

**20 WORKSHEETS FOR
ADULTS WITH ADHD
AND OTHER
NEUROLOGICAL
CONDITIONS**

**MANAGING
EXECUTIVE
FUNCTIONING
PROBLEMS**

BY ANGELA M. DOEL, M.S.

Managing Executive Functioning Problems

20 Worksheets for Adults with ADHD and Other Neurological Conditions

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Introduction

Executive functioning is a set of cognitive skills that are essential for engaging in goal-directed behavior, planning, solving problems, prioritizing, decision-making, sustaining attention, and developing emotional regulation. It is the command center of your brain, responsible for coordinating and integrating various mental processes. When executive function is impaired or underdeveloped, it can significantly impact your daily functioning, work performance, relationships, and overall well-being.

Some of the key elements of executive functioning include:

- 1. Working Memory** – the ability to temporarily hold and manipulate information in one's mind while completing a task.
- 2. Inhibition** – the ability to suppress or inhibit irrelevant or automatic responses in favor of more appropriate ones.
- 3. Cognitive Flexibility** – the ability to switch between different tasks or ideas and adapt to changing situations.
- 4. Planning and Organization** – the ability to set goals, develop a plan to achieve them, and monitor your progress.
- 5. Time Management** – the ability to estimate the amount of time required to complete a task and use that time effectively.
- 6. Emotional Regulation** – the ability to manage your emotions and regulate their intensity, particularly in response to stress or frustration.
- 7. Attentional Control** – the ability to focus and sustain attention on relevant information and ignore distractions.
- 8. Metacognition** – the ability to reflect on your own thinking and monitor cognitive processes.

This workbook was designed to help you navigate and overcome challenges related to executive function, empowering you to lead a more organized, focused, and productive life. Whether you are struggling with managing time, staying organized, or maintaining attention, this workbook aims to provide practical exercises and effective strategies tailored for the adult with ADHD.

Within these pages, you will find a range of tools and exercises to help you gain a deeper understanding of your unique executive function challenges. This workbook emphasizes a practical approach to improving executive function. You will be guided through various exercises and self-reflection activities that will enable you to identify your strengths, weaknesses, and specific areas for improvement. You will learn how to leverage your strengths and implement effective strategies to address your executive function challenges systematically.

Each worksheet introduces evidence-based techniques and practical tips that will help you develop personalized strategies to develop your executive functioning. From establishing

routines and setting realistic goals to managing distractions and enhancing cognitive flexibility, you will gain the tools and knowledge necessary to make positive changes in your daily life.

Improving executive function is an ongoing process that requires patience, perseverance, and self-compassion. Throughout this workbook, you will find space for self-reflection. You are encouraged to engage consistently and actively with the exercises, as this will maximize the benefits you get from the workbook.

By exploring and implementing the strategies in this workbook, you are taking a proactive step toward positive change. Celebrate your successes, no matter how small, and embrace the transformative power of self-improvement. I am excited to accompany you on this path of understanding and enhancing executive function.

-Angela M. Doel, M.S.

Commit to Change

Objective

To explore making positive changes in your life by pledging to actively work toward your goals.

What to Know

Human beings are by their very nature creatures of habit, and react with anxiety, discomfort, and uncertainty in the face of change. For example, imagine yourself getting dressed in the morning. You have your routine set and go through it, probably without much thought. Now imagine yourself when you are staying in someone else's home or at a hotel. You probably feel a bit anxious as you struggle to learn where things are and how they work, as well as searching through your bag to locate all the supplies you rely on to make your mornings comfortable and to prepare you for the day.

Even positive events that are welcome, like a new baby or work promotion, still elicit some anxiety and discomfort as you adjust to the changes they will bring. No matter whether it is positive or negative, change can be frightening, and it demands a lot of you.

Acknowledging these difficult feelings and working through them by committing to doing whatever it takes to accept new possibilities in your life is empowering. This worksheet will help you explore making positive changes by pledging to actively work toward your goals.

What to Do

In this activity, you will:

- create a commitment statement using the provided prompts.
- add your own statements that reflect your unique needs.
- read, recite, record, or take a picture of your pledge as often as you think you need to remind yourself what you will gain from making a change in your life.

Here are several examples of commitment pledges.

