



Education &
Communities



NSW Centre for Effective Reading

Teacher Resources

Working with students with cognitive difficulties: Organisation and Planning

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Organisation and Planning

What is it?	How is organisation measured?	Implications of Poorly Developed Organisation and Planning Skills	Implications of Well Developed Organisation and Planning Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Managing personal belongings and task materials, such as school bag, clothes and homework assignments » Managing time efficiently, such as starting and completing tasks efficiently » Putting ideas into logical, ordered sequences and steps » Breaking down tasks into smaller, manageable components 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Working on a complex drawing task that requires a child to organise their approach in order to copy drawing accurately and quickly » Working on a task that requires a child to plan a route » Working on a task which requires a child to plan and execute an efficient and systematic search 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Struggle to get ready for school on time » Difficulty getting things organised in the classroom (e.g. getting out pencils, paper, glue or the right book for a classroom activity) » Does not know where things are in the classroom » Difficulty prioritising activities and/or deciding which tasks should take precedence over other activities » Difficulty determining the amount of time that a specific task may take » Not completing work on time » Become overwhelmed with large tasks » Difficulty starting a task because they do not know where to begin » Start a task impulsively without planning the necessary steps » Difficulty putting thoughts down on paper in an ordered and logical way » Difficulty integrating new information with pre-existing knowledge » Difficulty completing homework and class room activities or homework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Able to complete homework efficiently » Checks back on work for accuracy » Follows through on instructions correctly » Knows where to begin in a task » Able to systematically work through the necessary steps in a task » Hands work in on time » Able to keep track of and find personal belongings easily » Has good ideas and can get these down on paper » Written work is well-organised



Strategies to facilitate organisation and planning

Classroom Organisation	Classroom Management	Instructional Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ensure classroom environment is well-organised to minimise distractions » Position child close to teacher and away from distracting children, windows or noisy corridors » Ensure child can easily see teaching presentations » Keep frequently used materials labeled and readily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Teach student how to prepare an uncluttered workspace to complete tasks » Develop routines and procedures for frequently occurring tasks » Promote student responsibility and accountability for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Deliver directions, explanations and instructional content in a clear, concise manner and at an appropriate pace » Simplify directions by providing in pictures or in writing and numbering each step » Use graphic organisers/semantic mapping to alert students to what will be included/expected from the lesson » Use a variety of ways to present information (visual and verbal) » Support explanations with visuals such as pictures, graphs, maps and/or diagrams » Write important ideas on the board. Use different coloured markers for emphasis or coding on the board, text or worksheets » Clearly set out a step-by-step written plan that can be followed to finish a task. Establish a 'template' step-by-step plan for common tasks such as writing a story » Give the student prompts to assist with their organisation and completion of tasks – such as checklists or picture cues that set out the steps of a task and can be ticked off as the steps are completed » Check to see if the student needs any help in getting started with any follow up independent tasks » Use a timer/visual prompt to define work times » One to one support where possible



What is Organisation and Planning?

The ability to plan actions and responses in the everyday context. **Organisation and planning skills** are components of **executive function** which allow a person to:

- » break down large tasks into smaller, manageable components
- » organise ideas into logical, ordered sequences or steps
- » manage task materials and belongings (e.g., manage homework assignments)
- » manage time (e.g. start and complete a task in reasonable timeframe)

Research suggests a strong association between organisational skills and academic performance¹. The demands on organisational skill tend to increase as children progress through school and escalate following transition to high school².

How is Organisation and Planning assessed?

Organisation and planning is assessed using a combination of specific **standardised measures** and behavioural observations including:

- » **Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure (ROCF)**³ requires a child to copy a design. The test is scored on the accuracy of the copy, the time taken to copy the figure, and the organisational approach to the task.
- » **Behavioural Assessment of the Dysexecutive Syndrome for Children (BADS-C)**⁴ examines a number of aspects of executive functioning in children. In regard to organisation and planning specifically, it encompasses a number of novel and child friendly tasks such as planning a route or working on a number of activities to a time deadline.
- » Tower of London (TOL)⁵ is a novel test of complex planning and problem solving abilities. Planning is essential to the success of this task, as impulsively starting the task without planning ahead will result in unnecessary errors and an increased time to complete tasks correctly.

