing materials, digital spaces, schedules, and daily routines support independence, reduce stress, and help students manage the increasing demands of high school life.

Lesson 2: Time Management – Practicing how to plan ahead, estimate how long tasks will take, balance multiple responsibilities, prioritize effectively, and create structured schedules that help students stay on track academically and personally.

Lesson 3: Focus & Cognitive Load – Learning how attention works, how stress and mental overload impact performance, and how to manage both external and internal distractions. Students develop strategies to maintain focus and create an environment that supports deep work.

Lesson 4: Motivation & Momentum – Understanding what drives motivation, why procrastination happens, and how momentum builds progress. Students learn practical tools—like micro-starts and activation strategies—to help them begin tasks more easily and follow through.

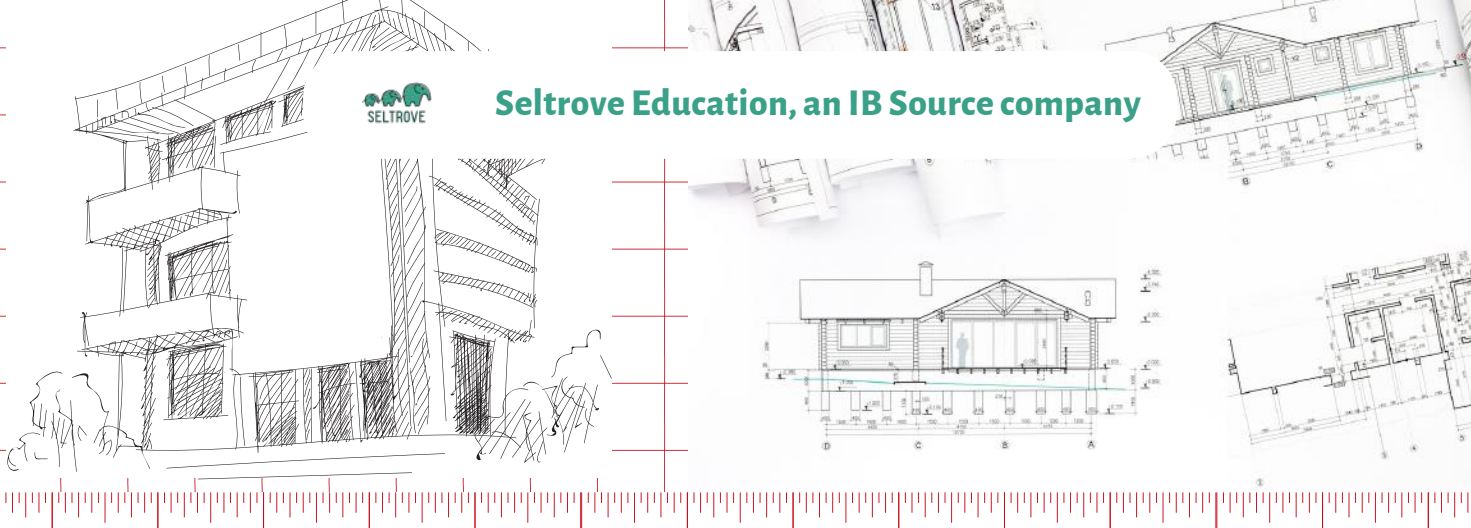
Lesson 5: Study Skills – Discovering research-backed study techniques such as retrieval practice, spaced repetition, structured note-taking, and task chunking that help students learn more effectively and prepare for assessments with confidence.

Lesson 6: Goal-Setting – Learning how to set meaningful academic, personal, and future-focused goals; break them into actionable steps; monitor progress; and adjust their approach when obstacles or changes arise.

Lesson 7: Financial Literacy – Understanding income, saving, needs vs. wants, budgeting, and making thoughtful spending decisions. Students learn practical financial habits that support independence and real-world readiness.

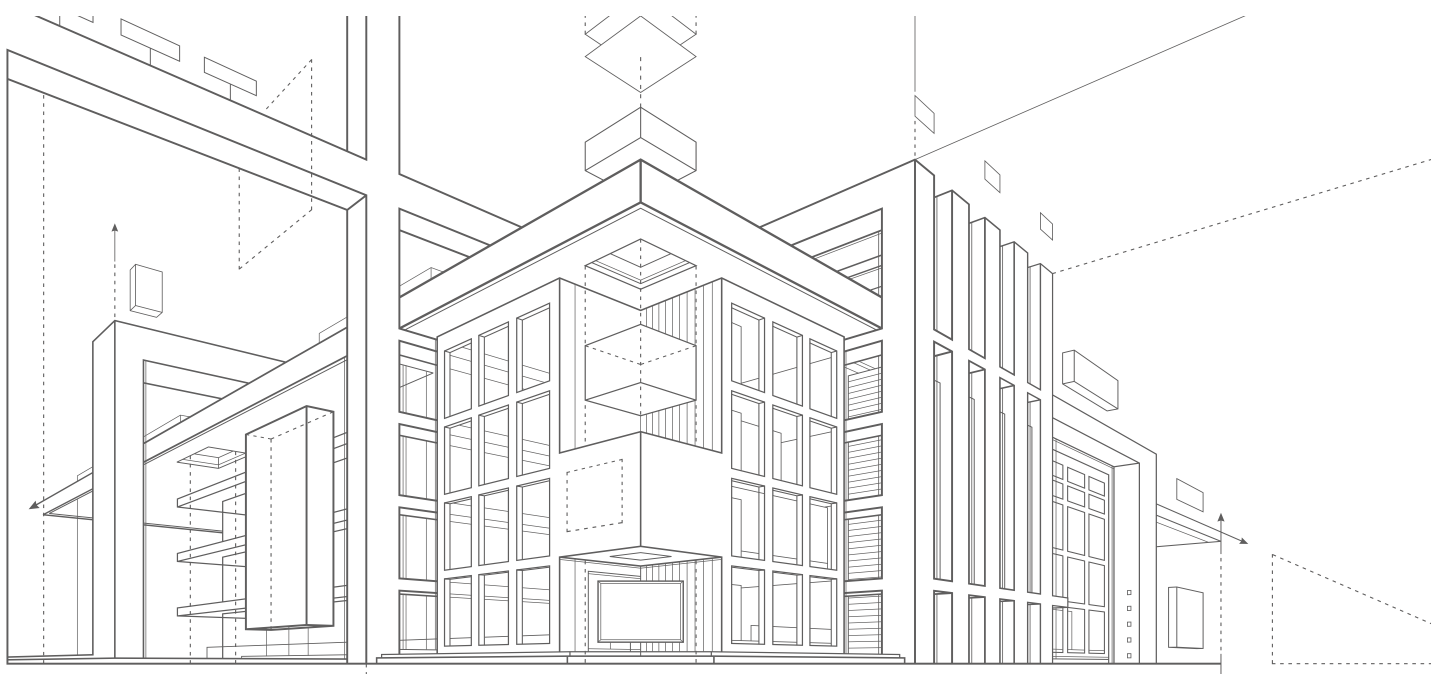
Post-Assessment – Reflecting on growth across all skill areas. Students evaluate how their systems, time management, focus, motivation, study habits, and planning skills have developed throughout the lessons.