- I commit to focusing on what is good and positive about myself and my life every day that I am taking on this challenge.
- I commit to doing whatever it takes to make the changes I know I need and want to make in my life.
- I commit to embracing my fears instead of trying to avoid them.
- I commit to accepting my discomfort.
- I commit to being patient with myself as I try out new and unfamiliar strategies and interventions.
- I commit to forgiving myself for any setbacks or mistakes I may make.

- I commit to taking the time for rest and relaxation, so I have the energy necessary to complete the tasks I set for myself.
- I commit to allowing myself to receive the emotional support I need to help me.
- I commit to rewarding myself every day for working to change my life.

Now, write your own statements.

I commit to

I commit to

I commit to

I commit to

What do you stand to gain from your commitments?

Think of a time when you committed to change in your life, no matter how small. What was the experience like for you? What would have made it better for you?

Describe how making the pledge impacted your ability to commit to your goal.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Map Your Life to Make Changes

Objective

To use the “map your life” technique to make changes in your life.

What to Know

Maybe you want to make changes in your life, but you are unsure how to do so. You may not know exactly what needs to change – you just know something *must* change! You can map your life to begin to identify how to make positive changes in your life.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Why do you want to make changes in your life?

What parts of your life do you want to change?

Is there something you wish you could do? Somewhere you would love to visit? Do you wish you had more time to build a skill? Are you longing for new friendships? Pinpoint what it is you desire the most to change or accomplish.

How willing are you to make changes to attain the things you want? A little? A lot? Explain.

What beliefs keep you stuck?

Where did these beliefs come from?

What else keeps you stuck?

Look at the page with the large rectangle that has three sections.

Imagine this is a map of your life. The left side of the map represents the land where you are living now. The right side of this map represents the land where you would like to live. Between the two pieces of land (the narrow section in the middle) is a river that you must cross.

Without putting too much thought into it, draw the land you are living in now. Use symbols, pictures, and words to describe your current "landscape," or life.

Now, move to your ideal landscape – the place you would like to be. Fill this space with words, symbols, and images that represent everything you would like to have in your life.

Look at the river that separates the two lands. What is in the river? What is stopping you from getting from where you are to where you want to be? Answer these questions the lines below, then use words, symbols, or pictures to represent the obstacles you need to overcome in the river.

Now, draw a bridge that will allow you to cross the river. What is it made of? Who can help you cross from one land to the other?

After you finish, write down the first three steps you can take to cross the bridge and move into the land where you would like to be.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

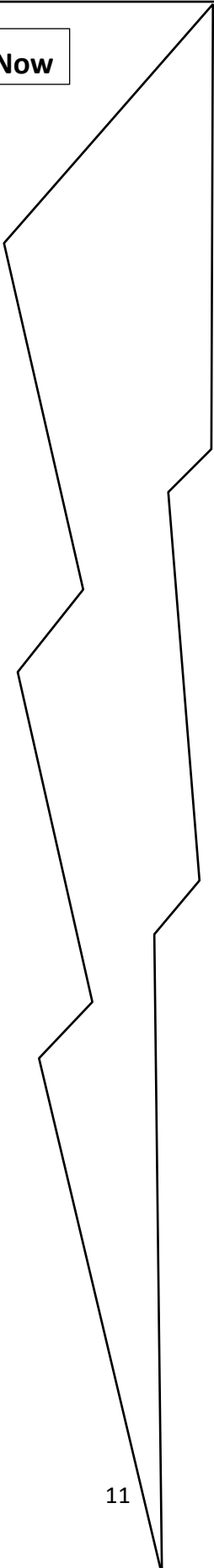
When will you take these steps? _____

Are there any resources, people, or other things that can help you accomplish these first steps? Explain.

What else can help you make the changes necessary to cross the bridge? Consider resources, people, and so forth. Be specific.

The Land Where You Are Now

Where You Want to Be



Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What surprised you about this exercise?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using Emotion Regulation Skills to Cope

Objective

To identify feelings then observe and name them as a way of helping you regulate your emotions.

What to Know

You probably move through your day experiencing a range of emotions—from pleasant to unpleasant, some of which are in your awareness while others are not. Sometimes the emotions that happen outside of your awareness can cause you to make poor decisions, say things you regret, or take actions that cause you or others harm.

You can learn specific skills that can help with “emotion regulation,” that is, controlling your emotions and keeping them more in balance rather than shifting between extremes. In this worksheet, you will learn about the range of emotions and then practice simply observing and naming your own.

