

## Integrating Executive Skills into IEPs and 504 Plans for Students Who Are Smart but Scattered

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### 3 Key Concepts about Executive Skills

1. They are brain-based skills (managed from the frontal lobes) that take 25 years to reach full maturation.

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### 3 Key Concepts about Executive Skills

2. Until they are fully mature, it's the job of parents, teachers, and adults who work with kids to act as *surrogate frontal lobes* for those kids.

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### 3 Key Concepts about Executive Skills

- 3. At a developmentally appropriate time and in a developmentally appropriate manner, we transfer those skills from our frontal lobes to our kids. Explicit teaching works better than crossing our fingers and hoping for the best.

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### ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

- Parent and teacher interviews
- Behavior rating scales
- Formal assessment
- Behavior observations
- Informal assessment

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### ASSESSING EXECUTIVE SKILLS

#### Informal Measures

- Parent interview (look for specific examples of problems in areas likely to be affected by executive skill deficits, including problems with homework, chores, following directions, social interactions, organizational skills, etc.).
- Teacher interviews (again, look for specificity of examples in relevant areas, e.g., following complex directions, task initiation, handling long-term assignments, response to open-ended tasks, social interactions, responses to classroom/school rules, etc.).

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**STUDENT INTERVIEW—EXCERPT:**

**HOMEWORK:** I'm going to ask you some questions about homework and the kinds of problems kids sometimes have with homework. Please tell me if you think these are problems for you. I may ask you to give me examples.

Item	Not a problem	Notes
Getting started on homework (TI). Related questions: What makes it hard? When is the best time to do homework? Are some subjects harder to start than others?		
Sticking with it long enough to get it done (SA). Related questions: Is this worse with some subjects than others? What do you say to yourself that either leads you to give up or stick with it? Does the length of the assignment make a difference in your ability to stick with it?		

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**HOMEWORK (continued)**

Item	Not a problem	Notes
Remembering assignments (WM). Related questions: Do you have trouble remembering to write down assignments, bring home necessary materials, or hand in assignments? Do you lose things necessary to complete the task?		
Becoming distracted while doing homework (SA). Related questions: What kinds of things distract you? Have you found places to study that minimize distractions? How do you handle distractions when they come up?		

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**ASSESSMENT OF EXECUTIVE SKILLS**

**Behavior Rating Scales**

- **Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function-2 (BRIEF-2).** Available from PAR ([parinc.com](http://parinc.com)).
- **Child Behavior Checklist/Teacher Report Form.** (ASEBA.org)
- **ADHD Rating Scales-V.** ([guilford.com](http://guilford.com))
- **Brown ADD Scales.** ([pearsonclinical.com](http://pearsonclinical.com))

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### Limitations of Formal Assessment

Feature	Executive skill affected
Examiner cues child to begin	Task initiation
Tasks are brief	Sustained attention
Examiner's presence communicates that performance is being monitored	Task initiation, sustained attention, goal-directed persistence
Most standardized tests involve closed-ended tasks (i.e., 1 correct answer)	Flexibility, metacognition

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### Limitations of Formal Assessment

The most complex cognitive task within any psychologist's repertoire is less complex than real world demands on executive skills, and there is no way of determining with any certainty how well these tests map on to the real world.

Thus, in the parlance of neuropsychologists, *absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*.

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### What Do Executive Skill Weaknesses Look Like in Students?

- Acts without thinking
- Interrupts others
- Overreacts to small problems
- Upset by changes in plans
- Overwhelmed by large assignments
- Talks or plays too loudly
- Resists change of routine
- Doesn't notice impact of behavior on others
- Doesn't see their behavior as part of the issue
- Easily overstimulated and has trouble calming down
- Gets stuck on one topic or activity
- Gets overly upset about "little things"
- Out of control more than peers
- Can't come up with more than one way to solve a problem
- Low tolerance for frustration
- Acts wild or out of control

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### What Do Executive Skill Weaknesses Look Like in Students?

