

Resource Guide

Supporting Cognitive Executive Functioning Skills

Executive functioning skills such as goal setting, task-switching, and sustained focus are essential for college success. However, many students are still refining these skills, as they rely on the prefrontal cortex, which continues developing into the mid-twenties. This guide offers strategies to support the development of cognitive executive functioning skills.

- **Support goal setting and tracking:** Support students in setting and tracking learning goals, whether for course objectives or individual tasks. Provide specific prompts to guide them in estimating the effort required, identifying necessary resources, and anticipating potential challenges. Post goals, objectives, and schedules in accessible locations, and consider using a checklist to help students monitor their progress.
- **Scaffold self-monitoring and progress tracking:** Support students in tracking their progress by breaking larger tasks into smaller steps and providing tools to monitor their work. Gradually reduce scaffolding as students become more adept at managing their own progress and adjusting their approach as challenges occur.
- **Teach effective information organization:** Provide guides, graphic organizers, or sparse outline notes sheets to help students categorize and organize course content. This scaffolding supports their working memory and prepares them to study more effectively on their own.
- **Facilitate connections between ideas:** Support students in connecting new information with prior knowledge by using structured activities like diagrams, outlines, graphic organizers, or other templates. These tools can help students make sense of essential concepts and reinforce the relevance of previous learning in new contexts.
- **Connect content to future work:** Encourage students to see how course skills and knowledge apply in future academic and professional contexts. Include activities that highlight real-world applications from various fields. This will reinforce the relevance of current learning and prepare students to adapt concepts to new situations.

Resources

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Brown, T. (2008, February). Executive Functions – Describing Six Aspects of a Complex Syndrome. *Attention Magazine*, 12–17.

Rivera, C. J., Wood, C. L., James, M., & Williams, S. (2019). Improving Study Outcomes for College Students With Executive Functioning Challenges. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 42(3), 139–147.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by email at ctl@slu.edu.