What to Do

To manage an emotion, you need to know what it is. The first step in learning emotion regulation is to become familiar with the range of emotions you may experience. Read the following list of pleasant and unpleasant emotions.

Pleasant		Unpleasant		
affectionate	passionate	aggravated	exhausted	tense
amused	peaceful	agitated	frightened	terrified
appreciative	pleased	ambivalent	frustrated	tired
calm	relaxed	angry	furious	uncomfortable
caring	relieved	annoyed	guarded	unhappy
comfortable	rested	anxious	guilty	upset
confident	safe	apprehensive	helpless	vulnerable
curious	satisfied	ashamed	impatient	
delighted	secure	bored	insecure	
empowered	strong	confused	irritated	
encouraged	surprised	contemptuous	lonely	
excited	thrilled	depressed	needy	
friendly	trusting	disappointed	nervous	
fulfilled	warm	disconnected	overwhelmed	
grateful		discouraged	remorseful	
hopeful		disgusted	resentful	
joyful		disheartened	restless	
loving		edgy	sad	
mellow		embarrassed	scared	
open		enraged	self-conscious	
optimistic		exasperated	suspicious	

<p>Can you think of other pleasant emotions? Write them down.</p>	<p>Can you think of other unpleasant emotions? Write them down.</p>
--	--

Are these feelings all familiar to you? Which ones are? Which ones are not? Write some reflections on the lines below the list.

Now, write down a few situations or experiences when you become aware of (notice) your feelings in the coming week. By labeling your feelings, you can use the power of your mind to take a step back and assess (mindfulness), then, over time, learn how to make a good choice about what to do next.

Start with PLEASANT or UNPLEASANT. Then try to identify the general feeling you notice, such as HAPPY, SAD, ANGRY, SCARED. Then, if you feel ready, try to be more specific. Use the above list of feelings as a guide, but feel free to use different words for feelings that come to mind that might not appear on this list.

Day	Situation when you notice feelings	Pleasant or unpleasant?	General (happy, sad, angry, scared)	Specific (see list)
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

Reflections on This Exercise

What emotions did you become aware of that you were not previously aware of?

What was the main obstacle you encountered in identifying your emotions?

What was easy about it? What would you like to do to continue the practice of naming and noticing your emotions? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Decrease Impulsivity Using the REST Technique

Objective

To pause during a distressing situation so you can identify healthier ways of managing your emotions to avoid reacting impulsively.

What to Know

When confronted with distressing situations, it can be challenging to remember healthy coping strategies that you have learned. It might seem easier and feel more natural to return to unhealthy habits than to identify helpful techniques to manage your emotions. When you take a step back from an emotionally upsetting situation, it gives you the opportunity to examine the situation more objectively. As a result, you are more likely to choose healthier solutions and coping techniques.

What to Do

Think of a recent situation when you experienced upsetting emotions and responded by acting impulsively or resorted to harmful urges. Answer the questions below.

Describe what happened.

Describe your emotions during this situation.

Describe how you reacted.

How did you feel afterward?

The following strategy, which uses the acronym **REST**, outlines steps to help you pause, clear your head, and then determine a helpful plan of action to address the situation. By encouraging you to briefly shift your attention from emotions and urges to facts and solutions, REST can be used as the first step in changing your unhealthy habits.

Relax: Take a “time out” from the situation to focus on your wellbeing. Go for a walk, take a hot bath, call a supportive friend, or even just take some deep breaths or count to ten.

Evaluate: Identify the facts within the distressing situation. Notice how you feel physically and emotionally. Observe what other people are doing and how they are reacting. Identify any threats to your safety.

Set an intention: Create a goal or plan to address the situation. This could mean choosing a coping skill, asking someone for help, calling a family meeting, or negotiating with others.

Take action: Put your plan into action with intention and awareness. While you may not necessarily resolve the situation, this action will be more effective than the impulsive behavior you would have otherwise carried out.

You might need to repeat some or all the REST steps during a particularly overwhelming or upsetting situation. But with practice, it can become a new habit to help you manage your emotions and cope in healthier ways.

Using the distressing situation you described on the previous page imagine how you could have responded differently using REST.

What could you have done to **Relax** during this situation?

If you had **Evaluated** the facts of this situation, what could you have noticed or learned?

What “**Set intention**” or plan could you have used?

