



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

**Executive Functioning
Skills**

*Lessons for middle school students
aged 11-14*

**Shop all our Future Ready
Resource Packs**





Seltrove Education, an IB Source company



Executive Functioning Skills

*Lessons for middle school students
aged 11-14*

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. Recognize that strong executive functioning skills—such as organizing materials, managing time, sustaining focus, motivating themselves, and planning ahead—help them work more independently and confidently in middle school.
2. Apply practical strategies to begin tasks, overcome resistance or procrastination, and maintain focus during work time, even when faced with distractions from peers, technology, or their environment.
3. Break multi-step assignments, projects, and responsibilities into smaller, manageable parts, and use planning tools such as checklists, timelines, digital planners, or task trackers to guide their work.
4. Follow complex or multi-step directions by using supports such as chunking, note-taking, visual cues, repetition, or self-check systems to ensure accuracy and follow-through.
5. Create and maintain organization systems—for materials, notebooks, digital files, backpacks, and daily routines—so they can quickly locate what they need and reduce stress during busy school days.
6. Estimate how long academic and personal tasks will take, compare estimates to actual time, and use time-management strategies (including prioritizing) to stay on track with deadlines and responsibilities.
7. Set meaningful personal and academic goals, outline the steps required to reach those goals, monitor progress over time, and adjust strategies when plans need to change.
8. Make thoughtful financial decisions by distinguishing needs from wants, planning how to use limited resources, creating simple budgets, and understanding the value of saving for future goals.



Teacher/Parent Guide

Executive Functioning Skills

Learning Rationale

In middle school, students transition between teachers, balance homework from various subjects, manage extracurriculars, and begin navigating the growing social and digital demands of adolescence. These shifts require strong executive functioning skills.

When middle school students develop practical strategies for staying organized, managing their time, sustaining focus, and motivating themselves, they build the confidence and independence needed to handle academic and personal challenges. These skills help students break down larger projects, prioritize competing tasks, follow multi-step directions, and complete their work with more consistency and accuracy. Strong executive functioning not only eases stress—it empowers students to take ownership of their learning and daily routines.

Building executive functioning skills helps:



Promote independent learning: Students learn to begin tasks without prompting, manage distractions, and use strategies to stay focused and productive.



Strengthen time management and prioritization: Students practice estimating time, breaking multi-step assignments into manageable parts, and deciding what needs to be completed first.



Support working memory and follow-through: Tools such as checklists, chunking, routines, and visual reminders help students remember instructions and complete multi-step tasks..



Encourage responsibility and organization: By developing systems for managing materials, digital work, and routines, students reduce stress, limit misplaced assignments, and increase academic readiness.



Develop goal-setting and reflection skills: Students learn to set meaningful goals, monitor their progress, adjust their strategies, and reflect on what helps them succeed.



Build decision-making skills, including financial awareness: Students connect executive functioning to real-life responsibilities.



An Introduction for Teachers & Parents

Introduction for the Teacher/Parent

These lessons are designed for middle school students (ages 11–14) and can be used in classrooms, homeschool settings, counseling groups, or independent study. Each lesson includes a short guided reading section to anchor the learning, followed by practical activities that help students apply executive functioning strategies to their everyday routines, schoolwork, and personal responsibilities.

The lessons are:

Flexible – They can be completed in 25–30 minutes, or expanded with optional discussion questions, journaling prompts, planning exercises, or real-life practice tasks that deepen understanding. Lessons can be taught in sequence or selected individually based on student needs.

Engaging – The examples and activities reflect the real challenges middle schoolers face—managing multiple classes, balancing responsibilities, staying focused with increased digital distractions, and becoming more independent with their schoolwork and daily routines.

Practical – Students learn concrete strategies they can use immediately, including how to stay organized, manage time effectively, break down large assignments, build motivation, study with purpose, set goals, and make thoughtful financial decisions. These lessons give students tools they can revisit throughout the school year.

The goal of this pack is to help students understand that strong executive functioning isn't about being “perfectly organized” or never losing focus—it's about having reliable strategies they can use when challenges arise. By practicing organization, time management, focus, planning, and responsible decision-making, students build the habits that support independence, confidence, and success in both school and daily life.



The Table of Contents

Pre-Assessment – A brief check-in to see how students currently manage organization, routines, focus, motivation, time management, planning, and decision-making in both school and home settings.