Parents and teachers also complete questionnaires to document their observations of the child's organisation and planning abilities in the home and school settings. An example of this is the Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Functions (BRIEF)⁶ which examines a number of aspects of organisation and planning including the ability to anticipate future events, set goals, and develop appropriate steps ahead of time to carry out a task or activity. Parents/caregivers are asked to rate their child's behaviour on issues such as:

- 'Does not bring home homework, assignment sheets or materials'
- 'Has good ideas but cannot get them on paper'
- 'Forgets to hand in homework, even when completed'
- 'Has good ideas but does not get the job done'
- 'Becomes overwhelmed by large assignments'
- 'Underestimates time needed to complete tasks'
- 'Does not plan ahead for school assignments'
- 'Written work is poorly organised'
- 'Starts assignments or chores at the last minute'

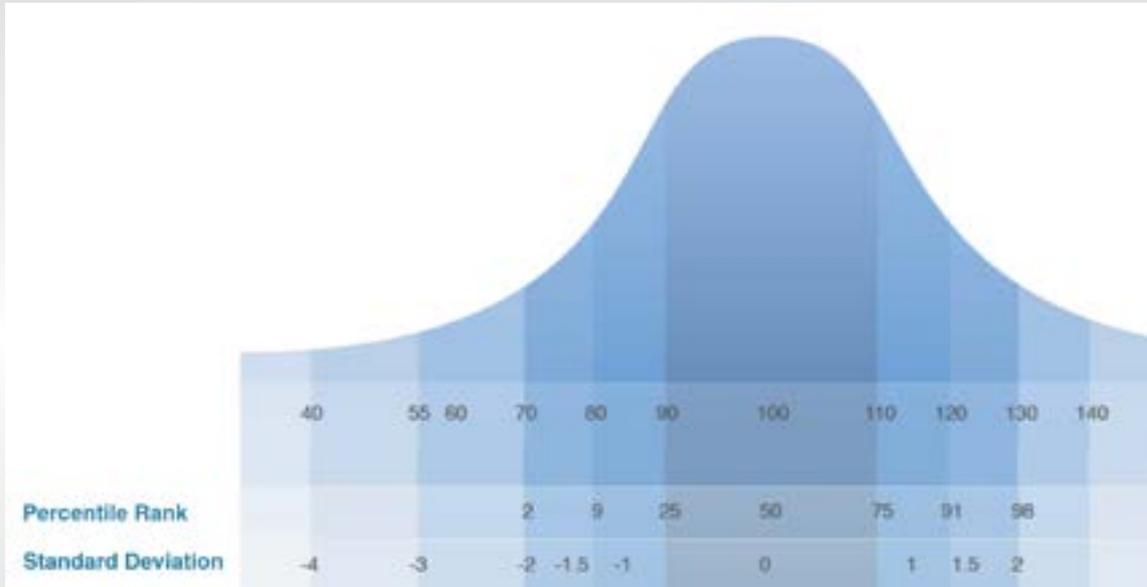


How are standardised assessment results interpreted?

Results are usually described as standardised scores which indicate how a child performs in comparison to other children of the same age.

The following information helps you understand what these scores mean. For more information regarding the normal distribution of scores see [here](#).

Understanding assessment results



NOTE: Z-scores, IQ scores T-scores, and scaled scores are considered interval scales of measurement. These scores indicate rank and meaningfully reflect the relative distance between scores. Percentiles only indicate ranking, by themselves they do not indicate how far apart scores are.

Typically developing organisation and planning

- » Organisation and planning abilities, like other executive functions, first emerge in early childhood and continue to develop well into adolescence and early adulthood⁷
- » The development of executive function coincides with the development of the frontal region of the brain^{7 8}
- » We have different expectations for the organisational skills of a child in kindergarten in comparison to Year 6



Development of organisation and planning skills

Typically developing organisational/planning skills may present as:	Poorly developed organisational/planning skills may present as:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Ability to manage personal belongings and task materials, such as school bag, clothes and homework assignments» Ability to manage time efficiently, such as starting and completing tasks efficiently» Ability to organise ideas into logical, ordered sequences and steps» Ability to break down tasks into smaller, manageable components» Ability to use language in an ordered and logical way to give instructions, tell a story or express ideas and thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Difficulty prioritising activities» Difficulty determining the amount of time that a specific task may take» Difficulty organising belongings, prioritising actions, allotting time efficiently and meeting deadlines» Struggling to get themselves ready for school on time» Difficulty getting things organised at school (e.g. getting out pencils, paper, glue and the right book for a classroom activity)» Appearing lazy and not completing work» Starting a task impulsively, without planning what steps are necessary» Completing a task but not meeting the goal that was set» Understanding parts of a task or subject but not being able to integrate them effectively» Not knowing where things are in the classroom» Difficulty completing homework and class room activities or homework» Difficulty getting thoughts down on paper. Has difficulty using language in an ordered and logical way to give instructions, tell a story or express ideas and thoughts» Attempting tasks in haphazard ways and finishing things slowly or inefficiently» ‘Jumping’ from one topic to another or going off on tangents in conversation, oral presentations or written tasks



Classroom Strategies

These strategies, while normal classroom practice, also assist in supporting students with poorly developed organisation and planning skills.