If you had **Taken action** based on that intention, what could have happened?

How would your response or reaction have been different?

The key to the **REST** strategy is to identify the moment when you will choose how to react to an upsetting situation, either with harmful habits or with healthier coping skills. Here are some indicators that can help you identify that moment.

- You feel an intense challenging emotion that usually results in avoidance or becoming confrontational.
- You are suddenly in physical or emotional pain.
- You notice the urge to act impulsively with harmful behaviors, even if there is no obvious reason.

Now, think of a recurring situation that causes you overwhelming or distressing emotions and harmful urges (for example, a confrontational family member, an unreasonably demanding boss, an overdue mortgage, etc.). Describe the situation below.

How can you use **REST** to address this situation next time it happens? Describe on the next page.

R _____

E _____

S _____

T _____

During what other situations could the REST technique be helpful?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise increase your ability to identify healthier coping skills and solutions to distressing situations? Explain.

Which of the **REST** steps did you find easiest to do? Why?

Which of the **REST** steps did you find most challenging? Why?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

What Can Help You Pay Attention?

Objective

To identify tools to increase your attention while completing tasks.

What to Know

Sometimes you might struggle to pay attention, and when you are faced with a challenging task, you might want to give up before even trying! Here are some strategies that might help you pay attention long enough to complete important tasks.

- 1. Get Active.** If you cannot concentrate, try some exercise before you get to work, like jogging in place, or doing jumping jacks. Doing 15 minutes of activity before a challenging task can help you stay more focused.
- 2. Take Breaks.** Practice attentive behavior at non-crucial times, then take attention breaks. Using a timer or a phone app, have an alarm go off during the work period. Write down whether you were paying attention. This can help train your brain to understand what attention looks like, and how often you are tempted to let your attention wander.
- 3. Adjust Time Frames.** If you find that, no matter what you do, you cannot stay on task, you might need to break content into smaller time intervals. Break up tasks so you work without becoming overwhelmed.
- 4. Remove Distractions.** When you are having a hard time paying attention, clutter on your desk or workspace can make it impossible to focus. Remove unnecessary clutter from your space.
- 5. Rate and Change Tasks.** If you tend to avoid things or become very distracted, rate the level of challenge found in the activity on a scale of 1 (easiest) to 10 (hardest). If the activity is an 8 or higher, think about what you can do to make the task a 2 or 3.
- 6. Break Up Tasks.** If these strategies fail to help you, look at the task itself. Can you break it into smaller chunks? Do part of the task, take a break, and come back to the project to finish it. You might finish faster than if you try to complete it all in one sitting.

What to Do

Write down the task you want to complete. Pick a strategy from the list above and write the # in the second column. For example, if you choose #4, "Remove Distractions," just write 4. Describe how the strategy helped you pay attention. Then, rate how well you paid attention from 1 to 10, where 1 = I had a really hard time paying attention, to 10 = I had no trouble paying attention and I finished the task easily. If you did not finish the task, write down 0 in the final column.

Task	Strategy used #	How it helped me pay attention	Rating 0 - 10

What strategy helped you the most? Why?

What task was hardest to complete? Explain.

Can you think of other things you can do to help you pay attention? List them.

Reflections on This Exercise

What was the main obstacle you encountered during this exercise?

What was easy?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Notice distressing or distracting thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations you experience as you prepare for the task. Write them down.

Next, focus your attention on performing the task and describe what you experience. For example, if your task is brushing your teeth, describe the sensations of the toothbrush in your mouth, the taste of the toothpaste, and the way your back bends as you rinse out your mouth in the sink.

As distracting thoughts, emotions, and judgments arise, observe them, and allow them to pass. Describe what happened.

Refocus your attention and awareness on your task and the present moment. Did you observe any change in the intensity of your thoughts, emotions, or judgments when you refocused on the task? Explain.

Complete your task. When you performed your task with intention and awareness, how was it different from previous times you completed that task? How was it the same? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

What important tasks and actions – at home, work, in your relationships, and so on – could you perform with intention and awareness using the steps above? Be specific.

What do you think would improve if you were more intentional while doing those tasks or actions?

How can being more intentional help you manage overwhelming or upsetting thoughts and emotions by simply observing them?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Focus and Attention Meditation

Objective

To increase your ability to be focused and attentive by using the Focus and Attention Meditation technique.

