



How to...

BUSY BRAIN

Benjamin Franklin, a founder of the US, famously made many lists of his projects, activities, and goals.



Take charge of your day

Make doing everything you need to get done a little easier with these tips.

The term “executive function” refers to skills that help you solve problems, use time wisely, and make decisions. It can also help you feel more in control about the things you need to do, whether it’s a homework assignment or straightening up your room. Here’s how to improve your executive function skills to get more done.

Take small steps

For many people, just getting started is the hardest step toward achieving a task. Start by identifying one small step you can take that will make a difference. For example, if your challenge is a messy room, gather empty glasses and plates and put them in the dishwasher. Your room probably looks a little better already! Next, pick up clothing that’s been gathering on a chair and hang it up. Then put pens and pencils in a cup, and recycle loose papers.

Break it down

Dedicate a window of time in your week to do a big project. You can probably do anything if it’s just for 20 minutes. Set a timer and go. Take a break for 10 minutes, then set the timer again for 15 more minutes to work on your goal.

Pair tasks with something fun

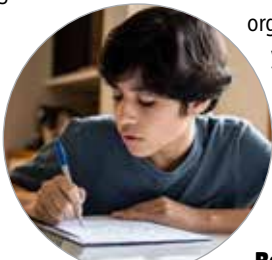
If you have to accomplish a task that you’re not excited about, make it more enjoyable by combining it with something you do like. For example, play music or an audiobook while you rake leaves. You could also recruit a partner, even if it’s virtually—call a friend and clean out your cluttered backpacks together.

Personalize your organization

The best “system” that will help you stay organized is the one that works for you. You might find that keeping a notebook, where you write down your checklist each day, is easier than juggling multiple sticky notes. Enjoy the satisfaction of crossing items off your list as you get them done!

Be kind to yourself

Learning executive function skills takes practice. If you forget or lose something, speak kindly to yourself the way you might to a friend who made a mistake. One small study suggests that people who practice kindness toward themselves reduce stress. It may feel silly at first, but repeat statements like, “You’re doing the best you can, and that’s enough.”



Create a list to stay on track.

Literary list makers



These fictional characters show more ways of being organized!

Hermione Granger of the *Harry Potter* books by J.K. Rowling gives her pals Harry and Ron magical homework planners that shout reminders like, “Do it today or later you’ll pay!”

Greg Heffley in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series by Jeff Kinney, Greg scribbles pros and cons lists, the social pecking order at middle school, and more.

Mia Tang Ten-year-old Mia of *The Front Desk* series by Kelly Yang works at her parents’ motel. She keeps guests’ requests in a notebook and solves problems by writing.