Strategies are described in the following areas:

1. Classroom organisation

- » Ensure furniture arrangement promotes learning opportunities
- » Maintain plans for materials and resources
- » Teach organisational strategies explicitly

2. Classroom management

- » Develop classroom rules collaboratively with students
- » Communicate classroom rules verbally and in writing
- » Set up a system of specific consequences and rewards
- » Develop routines and procedures for activities that occur regularly
- » Promote student responsibility and accountability for learning

3. Teaching and learning strategies

- » Before the lesson
- » During the lesson
- » After the lesson

1. Classroom organisation

Students with poorly developed organisation and planning skills require a classroom environment that is well organised to minimise distractions and allow the teacher to monitor student behaviour. Students also require explicit instruction to develop their own organisational skills.

In the classroom:

Ensuring furniture arrangement promotes learning opportunities and minimises distractions

- » Keep frequently used teaching materials and student supplies readily accessible. By minimising the time getting ready and cleaning up, activities can begin, and end promptly
- » Arrange student seating to allow for maximum visibility and accessibility to the learning activities and to limit distractions⁹
- » Seat student near, or with students, who will be good role models and where they can be easily monitored by the teacher



Maintain plans for materials and resources

- » Develop routines for distribution and access to classroom materials. For example:
 - place materials for student activities in a regular location for easy student access
 - have procedures for distribution and collection of materials and work books
 - have **labelled** tubs for student work books and materials
- » Keep student desks free of unnecessary materials. Have student periodically sort through and clean out desk, book bag, and other places where materials are stored
- » Teach student how to prepare an uncluttered workspace to complete tasks. For example, prompt the student to clear away unnecessary books or other materials before beginning work
- » Model the use of organisational and planning skills in the use of materials and resources in the classroom

Teach organisational strategies explicitly

Teachers can present their students with highly structured environments but it is also important that students develop skills in organising their own space and materials. The following steps can be used to develop students' learning and generalisation of organisational strategies¹⁰.



Tips for teaching organisational skills

1. Teaching organisational skills can start with students K-4 using the following steps:

- » Describe the structure of the classroom - the teacher and students discuss the organisation of the classroom space and materials so that students can understand why things have been set up in a particular way
- » Use the structure consistently - students practise using the existing classroom structure and the teacher can promote independence by prompting students

STUDENT: I don't have a pencil

TEACHER: Where do we store tools in the classroom?

- » Evaluate the structure - as students become familiar with the existing classroom structure, the teacher can regularly have discussions that encourage students to evaluate the classroom structure
 - Does it work?
 - Why does it work?
 - Are there any problems?
- » Adjust the structure - on the basis of the discussion the students can collectively devise solutions to the problems
- » Create a new structure - during the second half of the year the teacher can ask the class to revise an aspect of the structure of the classroom as a class project. For example: a single aspect of organisation, such as setting up the class library, can be selected for students to think about, plan and implement

2. As students' progress into upper primary, teachers can build upon what students have learned about organising their space with the following steps:

- » Have a class discussion about organisation and how it works -
 - What do you know about organisation?
 - Why is organisation important?
 - Are there different ways to organise?
- » The teacher can share how she likes to organise their things at school. Students can share how they like to keep their things organised at home and school
- » Have students organise their desks and materials in a way that matches their needs (i.e. one student may colour code and another may need additional space in a tote tray). Students could also work in pairs to solve problems collaboratively
- » Following this, students need to apply four critical metacognitive steps to fine-tune their organisation:

Say how to organise - describe the structure. For example: a student might say, "I'm organising my desk. First, I need to make groups of things that go together. I can put the papers in my folder. Extra pencils can go in my pencil case. My workbooks go in my tote tray."

Use the structure consistently

Evaluate the structure - Is it working or not?

Adjust the structure - How can I make it work better?