- Doesn't bother to write down assignment
- Forgets directions
- Forgets to bring materials home
- Keeps putting off homework
- Runs out of steam before finishing work
- Chooses "fun stuff" over homework or chores
- Passive study methods (or doesn't study)
- Forgets homework/forgets to pass it in
- Leaves long-term assignments or chores until last minute
- Can't break down long-term assignments
- Sloppy work
- Messy notebooks
- Loses or misplaces things (books, papers, notebooks, mittens, keys, cell phones, etc.)
- Can't find things in backpack

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### What Do Executive Skill Weaknesses Look Like in Younger Students (K-2)?

- Forgets directions
- Forgets to bring materials back and forth between home and school
- Runs out of steam before finishing work
- Chooses "fun stuff" over homework or chores
- Leaves a trail of belongings wherever he/she goes
- Sloppy work
- Loses or misplaces things (books, papers, permission slips, mittens, lunch money, etc.)
- Messy desk/cubby areas/backpack
- Leaves a "paper trail"—scattered around the room

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### Special Education Decision-Making

When does it shift from being a pattern of strengths and weaknesses to becoming an educational disability?

*When the student is failing classes or grades due to weak executive skills, that qualifies as a disability.*

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ADA Definition of Disability

An individual with a **disability** is **defined** by the **ADA** as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

*Failing = evidence of impairment*

*School = major life activity*

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Who falls through the cracks?

Kids who AREN'T FAILING.

These include:

- Gifted kids who could take tests with their eyes closed and still pass.
- Kids who aren't failing because their parents are *working overtime* to make sure they don't.

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The Best Option

A well-designed and well-implemented *Response to Intervention* model built on a multi-tiered system of support, beginning with whole class accommodations to support weak executive skills and to teach these skills explicitly in a developmentally appropriate manner.

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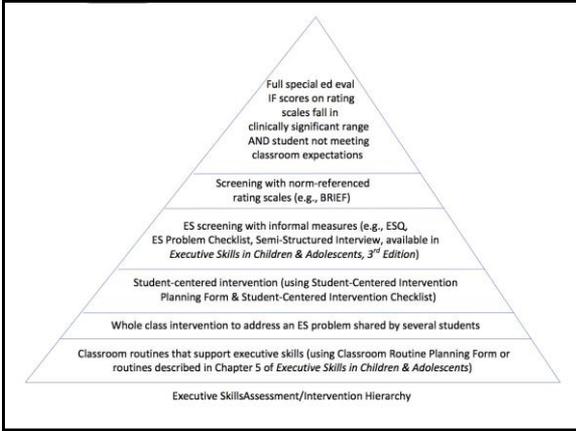
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## 504 Plans for Executive Skill Challenges

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### Who qualifies for services under Section 504?

Students whose mental or physical impairment substantially limits their ability to learn or any other major life activity.

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By the way...

School districts, in determining whether a student has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits that student in a major life activity, must **not** consider the ameliorating effects of any mitigating measures that student is using.

One example cited by the ed.gov website of a mitigating measure: Medication.

Would parental support also be considered a mitigating measure? Something to think about...

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What services are available to students with disabilities under 504?

*Section 504 requires recipients to provide to students with disabilities appropriate educational services designed to meet the individual needs of such students to the same extent as the needs of students without disabilities are met. An appropriate education for a student with a disability under the Section 504 regulations could consist of education in regular classrooms, education in regular classes with supplementary services, and/or special education and related services.*

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/S04faq.html#interrelationship>

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Sample 504 Plan for ADHD Page 2 of 2

ACCOMMODATIONS AND/OR SERVICES			
Area of Educational Need	Accommodation or Service	Person(s) Responsible for Implementing	Frequency of Accommodation or Service
Organization	Write homework assignments in the planner and have the teacher(s) initial.	Student, Teacher(s)	Daily At the end of each class
Organization	Provide an extra set of books to keep at home.	Teacher(s)	Annually
Disability	Seat student near the front of the class or away from peer distractions.	Teacher(s)	Daily
Disability	Provide student with a quiet area for test-taking and in-class individual work.	Teacher(s)	As needed
Inequality	Give (and request to) signed copy signals notifying student to raise his hand before answering or writing.	School staff, Student	As needed

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Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Understood

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Writing IEP Goals to Address Executive Skill Challenges

Seven horizontal lines for writing notes.