Lesson 1: Organization & Routines – Exploring how organizing materials, digital files, workspaces, and daily routines helps students stay prepared, reduce stress, and manage their responsibilities with greater independence.

Lesson 2: Time Management – Practicing how to estimate how long tasks will take, break assignments into smaller steps, choose what needs to be done first, and create simple plans and schedules to stay on track.

Lesson 3: Focus & Attention – Learning how to recognize internal and external distractions, shift attention back to the task, create a focus-friendly environment, and use strategies to maintain concentration during work time.

Lesson 4: Motivation & Momentum – Understanding what motivates them, how to overcome procrastination, how momentum builds motivation, and how to use small starting rituals to make beginning tasks easier.

Lesson 5: Study Skills – Discovering effective study habits such as retrieval practice, spacing, chunking, and note-taking strategies that help students study smarter—not longer.

Lesson 6: Goals & Tracking Progress – Learning how to set meaningful academic and personal goals, outline the steps needed to reach them, monitor progress over time, and adjust strategies when plans change.

Lesson 7: Financial Literacy – Understanding needs vs. wants, planning a simple budget, saving for goals, and making thoughtful spending choices that build independence and real-world decision-making skills.

Post-Assessment – Reflecting on growth by reviewing each skill area. Students evaluate how their organization, time management, focus, motivation, study habits, and decision-making have strengthened throughout the lessons.

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



Seltrove Education, an IB Source company



Pre-Assessment





Lesson Plan: Pre-Assessment

Learning Objectives

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

1. Reflect on their current habits and skills related to organization, routines, focus, time management, motivation, study habits, planning, and decision-making.
2. Identify areas of strength where they already feel confident and capable in managing their schoolwork and daily responsibilities.
3. Recognize areas that feel challenging, such as starting tasks, staying focused, keeping materials organized, following multi-step directions, or planning ahead.
4. Increase self-awareness about how they currently approach tasks, manage deadlines, and handle responsibilities at home and at school.
5. Set a baseline understanding that helps guide future learning, conversations, and skill-building throughout the pack.

Learning Rationale

The pre-assessment helps students pause and think about how they currently manage the many responsibilities of middle school. As academic and personal demands increase, students rely more heavily on executive functioning skills—yet many have not had a chance to reflect on what they already do well or where they may need support.

This short check-in serves several important purposes:

- Helps students build self-awareness - Students begin to notice their own habits, challenges, and successes.
- Normalizes the learning process - Students understand that executive functioning skills are learned, not “personality traits,” and that everyone has strengths and areas for improvement.
- Shows teachers and parents where support is needed - The pre-assessment gives adults insight into how students currently manage tasks, routines, and responsibilities, allowing them to tailor lessons, prompts, and follow-up questions.
- Encourages students to take ownership - Reflecting on their current skill level helps students feel involved in the learning process and invested in developing strategies.
- Provides a baseline for meaningful comparison - When paired with the post-assessment, students can clearly see their progress.



Lesson Plan: Pre-Assessment

Step 1: Introduce the Activity

- Explain: “This activity helps us understand how you currently handle things like organizing your materials, managing your time, staying focused, completing tasks, and making decisions. There are no right or wrong answers — everyone has different habits and strategies. Your responses simply show where you are starting.”
- 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 short, low-pressure sharing, such as:
 - “What’s something you do to stay organized when things get busy?”
 - “Can you think of a time when you planned ahead and it really helped you?”
 - “What’s one thing that helps you stay on task when you get distracted?”
- Keep it light and reflective. Avoid correcting or offering solutions at this stage. The goal is simply to listen, observe, and understand how students currently use executive functioning skills.

Step 4: Record Insights

- Teachers/parents jot down notes on patterns you notice:
 - Skills the student feels confident about (organization, focus, time use, etc.)
 - Areas where the student expressed uncertainty or difficulty
 - Examples the student mentioned about their routines, decision-making, or motivation
 - Any organizational or planning strategies the student already uses
- These notes create a baseline snapshot to compare with the post-assessment later.