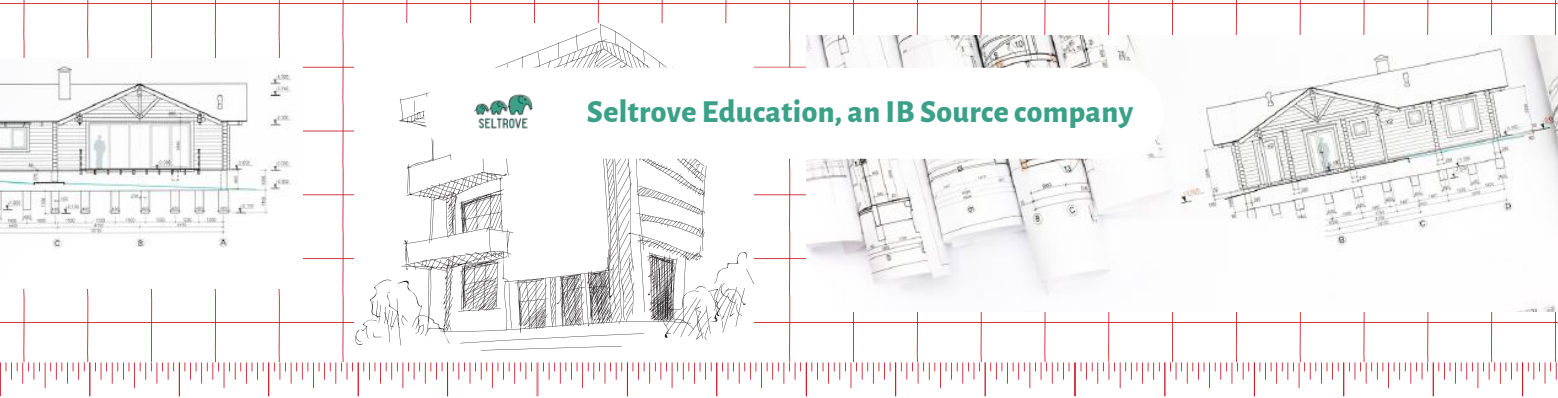
Resources – Additional tools for teachers, parents, and students.



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Pre-Assessment





Lesson Plan: Pre-Assessment

Learning Objectives

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

1. Reflect on their current executive functioning habits, including how they organize materials, manage time, sustain focus, start tasks, study effectively, set goals, and make financial decisions.
2. Identify their personal strengths and areas of growth across different executive functioning skills that impact both school performance and daily life.
3. Increase self-awareness by examining how stress, cognitive load, digital habits, and competing responsibilities influence their ability to plan, focus, and follow through.
4. Recognize patterns in their behavior, such as tendencies toward procrastination, disorganization, distraction, or inconsistent routines.
5. Establish a starting point that will help them track growth throughout the lessons and see how improving EF skills supports their independence and confidence.
6. Set an initial intention for what they hope to improve, notice, or better understand as they move through the EF lessons.

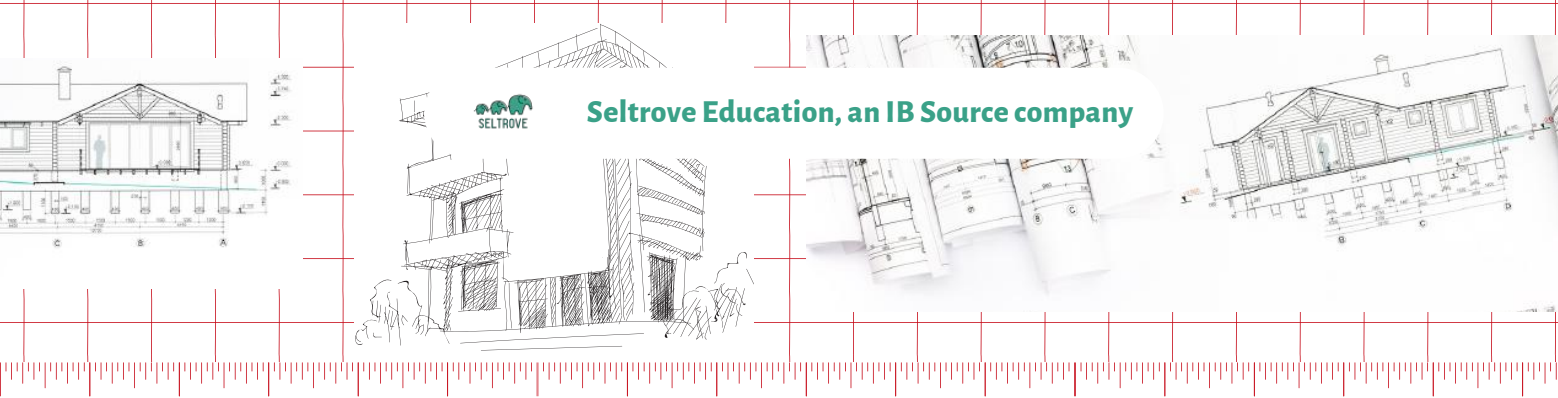
Learning Rationale

The pre-assessment gives students an opportunity to pause and reflect before learning new skills. The pre-assessment helps students become aware of their current habits, challenges, and strengths so they can approach the lessons with clarity and purpose.