Use this formula

The student will exhibit [specific executive skill] by [specific behavior]

Seven horizontal lines for writing notes.

Examples

- The student will demonstrate response inhibition by using acceptable language and behavior to handle conflict situations.
- The student will demonstrate working memory by bringing all appropriate materials to and from school every day.
- The student will demonstrate emotional control by using coping strategies to recover when he/she begins to get upset/angry/frustrated/anxious.
- The student will demonstrate task initiation by starting class assignments within 3 minutes of the prompt to begin working.

Seven horizontal lines for writing notes.

### Examples

- The student will demonstrate flexibility by adjusting quickly and calmly when confronted with the unexpected (e.g., changes in plans or routines, disappointment, being told no).
- The student will demonstrate sustained attention by accurately completing classwork and homework within the time allotted or within suggested time frames.
- The student will demonstrate task initiation by starting class assignments within 3 minutes of the prompt to begin working.
- The student will demonstrate planning/prioritizing by creating and following daily homework or study plans.

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### Examples

- The student will demonstrate organization by placing materials in a specified place in notebooks, backpacks, desks, and study areas.
- The student will demonstrate time management by completing assignments by the due date.
- The student will demonstrate goal-directed persistence by being able to define a long-term goal and develop and follow a plan to achieve that goal.
- The student will demonstrate metacognition by selecting and using the most study strategies to accomplish a task.

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### Progress Monitoring

Whenever possible, use data that is already being collected.

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### Naturally Occurring Progress Monitoring Options

#### DATA ROUTINELY COLLECTED BY SCHOOLS OR TEACHERS

Class attendance
Homework completion rates
Percent homework handed in on time
Grades on homework assignments
Test or quiz grades
Class participation (especially in foreign language classes)
Discipline referrals

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### Other Progress Monitoring Options

- Count and graph behaviors associated with executive skills.
- Use checklists to monitor performance.
- Use goal attainment scaling.
- Use rubrics.

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### Counting and Graphing Behaviors

1. Identify the behavior of concern
2. Define it so it is observable and countable
3. Decide who will count the behavior
4. Create graph to show the behaviors

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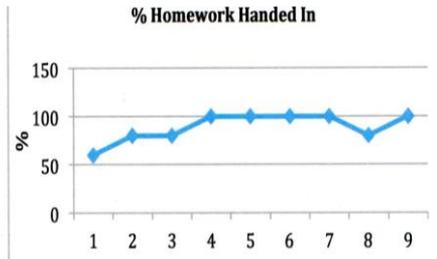
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### Example: Tracking Homework Handed In




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### Other Examples

Executive Skill	Behavior to be Counted
Response inhibition	"Call-outs" during morning meeting (graph total #)
Working memory	Bringing gym clothes to PE class (graph # on a weekly basis)
Emotional control	"Meltdowns" (whining, crying, angry voice) during independent work time (graph total #)
Organization	Homework placed in appropriate "Complete" and "Incomplete" folders (Daily checks with percentage graphed on a weekly basis).