Step 5: Set the Tone

- Reassure students that this is a starting point: “You’ll learn new ideas and strategies in the next lessons to help with organization, focus, planning, and managing your responsibilities. If your answers change later, that’s a great thing — it means you’ve learned and 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 understand this well
- I somewhat understand this
- I'm unsure or confused by this

Statement	I understand this well!	I somewhat understand this.	I'm unsure or confused by this.
I understand how to set up a system to keep my school materials organized.			
I know how to organize digital files, notes, and assignment.			
I understand how daily routines help me stay prepared and reduce stress.			
I understand how to estimate how long a task or assignment will take me to complete.			
I know how to break a large task or project into smaller steps.			
I understand how to decide what needs to be done first when I have multiple tasks.			
I know how to use a planner, schedule, or calendar to manage my responsibilities.			
I understand what usually distracts me when I'm trying to work.			
I know strategies I can use to stay focused when my mind starts to wander.			



Pre-Assessment

Statement	I understand this well!	I somewhat understand this.	I'm unsure or confused by this.
I know strategies I can use to stay focused when my mind starts to wander.			
I understand what helps me get started when I don't feel like doing a task.			
I know strategies to overcome procrastination.			
I know how to choose study strategies that work well for me.			
I understand how to set a goal that is clear and realistic.			
I understand the difference between needs and wants.			
I know how planning ahead can help me manage money better.			

What is something you notice about the way you organize yourself, manage your time, or focus?



Lesson 1

Organization & Routines

Essential Question

How does being organized and following routines help me feel more prepared, confident, and in control of my daily responsibilities?

Core Idea

When students create simple habits for managing their physical spaces, digital work, and daily routines, they reduce stress, save time, and feel more capable of handling the demands of school and life.





Lesson Plan: Organization & Routines

Learning Objectives

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

1. Understand why organization and routines play an important role in staying prepared.
2. Identify personal strengths and challenges related to organizing materials, digital files, and daily routines.
3. Create systems for managing schoolwork, homework supplies, devices, and personal spaces.
4. Recognize how routines help reduce stress and improve follow-through.
5. Apply simple organizational strategies that help them locate materials quickly and begin tasks with less frustration.

Learning Rationale

Middle school brings new levels of complexity—multiple classes, different teachers, locker changes, homework from several subjects, and increased digital work. Without strong organizational skills and predictable routines, students often feel overwhelmed, lose track of important assignments, or waste time searching for materials.

Learning how to stay organized helps:

- Build independence
- Reduce stress and frustration
- Support working memory
- Improve task initiation and follow-through
- Create a strong foundation for all future EF skills

Key Vocabulary

You may choose to introduce these terms as needed:

- **Organization:** A system for keeping materials, information, and spaces arranged so they are easy to find and use.
- **Routine:** A set of actions that happen in the same order each day or week.
- **System:** A method or structure that keeps things running smoothly (such as a binder system, digital folder system, or nightly routine).
- **Reset:** A quick process of returning materials or spaces back to order.
- **Efficiency:** Doing tasks in a way that saves time, energy, or effort.
- **Preparation:** Getting things ready ahead of time to make future tasks easier.



Lesson Plan: Organization & Routines

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

Activity 1: Strategies & Tools

This activity will help students as they complete Activity 2. Please do these activities in order.

- Read the directions to your students.
- Allow pair discussions: Pairs discussing choices increases engagement and accuracy.
- Make it low-stakes and fun: Students love starring, and customizing their choices.
- Extension option: Have students choose one tool and create a tiny ad/poster for it: “Why this tool is awesome for middle schoolers!”

Activity 2: “Fix That System!” Challenge

- Read the directions to your students and help them get into pairs.
- Encourage multiple solutions—there’s no single right answer.
- If students struggle, ask: “How would this routine reduce stress?”

Activity 3: Digital Folder Build-Out

- Read through the directions with your students.
- Demonstrate naming conventions (e.g., 2026_Math_Unit2_ProjectDraft1).
- Encourage consistent capitalization and dates.
- Have students test each other’s systems — peer verification is powerful.
- Great activity for Chromebook, Google Drive, or iPad schools.

Activity 4: Routine Builder

- Read the directions with your students.
- Encourage routines that are simple, not perfect.
- Emphasize habit science: “Routines reduce decision fatigue.”
- Let students test each routine with an “unexpected problem.”

Activity 5: Organization Style Survey

- Read the directions with your students.
- Emphasize that no style is “good” or “bad”—only useful or unhelpful in the moment.
- Ask: “Does your style match how you currently organize?”



Lesson Plan: Organization & Routines

Activity 6: Create a Personal Organization Toolkit

- Read the directions with your students.
- Encourage a mix of digital and physical tools.
- Have students share their toolkit ideas with classmates — they love seeing must-have tools.
- Reinforce habit-building: “Tools only work if you use them consistently.”
- Great opportunity for a quick gallery walk.