For teachers and parents, the pre-assessment provides insight into how students view their own executive functioning skills. This information can guide instruction, highlight areas where support may be needed, and show growth when compared with the post-assessment.

Completing the pre-assessment helps students:

- Develop self-awareness about how they manage organization, time, focus, and other essential skills.
- Recognize the impact of their current strategies—or lack of strategies—on stress, academic performance, and daily routines.
- Acknowledge personal challenges such as procrastination, difficulty focusing, inconsistent routines, or trouble keeping up with deadlines.
- Identify strengths they can build on, such as strong note-taking habits, consistent routines, or effective planning strategies.
- Prepare for intentional learning, entering the lessons with a clearer understanding of which strategies may be most helpful for their unique needs.



Lesson Plan: Pre-Assessment

Step 1: Introduce the Activity

- Explain: “This activity helps us understand how you currently manage things like organization, time, focus, motivation, studying, and planning. There are no right or wrong answers — everyone has different habits and strategies. Your responses will help guide what we focus on in the lessons.”
- Encourage honesty and self-reflection — this is about noticing personal starting points, not grades.

Step 2: Clarify the Format

- Students read each statement and mark their response in the rating column.
- If working one-on-one or in a small group, you may also read the statements aloud.
- Remind students to respond quickly and honestly, without overthinking.

Step 3: Optional Discussion

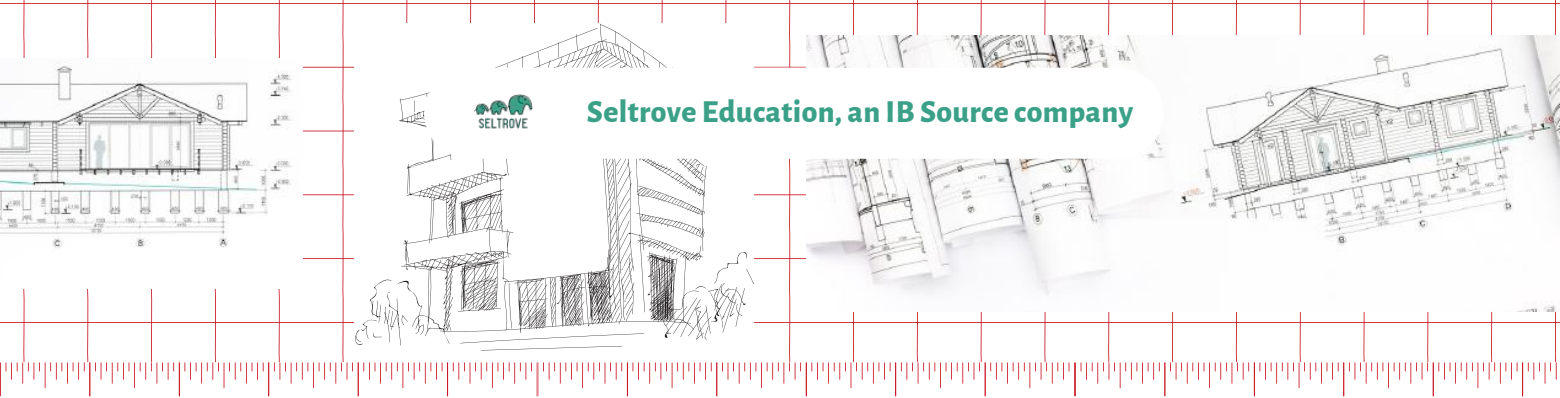
- After a few selected statements, invite quick, low-pressure sharing.
 - “Which tasks are hardest for you to start — and why do you think that is?”
 - “What helps you stay focused when there are lots of distractions?”
 - “How do you keep track of deadlines or important tasks right now?”
- Keep it light — don’t correct or explain. The goal is to listen and observe.

Step 4: Record Insights

- Teachers/parents jot down notes on patterns you notice:
 - Skills where students responded with confidence
 - Areas where they seemed unsure or hesitant
 - Any routines, tools, or strategies they already use
 - Challenges they describe with organization, time, attention, motivation, or studying
- These notes help create a baseline snapshot of students’ current executive functioning skills and will be useful to revisit during the post-assessment.

Step 5: Set the Tone

- Reassure students that this is a starting point: “You’ll be learning practical strategies for organization, time management, focus, motivation, studying, and planning in the upcoming lessons. If your answers change by the end of the pack, that’s not only okay — it means you’ve grown.”
- Keep the atmosphere positive and reflective. Frame this as exploration, not a test.