2. Classroom management

Teachers need to provide support to students with poorly developed organisation and planning skills through classroom management strategies that provide routine and structure and develop student independence.

In the classroom:

Develop and communicate (verbally and in writing) classroom rules

Develop a limited number of **rules** (three to five) that are clear, specific, and stated positively¹¹:

- » involve students in the process of understanding, developing, and implementing rules and procedures
- » review rules regularly
- » reinforce rules by practising them with students

Example of classroom rules

Be Respectful	Be Responsible	Be Cooperative
Raise your hand to speak	Hand in completed assignments on time	Do what your teacher asks immediately
Keep hands, feet and objects to yourself	Sit in your seat unless you have permission to leave	
	Start work immediately, work during work times	
	Bring paper, pencil and books to class	

An effective system of consequences and rewards should:

- » tell students what happens if they break a rule
- » tell students what happens if they follow a rule
- » introduce choice - once a student knows the consequence they can make an informed choice
- » provide feedback to students about their behaviour¹²

Be sure consequences are reasonable and logical to the situation and be consistent and fair in applying consequences.



Developing routines and procedures for activities that occur regularly

Procedures should explain the accepted process for carrying out a specific activity in the classroom. For example; sharpening pencils, attending assembly, moving around the classroom, handing in completed work.

To develop procedures and routines for the class or a specific student:

- » make a list of all the activities in the classroom
- » determine the desired outcome e.g. entering the classroom
- » decide how students need to complete the task - break into a series of steps
- » consider what errors students are likely to make
- » consider problem areas or problem times - a well-designed routine can often overcome these problems

Breaking an activity into a series of steps makes it more manageable for some students. Practise these procedures with students, particularly at the beginning of the year.

Entering the classroom

Line up at the classroom door when the bell rings
Talk quietly until the teacher arrives
Listen to teacher instructions
Walk into the classroom and sit at your desk
Wait quietly until the teacher is ready



Maintain a consistent daily routine in the classroom. Provide a daily schedule and refer to it often e.g. **visual timetable**. Some students may require an individual copy of the schedule.

Promote student responsibility and accountability for learning

Make sure students fully understand what they are supposed to do and how they are to do it:

- » monitor student completion of tasks and mastery of skills/content
- » provide timely feedback on tasks

Develop strategies to support student independence:

- » visual or written prompts for specific tasks
- » colour code workbooks according to subject
- » provide explicit strategy instruction

Teach students to seek clarification when instructions are not understood:

- » Teach the student to use a diary, daily planner and timetable to organise things such as appointments and when school work is due, and to schedule appropriate time for homework and assignments to be completed.

If the student continually leaves books at school and is therefore unable to complete homework, provide two sets of books...one that stays at home and one that stays in school. Teach the student how to break a task down into smaller parts, and work out in what order things need to be done.



3. Teaching and learning strategies

Teachers can use a number of adjustments to their teaching and learning to cater for the needs of students with poor organisation and planning skills.

These can include:

Before the lesson

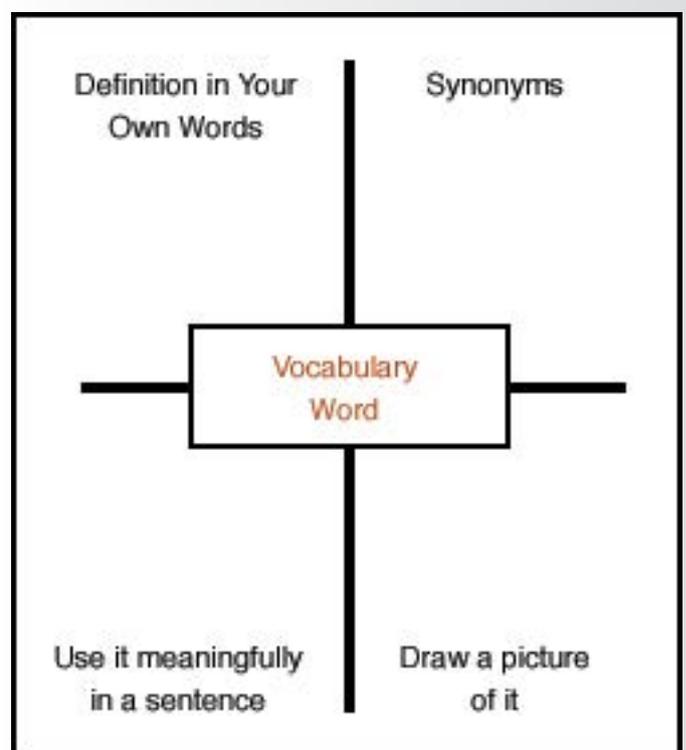
- » Provide information from a variety of sources – e.g. written text, videos, podcasts, audio text
- » Introduce new vocabulary prior to lesson - prepare a glossary of terms, use visual aids such as **word maps**