What to Know

This 11-minute audio will help you practice managing your anger, frustration, and irritation.

[Click here to listen to this audio.](#)

Right click the link to download the audio to your computer, and from there you can transfer it to a smartphone or other audio player. Use it whenever you are having a difficult time paying attention or focusing on the task at hand.

Use the following chart to record your daily practice. Make several copies of this chart and keep a record of the time you spend practicing this technique until it becomes a habit. You want it to become routine – something you do without thinking, like brushing your teeth. It is also useful to note your general mood, both before and after your daily practice.

Day	Time of Day	Minutes	Mood Before	Mood After
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

Meditation Script

Begin by finding a comfortable seated position in a quiet and comfortable place where you can sit or lie down without distractions. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in, allowing your chest and abdomen to expand fully. Allow yourself to fully settle into this space, taking a deep breath in and out.

Exhale slowly, releasing any tension or distractions from your body and mind. Take a few more deep breaths, inhaling peace and exhaling any restlessness or scattered thoughts.

As you begin to relax, allow your mind to quiet down and become still. Focus on your breath, breathing in deeply and exhaling fully. With each breath, imagine yourself releasing any tension or stress that you may be holding onto.

Now, bring your attention to the sensation of your breath as it enters and leaves your body. Notice the coolness of the air as you inhale and the warmth as you exhale. Feel the gentle rise and fall of your abdomen with each breath, grounding you in the present moment.

As you continue to breathe, bring your attention to your mind's eye. Picture a bright, radiant light in the center of your forehead, shining with a powerful and focused energy. Allow this light to grow stronger and brighter, filling your entire being with its intensity. Imagine a radiant light at the center of your being, at the core of your consciousness. This light represents your focus and attention. Visualize it growing brighter and more vibrant with each breath, illuminating your mind with clarity and alertness.

As you bask in this light, feel your mind becoming more and more clear and focused. Any distracting thoughts or worries gently fade away as your mind becomes fully present and engaged in the present moment.

As thoughts arise, acknowledge them without judgment and gently release them, allowing them to float away like clouds passing through the sky. Return your focus to the breath, anchoring yourself in the present moment.

Now, bring your attention to the sounds around you. Can you hear birds chirping outside or the sound of a clock ticking? Allow these sounds to come and go without getting caught up in them. Notice the subtle noises, whether near or distant, without getting caught up in any particular sound. Simply observe the symphony of the present moment, allowing it to flow through your awareness without attachment or distraction.

Shift your focus to the sensations in your body. Start with your feet and slowly scan upward, bringing your attention to each part of your body. Are you feeling any tension or discomfort? Simply acknowledge these sensations without judgment, and then allow them to dissipate. With each breath, imagine the tension melting away, replaced by a deep sense of relaxation and ease. Feel the energy and aliveness within your body, fully present in the here and now.

Now, imagine a calm and serene landscape in your mind's eye. It can be a tranquil forest, a peaceful beach, or any place that evokes a sense of stillness and focus for you. Explore this

landscape with your senses—notice the colors, textures, and scents. Allow yourself to become fully immersed in this serene environment, feeling a deep sense of centeredness and clarity.

As you bask in this inner sanctuary of focus and attention, repeat the following affirmations silently or aloud:

"I am fully present in this moment, embracing clarity and focus."

"I release distractions and allow my mind to stay centered on the task at hand."

"My attention is a valuable asset, and I nurture it with intention and care."

"I am capable of maintaining sustained focus and achieving my goals."

"I welcome the flow of inspiration and concentration into my life."

"I am focused, attentive, and productive."

"I am capable of achieving my goals."

These affirmations can help you build self-confidence and stay motivated.

Take a few more moments to cultivate this sense of focused awareness and connection with your inner self.

Feel the power of your focused mind and allow yourself to feel empowered and energized by this experience. When you're ready, take a deep breath and slowly begin to return your attention to your surroundings.

Visualize yourself accomplishing your goals and staying focused. Imagine yourself working productively and efficiently, achieving success in whatever you're working on. This visualization can help you stay motivated and focused, even after you finish your meditation.

Now, gradually bring your attention back to your breath. Feel the gentle rhythm of your inhales and exhales, bringing a sense of grounding and stability to your being. With each breath, bring your awareness back to the present moment, feeling refreshed, rejuvenated, and ready to embrace any challenges or tasks that lie ahead. Take a moment to reflect on everything you're grateful for in your life. This can help shift your focus from negative thoughts or distractions to positive ones. By focusing on gratitude, you can cultivate a more positive and productive mindset.