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### Another Option: 5-Point Scales

**5** I can't stand this and ready to explode.  
I want to hit someone, something, or throw something. I need someone to help me get to a safe place so I can calm down. 😡

**4** I am getting too angry.  
My brain isn't working clearly. I might say or do something I will be sorry for later. I need to go to my safe place to calm down. 😠

**3** I am getting really irritated.  
I need to walk away from the situation. I will tell my teacher that I need a break. 😡

**2** I am doing OK.  
I'm not pleased, but I'm not upset. I can stay where I am and keep working. I can control my anger to myself. 😐

**1** I am doing great.  
I feel good about myself and about what I'm going on in school. 😊

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## Another Option: 5-Point Scales

Feelings Chart	
<b>5</b>	<p><b>How I feel:</b> 😞</p> <p><b>I need some help!</b></p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>How I feel:</b> 😞</p> <p><b>I'm really upset.</b></p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>How I feel:</b> 😞</p> <p><b>I've got a problem.</b></p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>How I feel:</b> 😞</p> <p><b>Things are pretty good.</b></p>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>How I feel:</b> 😊</p> <p><b>Feeling Great!</b></p>

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## Another Option: 5-Point Scales

5-Point Scale (Anxiety)		
Feels Like	What I can do	
<b>5</b>	I'm going to breakdown (cry, begin pacing and banging my head).	I can leave the room with permission and go to home base.
<b>4</b>	My stomach is starting to hurt and I'm having difficulty concentrating.	I can ask to talk privately to an adult. I can listen to my iPod with calming music (headphones).
<b>3</b>	I'm feeling uneasy and I'm starting to sweat.	I can refer to my coping cards and use deep breathing.
<b>2</b>	I feel ok, I can handle the situation.	Self-talk and reassure myself that I can do it!
<b>1</b>	I feel great. No problem!	

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## Checklists

Things that can be turned into checklists:

- To-do lists (e.g., morning work)
- Multi-step assignments (e.g., elements of a chemistry lab report)
- Step-by-step procedures (e.g., proofreading checklist)
- Behavioral strategies (e.g., steps to take to “stay calm” in a crisis)

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**Incorporating checklists into outcome measures**

- Keep track of percentage of steps followed or items completed
- Allot points for each item on the checklist and count the total points earned
- Keep track of frequency of handing in the checklist

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**Example: Proofreading checklist for first graders learning to write sentences**

Place a check (✓) by each item:

- All sentences begin with a capital letter.
- All sentences end with a period.

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**CONSISTENT MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT ORGANIZATION**

CRITERIA	EACH OF THE CRITERIA IS WORTH 1 POINTS APiece.
<b>DUE DATES:</b> THE STUDENT WRITES DUE DATES AT THE TOP OF ALL ASSIGNMENTS.	
<b>NO STUFFING:</b> THE STUDENT'S BINDER AND TEXTBOOK DO NOT CONTAIN LOOSE PAPERS, AND HE/SHE USES THE TAB DIVIDERS AND POCKETS APPROPRIATELY.	
<b>MATERIALS:</b> THE STUDENT HAS ALL NECESSARY MATERIALS FOR CLASS. (EX. PENCIL, PAPER, ETC.)	
<b>PLANNER:</b> THE PLANNER IS FILLED OUT.	
<b>COMPLETE/INCOMPLETE SECTION:</b> THE STUDENT'S BINDER CONTAINS EITHER A FOLDER OR SECTION FOR COMPLETE AND INCOMPLETE HOMEWORK.	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>

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## Goal Attainment Scaling

A quick and easy way to gauge progress toward achieving individual goals set by teachers or by students themselves.

Step 1: Define goal

Step 2: Identify 5 outcome levels. 0 = current level; other levels are either somewhat more or less than current level (+1, -1) or much more or less than current level (+2, -2).

Step 3: On a daily or weekly basis, determine how well the goal has been met and graph the results.

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### Example: Remembering Homework Materials

Level of Attainment	Behavior
-2 (much less than expected)	Carrie remembers everything she has to bring home for homework 1 day out of 5.
-1 (somewhat less than expected)	Carrie remembers everything she has to bring home for homework 2 days out of 5.
0 (current level)	Carrie remembers everything she has to bring home for homework 3 days out of 5.
+1 (somewhat more than expected)	Carrie remembers everything she has to bring home for homework 4 days out of 5.
+2 (much more than expected)	Carrie remembers everything she has to bring home for homework 5 days out of 5.