Visual aids for introducing new vocabulary

Glossary of terms

diggings	an area where gold is mined
discriminate (against)	to treat someone unfairly because of what they are
erosion	environmental damage caused when water washes away soil
Eureka Stockade	a battle between diggers and troops at Ballarat in 1854
stockade	small fort

Vocabulary word map



- » Use **graphic organisers** or semantic mapping to alert students to what will be included and expected from the lesson or discussion¹³
 - use a graphic organiser to provide an overview of the content and expected learning at the beginning of the session
 - link what is being learned to previous lessons or background knowledge
 - complete the graphic organiser during and/or after the lesson





During the lesson

- » Support explanations with visuals such as pictures, graphs, maps and/or diagrams¹⁴
- » Deliver directions, explanations and instructional content in a clear, concise manner and at an appropriate pace
- » Deliver verbal instructions prior to handing out materials
- » Break information into key points when delivering directions, explanations and instructions and monitor to determine student comprehension
- » Give step-by-step instructions with the steps outlined in writing or shown in picture sequences. Use demonstrations along with the presentation of information
- » Write important ideas on the board. Use different colour markers for emphasis or coding on the board, text or worksheets
- » Present a new concept by relating it to previously presented information
- » Repeat, paraphrase, and summarize all important points, particularly at the conclusion of the lesson or discussion
- » Clearly set out a step-by-step written plan that can be followed to finish a task. Establish a 'template' step-by-step plan for common tasks such as writing a story
- » Give the student prompts to assist with their organisation and completion of tasks. This could include written checklists, or picture cues that set out the steps of a task and can be ticked off as the steps are completed

After the lesson

- » Begin modelling task time estimation by breaking down after lesson tasks into smaller parts and then identifying an estimated time for each part. Gradually, students can start to take more responsibility in estimating times for daily tasks. This will provide good preparation for students when assignments and tasks increase in difficulty and volume in high school
- » Check to see if the student needs any help in getting started with any follow up independent tasks
- » Use uncluttered and clearly formatted tests and worksheets:
 - block sections on paper for each response of a task by drawing lines or folding. Show students how to cover parts of text or worksheet not being used
 - give page numbers for locating answers to questions
 - reduce the amount of information on a page (e.g. less print, fewer pictures per page, highlight important information)
 - arrange items so that it is easy to know where to start and how to proceed



- » Give the student an individual responsibility checklist.

Individual responsibility checklist				
	1	2	3	Sticker
I like to listen to instructions before I begin				
I ask questions if I don't understand				
I make a plan before I start work				
I finish my work				

- » Use a **timer** or visual prompt to define work times:



- » Have the student keep a journal or homework diary that includes the instructions and timelines.

Homework diary			
Week beginning	Homework tasks	When due	Parent/carer signature
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
My achievements this week			

- » Communicate homework assignments and expectations to parents so they can help, if needed
- » Focus on and complete one task at a time
- » Keep track of how well students complete their assigned homework. Discuss and resolve with them and their parents any problems in completing these assignments. For example, evaluate the difficulty of the assignments and how long the students spend on their homework each night. Keep in mind that the quality, rather than the quantity, of homework assigned is the most important issue. While doing homework is an important part of developing organisation of study skills, it should be used to reinforce skills and to review material learned in class, rather than to present, in advance, large amounts of material that is new to the student

Resource List

Executive Function

What is Executive Function? (Video)

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/inbrief_series/inbrief_executive_function/

Development of Executive Function

http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/everyday_learning/EDL1203_SampleChapter.pdf

Assessment of Executive Function (Powerpoint)

http://www.caspwebcasts.org/pdfs/ch08_02.pdf

Executive Function in Education

http://www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au/tfel/files/links/link_144752.pdf

<http://learningprogram.rmhc.org.au/teachers/impaired-executive-functioning.php>

Standardised Psychological Assessment

<http://www.elsevierhealth.com/media/us/samplechapters/9780443100994/9780443100994.pdf>

Rey Osterreith Complex Figure

<http://alpha.fdu.edu/psychology/rocf.htm>



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