

Executive Skills Checklist for High School Students

INSTRUCTIONS: Think about a specific student as you read through the Checklist. Consider which phrases describe a significant struggle for that student. (We all tap our fingers from time to time, but that does not represent a problem most of the time.) Check a box if the phrase describes a choice or behaviour that is a genuine obstacle for the student.

Inhibition

- Hurries to complete work just to “be done”
- Asks to the bathroom multiple times in a period
- Has a hard time staying off phone
- Stands up in the middle of instruction (or a video)
- Blurts out ideas at the wrong time
- Makes inappropriate comments
- Tap fingers or moves leg
- Talks during instruction or work time
- Does not stay in the assigned seat

Working Memory

- Starts the steps of a task, but not in the right order
- Does not bring materials (e.g., binder, pencil, text) to class
- Leaves personal belongings or materials in classroom
- Forgets to turn in assignments
- Does not follow instructions
- Does not know deadlines
- Needs regular reminders of key concepts from lesson

Shift

- Is often late to class
- Will not stop working on assignment until it is complete
- Has trouble thinking of different approaches to a problem (e.g., my way or the highway)
- Bothered by unexpected changes (e.g., having a substitute teacher, change in the agenda)
- Has a hard time forgiving and forgetting
- Is concerned with small details and misses the big picture (e.g., worried about word count)
- Has a difficult time being creative

Emotional Control

- Irritated when work is too challenging or when asked to redo an assignment (asks “why am I doing this?”)
- Becomes emotional when assignment is confusing
- Escapes to the bathroom because of student drama
- Acts without thinking of the consequence
- Considered by peers to be moody
- Overreacts emotionally (e.g., gets very angry, cries during test)
- Gets upset quickly or easily over little things (e.g., fights with others)

Organization (Materials and Planning)

- Feels overwhelmed by tasks
- Gets stuck in the planning stage
- Starts assignment without proper materials
- Maintains a messy locker (or desk)
- Misplaces materials and personal belongings
- Eats something at desk and leaves garbage
- Does not put paper in the binder properly (e.g., papers are stuffed in bag)
- Does not take effective notes (e.g., messy, incomplete, focuses on non-essentials)
- Does not study for tests
- Does not check classroom webpage (e.g., Google Classroom)

Monitor (Self and Task)

- Does not notice when others stop listening
- Does not realize when others are getting upset
- Makes careless errors in assignments
- Has difficulty completing tasks
- Takes bathroom breaks longer than necessary
- Does not recognize when being off task

Initiation

- Asks to do the work at home, but does not get it done there
- Does not seem very excited or passionate about interests
- Is slow to get things started
- Comes up with excuses for procrastinating
- Refuses to work in class
- Easily distracted during the early stages of a task
- Feels defeated about tasks
- Does not effectively prioritize tasks (e.g., wants to complete a late assignment before finishing the current assignment)

How many checks represent a concern? There is no specific quantity of checks that represent a concern. To identify what supports to prioritize, consider how much of a problem is caused by each item.

ANALYSIS: Executive functions are deeply interrelated so interpret these results thoughtfully. For example, “Does not study for tests” is an item listed under Organization (Materials and Planning) but it might just as well be listed under Inhibition. After all, there are many reasons why a student does not study for tests. One student might not study because they cannot put down the phone. Another student does not study because they do not have a reliable system to manage their notes and homework. Those students have different executive function profiles and need different types of support.