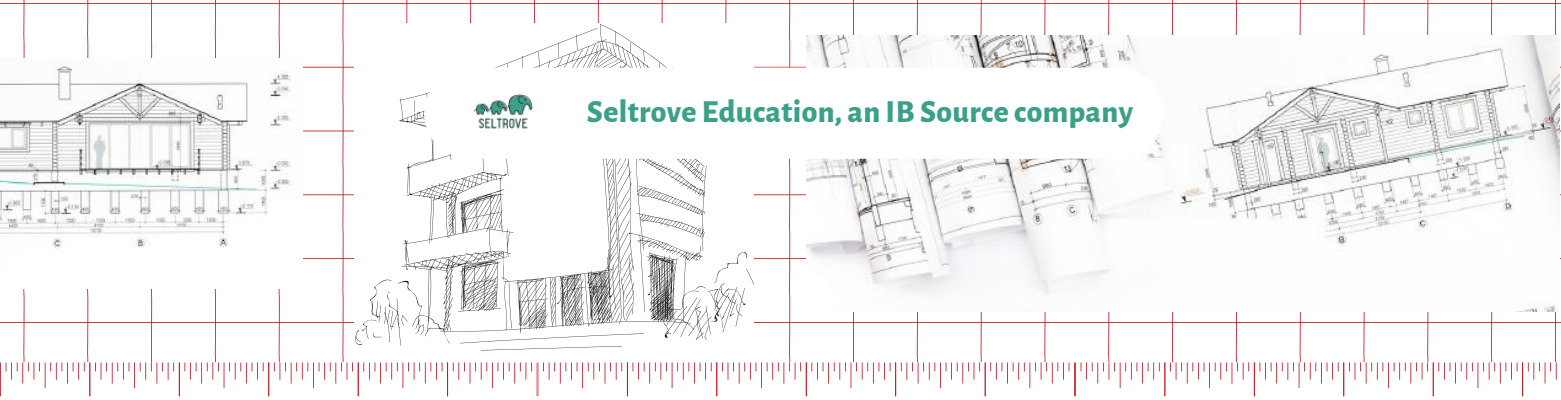


Pre-Assessment

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

- I strongly agree with this statement.
- I agree with this statement.
- I disagree with this statement.
- I strongly disagree with this statement.

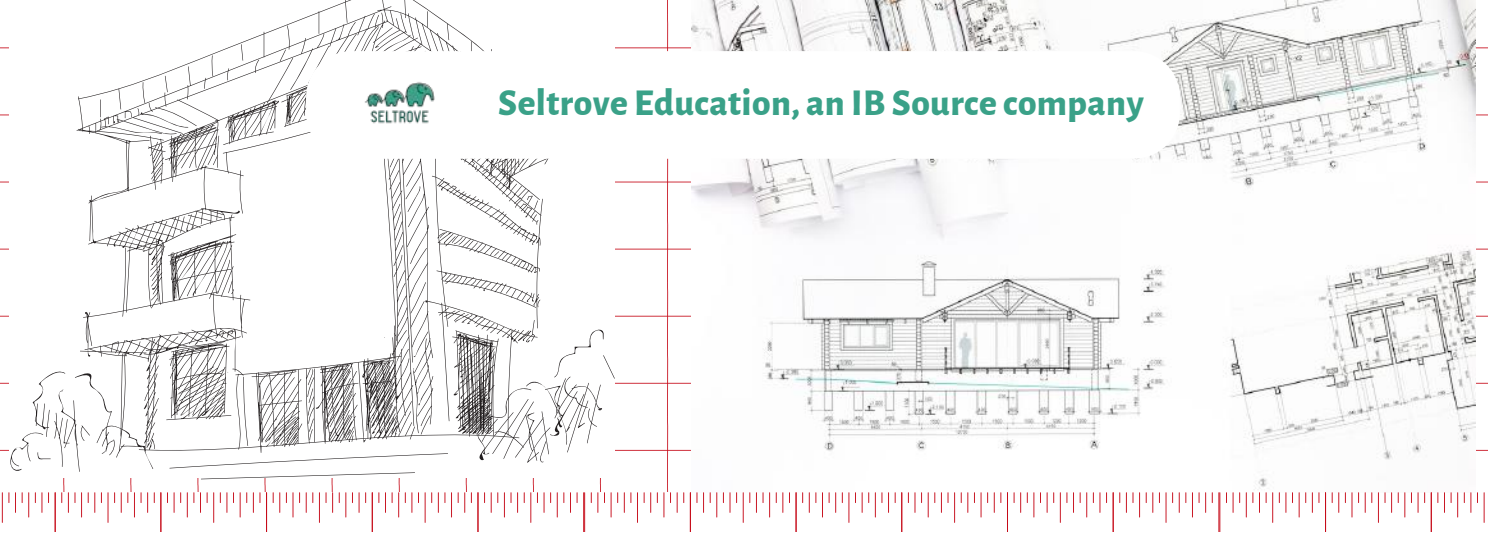
| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| I have a consistent system for keeping my school materials and personal items organized. | | | | |
| I can quickly find assignments, notes, and digital files when I need them. | | | | |
| I follow daily routines that help me stay prepared for school, activities, and responsibilities. | | | | |
| I have a good understanding of how long my tasks and assignments will take to complete. | | | | |
| I regularly create plans or schedules to manage my schoolwork, activities, and personal responsibilities. | | | | |
| I am able to prioritize what needs to be done first when I have multiple tasks. | | | | |
| I can stay focused on a task even when I'm surrounded by distractions (phone, people, noise, etc.). | | | | |
| I understand how stress or overwhelm affects my ability to focus and make decisions. | | | | |
| I can start tasks without putting them off for long periods of time. | | | | |
| I understand what helps me stay motivated when work feels boring or difficult. | | | | |



Pre-Assessment

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| I use study strategies that help me remember information (not just rereading or cramming). | | | | |
| I prepare for tests and assignments ahead of time rather than waiting until the last minute. | | | | |
| I know how to break big goals into smaller, manageable steps. | | | | |
| I track my progress and adjust my approach when something isn't working. | | | | |
| I know how to plan or track a simple budget. | | | | |
| I think about how today's financial choices affect my future goals. | | | | |

What is one habit or challenge you've become aware of in how you organize, plan, focus, or manage your responsibilities?