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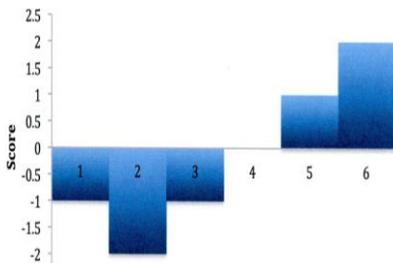
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### Graphing: Remembering Homework Materials




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## Rubrics

Rubrics list a set of criteria that describe a behavior or piece of work and provide gradations of quality from “excellent” to “poor” (or “expert” to “novice”). They are a way to link qualitative assessment to a quantitative rating system. With executive skills, they help students judge how well they perform a given task that cannot be quantified easily.

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### Example: Rubric for Test Study Time

Element	Criteria				Value
	4	3	2	1	
Amount of time spent studying	Met goal of ___ hrs. ___ min. spent studying	Spent at least 75% of committed time studying	Spent at least 50% of committed time.	Spent less than 50% of committed time	
Number of study session	4 or more study sessions (1 per day) before exam	3 study sessions	1-2 study sessions	Didn't study	
Pre-study preparation	Went to extra help sessions with teacher.	Used detailed study guide and/or practice tests.	Skimmed notes to determine what would be on test.	Didn't prepare for studying advance.	
Variety of study techniques	Used 3 or more different study strategies	Used 2 different study strategies	Used one study strategy	Didn't study.	
Total Points earned:					

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### Example: Rubric for Test Study Time

Element	Criteria				Value
	4	3	2	1	
Amount of time spent studying	Met goal of _2_ hrs. _30_ min. spent studying	Spent at least 75% of committed time studying	Spent at least 50% of committed time.	Spent less than 50% of committed time	4
Number of study session	4 or more study sessions (1 per day) before exam	3 study sessions	1-2 study sessions	Didn't study	2
Pre-study preparation	Went to extra help sessions with teacher.	Used detailed study guide and/or practice tests.	Skimmed notes to determine what would be on test.	Didn't prepare for studying advance.	3
Variety of study techniques	Used 3 or more different study strategies	Used 2 different study strategies	Used one study strategy	Didn't study.	3
Total Points earned:					12

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Example: Managing Frustration

Element	Criteria				Value
	4	3	2	1	
Getting along with teachers	Did not lose temper with any teachers* (losing temper means making an angry, impolite response or comment in class.	Lost my temper in 1-2 classes this week or with one teacher 1-2 times.	Lost my temper in 3-4 classes or with one teacher 3-4 times this week.	Lost my temper 5 times or more this week.	
Completing homework without frustration	Did not "lose my cool" with any HW (engaging in an angry rant or refusing to do homework).	Lost my cool with 1-2 assignments.	Lost my cool with 3-4 assignments.	Lost my cool with 5 or more assignments.	
Getting along with football coach	Did not lose my temper with football coach—angry, impolite response—may be nonverbal (gesture, facial expression).	Lost temper 1-2 times.	Lost temper 3-4 times.	Lost temper 5 or more times.	
				Total Points earned:	

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If we were completely successful in integrating executive skill development into our schools, what would it look like?

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*By the time students graduate from high school, they will be able to:*

- Describe their own executive skill strengths and challenges and give concrete examples from their daily lives to illustrate them.
- Identify with specific examples how their executive skill challenges impede academic performance.
- Make and achieve specific goals to address executive skill challenges within a context and/or setting that is meaningful to the student.

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*By the time students graduate from high school, they will be able to:*

- Create tools (e.g., graph, chart, or checklist) that will allow them to track their progress toward goal attainment.
- Identify and use strategies for overcoming obstacles toward goal attainment.
- Independently set goals and use self-selected coping strategies that lead to measurable improvement in academic performance variables (e.g., grades on tests/assignments, homework handed in on time, report card grades).
- Explain how they think they will be able to apply what they have learned during the coaching or seminar to future goals at school or home, in leisure activities, or in the workplace.

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