Activity 7: Backpack or Binder Makeover

- Read the directions to your students.
- Share a model organized binder or backpack.
- Remind: “The best system is one you can keep up easily.”
- Pair students for “before/after” comparisons to build motivation.



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Supports

Lesson 1: Organization & 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 middle 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



Organization & Routines



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

- Understand why organization and routines play an important role in staying prepared.
- Identify strengths and challenges related to organizing materials, digital files, and daily routines.
- Create systems for managing schoolwork, homework, devices, and spaces.
- Recognize how routines help reduce stress and improve follow-through.
- Apply simple organizational strategies that help you locate materials quickly and begin tasks with less frustration.



Middle school gives your brain a workout. You move between classes, keep track of different teachers' expectations, manage homework from several subjects, and juggle stuff like devices, sports, and activities. Research shows that as school demands increase, your brain uses more working memory to keep track of everything.

But working memory is limited.

According to cognitive scientists, your brain can hold only 3–5 pieces of information at once before things start slipping. That's why being disorganized feels overwhelming — your brain is trying to carry too many things at the same time.

Organization isn't about being neat for neatness' sake. It's about taking pressure off your brain so it has more space to think, plan, and learn.

Studies in cognitive psychology show that when you organize your environment, two important things happen:

1. Your working memory frees up

If your backpack is chaos or your digital files are everywhere, your brain wastes energy searching, remembering, and guessing. But when systems are in place, your brain can use that energy for solving problems, remembering instructions, and focusing longer.



Organization & Routines

2. Your thinking becomes more efficient

Research on cognitive load shows that when your environment is cluttered or unpredictable, your brain has to work harder even on simple tasks. This is why organized spaces make school feel easier — your brain isn't fighting distractions before you even begin.

Scientists who study habits say that routines reduce something called decision fatigue — the mental exhaustion that happens from having to make too many choices. When you have routines like checking your planner, packing your backpack, resetting your workspace, and setting up your device folders you're not deciding from scratch every day. This saves energy and keeps you from forgetting necessary steps.

Humans repeat about 40% of their daily actions without thinking — which means routines are your hidden superpower.

Routines Make Life Easier

Research on adolescent brains shows:

- routines help lower stress hormones
- predictable habits increase follow-through
- structured environments help the brain focus
- routines improve sleep, which boosts memory and mood

Creating Your Own System

There's no single "correct" system. Research shows that systems work best when: they match your thinking style, are simple to use, are consistent, and make things easier. Ask yourself:

- Do I remember things best when I see them?
- Do I do better when everything has one place?
- Do digital reminders help me stay on track?
- Do checklists give me a sense of control?



Reflection Question

Which part of being organized—your materials, your digital work, or your routines—do you think would make the biggest difference for you this year if you improved it? Why?



Activity 1: Strategies & Tools

Match each tool or strategy on the left with the correct description on the right. These tools can help with organization, routines, planning, and staying focused. When you finish, star the THREE tools you want to try in your own system.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| A. A quick daily habit: if a task takes less than 60 seconds, do it now. | _____ Color-Coding System |
| B. Keeps different subjects separate using labeled sections. | _____ Digital Folders |
| C. A list that helps you see which tasks are most important to do first. | _____ File Naming Conventions |
| D. Assigning a color to each class to make sorting easier. | _____ Weekly Reset |
| E. A special spot at home where school supplies, homework, and devices always go. | _____ Checklists |
| F. A timer method that improves focus by working in bursts, like 20 minutes of work + 5 minutes of break. | _____ Routines |
| G. Using the same naming style for every digital file so you can quickly search and find things. | _____ Timer Method |
| H. Taking everything out of your backpack and reorganizing it at least once a week. | _____ “Home Base” for Materials |
| I. Visual markers (stickers, symbols, tape) that remind you what belongs where. | _____ Priority List |
| J. Doing a regular end-of-week cleanup to reset your backpack, binder, desk, or digital files. | _____ Backpack Sort |
| K. Structured steps you follow daily. | _____ Alarm or Reminder App |
| L. Short lists that break tasks into smaller steps so you don’t forget anything. | _____ Binder with Tabs |
| M. A digital notification that reminds you when it’s time to do something. | _____ Visual Labels |
| N. Creating folders on your device to store notes, assignments, and resources by class or topic. | _____ “One-Minute Rule” |