Lesson 1

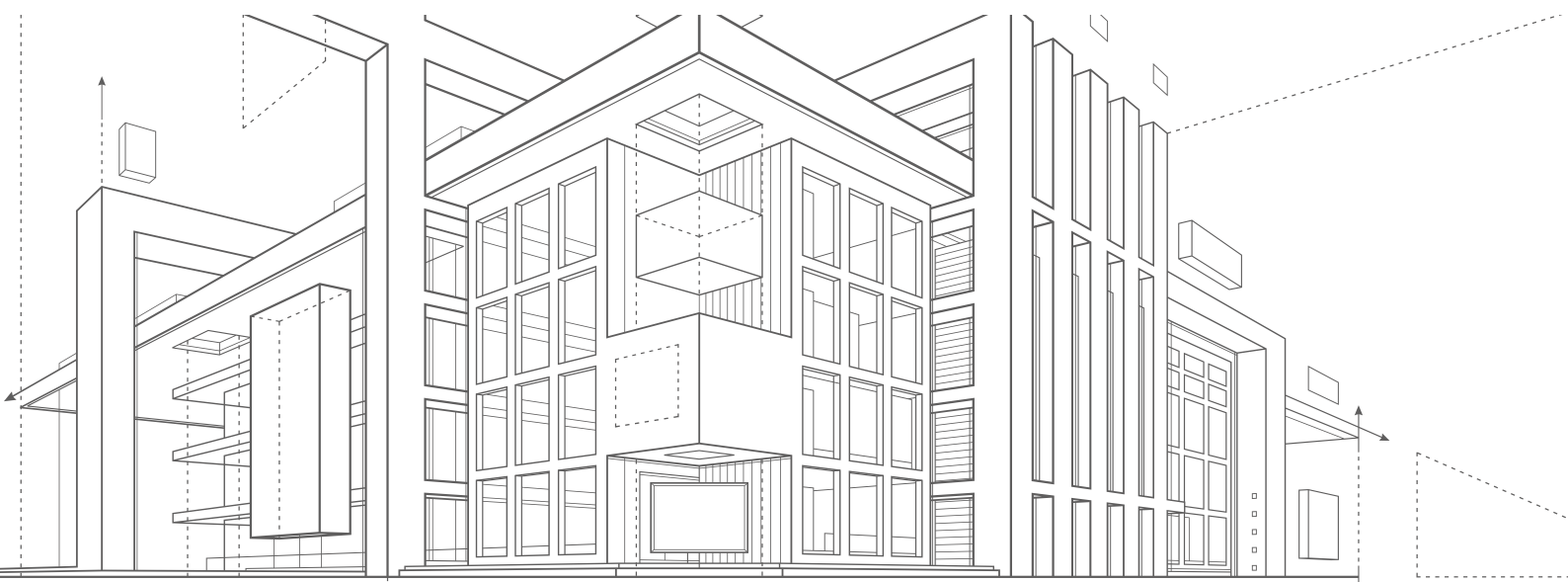
Systems & Routines

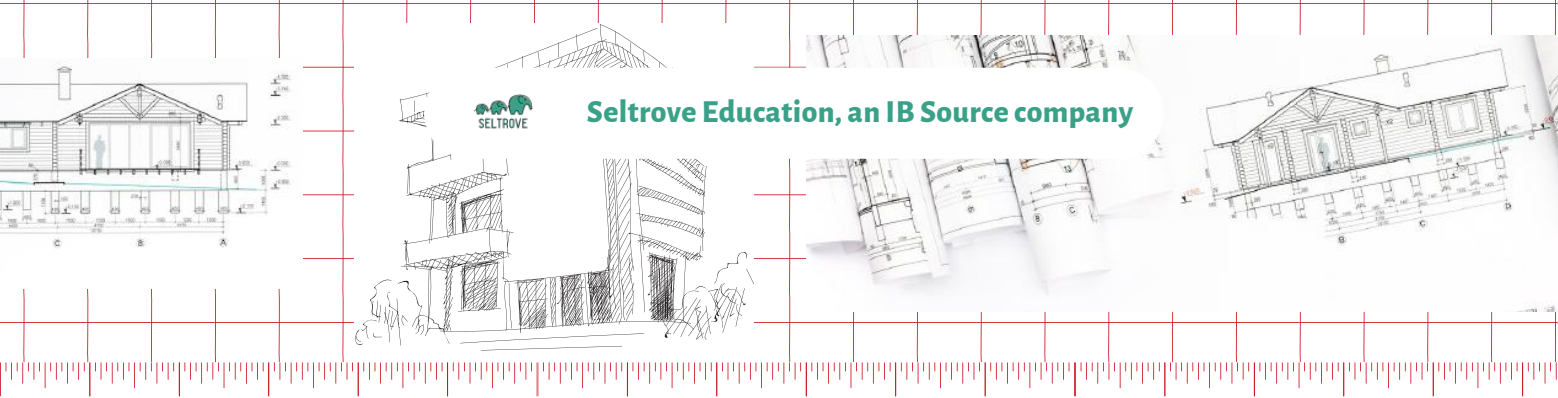
Essential Question

How can the systems and routines I use each day make my life easier, more organized, and less stressful?

Core Idea

Systems and routines help students manage responsibilities by reducing confusion, saving time, and keeping important things from slipping through the cracks.





Lesson Plan: Systems & Routines

Learning Objectives

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

1. Identify areas in their physical and digital life that would benefit from stronger systems or routines, such as materials, notes, assignments, emails, and personal spaces.
2. Explain how consistent routines reduce stress and mental load by eliminating unnecessary decisions and creating predictability.
3. Evaluate their current organizational habits and recognize patterns that help or hinder their ability to stay prepared and manage responsibilities.
4. Create or refine one personal system or routine—such as a homework routine, morning routine, folder structure, or workspace setup—that supports greater independence and consistency.
5. Understand how organization and routines connect to executive functioning, particularly planning, working memory, and task initiation.

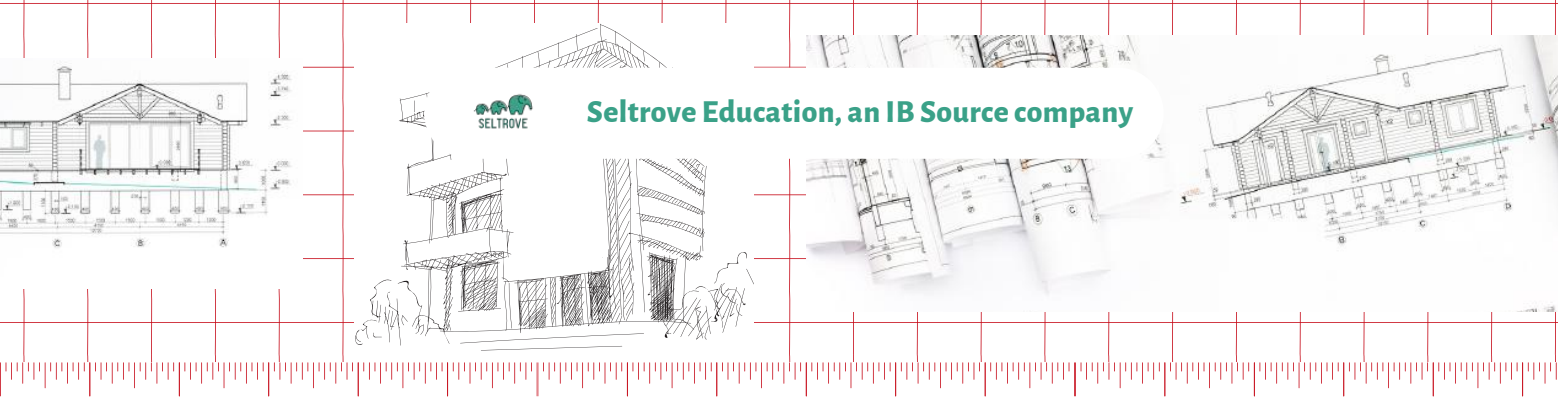
Learning Rationale

High school students face increasing expectations to manage their own materials, deadlines, and daily responsibilities. Many students have never been explicitly taught how to build systems for staying organized; instead, they are expected to “just know” or “figure it out.” This lesson helps close that gap by teaching organization as a skill—something students can practice, personalize, and improve over time.

Consistent systems and routines make daily tasks easier by:

- Reducing cognitive load: Students waste less mental energy trying to remember what they need or where things are.
- Strengthening working memory: Clear systems help students keep track of multi-step responsibilities and avoid missing important tasks.
- Supporting task initiation: When everything has a place and routines are predictable, it becomes easier to start work.
- Building independence: Students rely less on reminders from adults and more on internal systems they can manage themselves.

The goal is not to create a perfectly organized student—it is to help each student identify what kind of systems actually work for them. A system is successful when it is simple, repeatable, and sustainable.



Lesson Plan: Systems & Routines

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

Activity 1: System Scan

- Read the direction with your students.
- Encourage students to answer quickly rather than overthinking.
- Normalize that everyone has systems that break down sometimes.
- Ask students which areas surprised them and why.
- Remind students this is not a grade — it's a starting point.

Activity 2: Personal Systems Inventory

- Read the direction with your students.
- Encourage students to talk about the why behind their habits.
- If appropriate, pair students to compare one answer (optional).
- Highlight that self-awareness is a major part of EF skills.
- Avoid “correcting” answers — let students explore their own patterns.

Activity 3: Real-Life Scenario Challenge

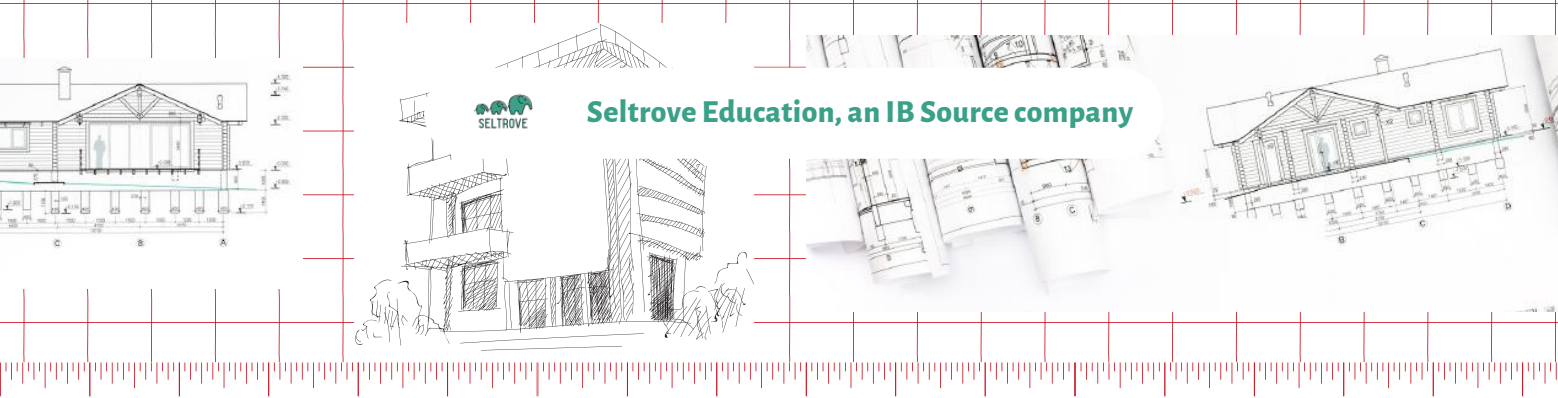
- Read through the directions with your students and help students get into small groups or pairs.
- Encourage students to focus on systems, not blaming the person.
- Allow pairs to discuss one or two scenarios before writing.
- Ask students which scenario felt most relatable.
- Reinforce that small systems can prevent big headaches.

Activity 4: Routines That Work

- Read the directions with your students.
- Encourage students to focus on realistic changes.
- Suggest students choose routines that actually affect their stress level.
- Offer examples of small improvements (laying out clothes, checking the portal, etc.).
- Remind students: consistency matters more than complexity.

Activity 5: Digital Life Makeover

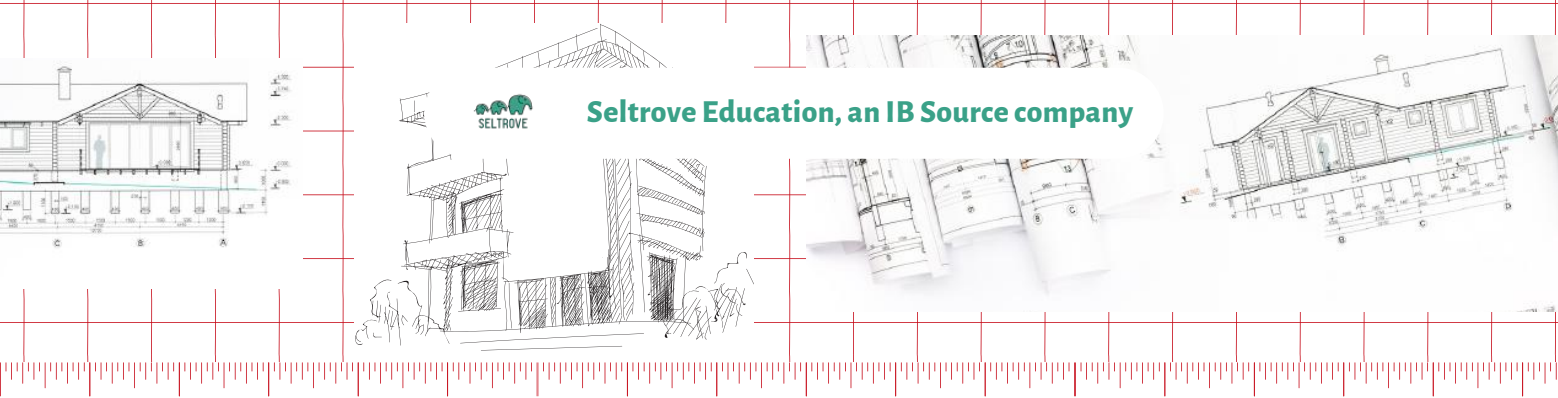
- Read the direction with your students.
- Encourage students to build a system they will actually use.
- Model a naming system aloud (students love concrete examples).
- Clarify the difference between Downloads, Desktop, and Drive as storage spaces.
- Teach the concept of version control (“Draft 1, Draft 2...”).
- Ask students to pair up to test each other's 5-Second Find.
- Normalize digital clutter as common—and solvable.
- Encourage students to start simple. Complexity leads to abandonment.



Lesson Plan: Systems & Routines

Activity 6: Organization Style Survey

- Read the direction with your students.
- Emphasize that no style is better than another — all can be effective.
- Allow a few minutes for students to share or compare their styles in pairs.
- Encourage students to notice how their style might influence:
 - Their routines
 - Their workspace
 - Their digital organization
 - Their time management
- Connect survey results to upcoming lessons (especially Time Management & Study Skills).



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Supports

Lesson 1: Systems & Routines

Multiple Means of Representation

Provide information in different ways so every learner can access the content.

Visual Supports

- Visual examples of organized vs. disorganized systems (backpacks, binders, digital folders).
- Color-coded charts showing how routines reduce cognitive load.
- Step-by-step visuals for the SORT → PURGE → REDESIGN method.
- Icons for routine steps (morning, after school, night).
- Graphic organizers for “My System” and “My Routine.”

Auditory Supports

- Read the student lesson aloud or offer an audio version.
- Provide short video clips about working memory, attention, and habit science.
- Teacher modeling: think-aloud demonstrations (“Here’s how I reset my backpack on Fridays...”).

Text Supports

- Offer a simplified summary version of the lesson for students who benefit from reduced text.
- Highlight key words (system, routine, cognitive load, working memory).
- Use bolded headers and chunked information for readability.

Language/Literacy Supports

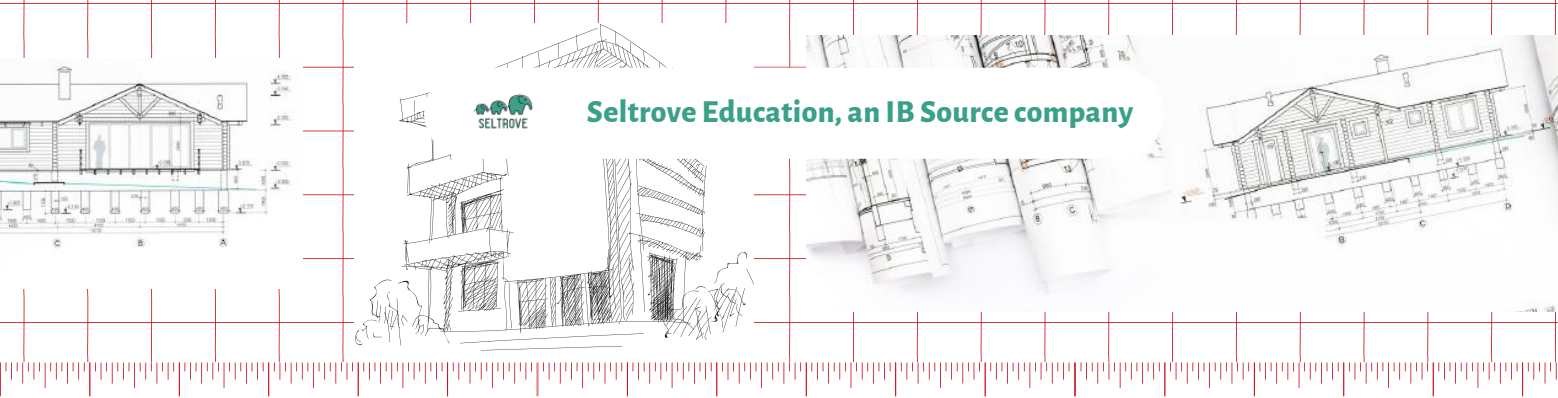
- Provide definitions of vocabulary in the margins.
- Offer sentence starters for thinking (e.g., “A routine that would help me is...”).
- Use bilingual glossaries if needed.

Multiple Means of Engagement

Offer options that increase interest, motivation, and emotional investment.

Choice & Autonomy

- Students choose which routine to design (morning, after school, night).
- Students select their organization style (Activity 14) and apply it.
- Students choose 1–2 organization strategies they want to try first.



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Supports

Relevance & Real-Life Connection

- Scenarios reflect real high school struggles (lost homework, messy backpack).
- Students redesign their own current system, not just fictional ones.
- Allow students to reflect on stress, confidence, and independence.

Collaboration & Discussion

- Pair or group talk: “What makes organization hard for you?”
- Peer model sharing: students who feel comfortable show their system.
- Partner routine challenges (“Test my system — what if I overslept?”).

Normalize Struggle

- Discuss how imperfect organization is realistic, and systems evolve.

Multiple Means of Action & Expression

Give learners different ways to show what they understand.

Flexible Output Options - Students may demonstrate their organizational plan through:

- Writing (checklists, planners)
- Drawing (visual layouts, locker maps)
- Digital demonstrations (folder creation, screenshots)
- Physical organization (actual backpack or binder makeover)

Scaffolded Supports

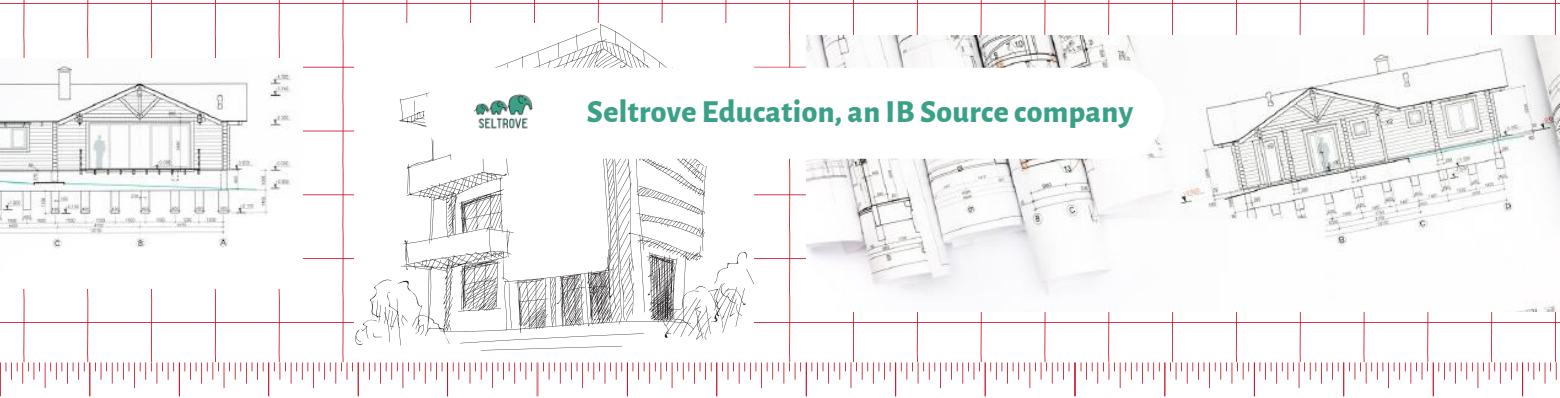
- Provide templates for routines so students aren't starting from a blank page.
- Offer simple choices: Do you want a checklist? A diagram? A step-by-step plan?
- Give examples of strong, medium, and simple routines (modeling quality).

Executive Functioning Supports

- Break tasks into smaller steps on the worksheet.
- Allow movement breaks during multi-step activities.
- Use timers for focused work periods.
- Provide check-in boxes for progress monitoring.

Assistive Technology

- Digital planners and reminder apps
- Visual schedule tools
- Digital sticky notes



Lesson Plan: Systems & Routines



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

- Identify areas in my physical and digital life that would benefit from stronger systems or routines.
- Explain how consistent routines reduce stress and mental load by eliminating unnecessary decisions and creating predictability.
- Evaluate my current organizational habits and recognize patterns that help or hinder my ability to stay prepared and manage responsibilities.
- Create or refine one personal system or routine that supports greater independence and consistency.
- Understand how organization and routines connect to executive functioning, particularly planning, working memory, and task initiation.



Keeping your life organized is about having systems & routines.

Keeping your life organized isn't about being perfectly neat or having color-coded everything. It's about having systems and routines that make your day easier and reduce the amount of energy you waste trying to remember or find things.

A **system** is a simple method you use the same way every time. A **routine** is a repeatable pattern you follow so you don't have to start from scratch each day.

You already use systems and routines without realizing it—like where you usually put your phone, the order you get ready in the morning, or how you check your messages. When your systems are clear and consistent, things run smoothly. When they're not, small problems pile up and create stress.

Here's why systems and routines matter in high school:

- **They reduce mental load.** When you have a place for assignments, notes, deadlines, and materials, you don't waste energy trying to remember everything.
- **They make starting tasks easier.** It's much simpler to begin homework when your workspace is ready and you know what the next step is.
- **They save time.** You spend less time looking for things, rewriting lost assignments, or reorganizing last-minute.
- **They help you stay prepared.** Good routines mean fewer surprises—like forgotten materials or last-minute scrambles.