When you're ready, slowly open your eyes, allowing the external world to come into focus. Take a moment to express gratitude for this time dedicated to enhancing your focus and attention. Carry this sense of centered awareness with you as you move through your day, knowing that you have the power to maintain focus and accomplish your goals with clarity and purpose.

Remember that you can return to this meditation whenever you need to re-center and refocus your mind. Allow this sense of focus and clarity to stay with you as you move forward with your day. May your attention be sharp, your focus unwavering, and your presence fully engaged in every moment. Trust that with practice, you will become more focused, attentive, and centered over time.

Goal Setting for Adults with ADHD

Objective

To overcome prior difficulties in setting and completing goals.

What to Know

If you have ADHD, you might have trouble setting and completing goals. You might see the results in your mind but have no clue how to complete what you have set out to do. Instead, you might find yourself on a zigzag path as you work toward goal completion – becoming frustrated or disappointed in yourself if you fail to achieve what you set out to do.

You can create a plan to achieve what you want. It is not always easy and sometimes may not come naturally. Research shows that identifying “why” you want to achieve the goal will help you accomplish two things:

- You will be more interested in working toward the goal.
- You will be more focused as you complete each step toward completion of your goal.

What to Do

One of the hardest parts of goal setting can be deciding which goal you want to work on. You might have a long list and you cannot decide where to start. Or you might try to set large, unrealistic goals instead of breaking them down into more manageable tasks.

Describe one goal you would like to achieve.

Why do you want to achieve this goal? Be as detailed as possible.

Break down your goal into smaller, doable parts. Write down each step needed to achieve your goal.

Are there things on your list that make you feel anxious or uncertain? Explain.

Think about what tasks you need to start with. Do you have time to start these tasks now? If not now, when?

Do you have the needed materials? List the materials you need.

Can you ask for help? Write down the names of two or three people who can help you complete the tasks.

Once you have identified the smaller, doable parts, choose a start date: _____

How can you measure your progress? Be specific. For example, if you want to lose weight, come up with a reasonable weekly goal, e.g., *I will lose 1-2 pounds each week. I will exercise 5 days/week, combining strength training, cardio, and yoga.*

Creating measurable steps not only breaks goals into more manageable tasks but can also help you stay motivated to reach the end result. Keep a journal and write down each step or use an app to track your progress. Some great goal-setting apps include Toodledo, LifeTick, Habit List, Goals on Track, and Stickk.

Always keep your journal in one place so you will remember to write down your steps and review your progress. If you choose to use an app, set up notifications or a daily phone alarm as a reminder.

What will you do to remind yourself to track your progress?

Here are a few more suggestions to ensure your success!

- Find a “cheerleader” who can hold you accountable, someone who can check in with you to see how you are doing. Ask this person if they will help you.

Who can help you? _____

Did you ask them for help? Yes No

This person can check in each day via text message or phone call to encourage you to keep going.

- Take fifteen minutes each day to plan your daily activities and set priorities to achieve your goal. It will become easier once it becomes a habit.
 - Add in small rewards for completing tasks. What can you do to reward yourself?
-
-
-

- Review your priorities before diving into a new task. You might ask yourself, “Is this what I should be doing right now?” – no matter how tempting other options might seem.
- Connect the short-term tasks to larger goals so there is a feeling of greater progress with the completion of each small step.

After one month, review your progress, noting what went well and what did not go so well. Do you need more time? Were the steps you identified reasonable? Remember, ADHD can make the way you set and achieve goals a bit different than others, and you might need to make accommodations for yourself so you can achieve your goal.

Overcoming Procrastination

Objective

To overcome your procrastination by understanding its cause and making a plan to successfully accomplish two projects.

What to Know

You may be putting off doing things for many reasons. But research shows that procrastination can lead to increased stress, health problems, and poor performance. Maybe you really want to get the project or task done, but it is as if your procrastination has a life of its own, and it is in charge. If that happens to you, you can take back control.

1. Identify why you are putting something off. Procrastination is an emotional reaction to something you do not want to do. Knowing *why* you keep putting something off can offer insight into how to get yourself moving. Tim Pynchyl, author of *Solving the Procrastination Puzzle*, identifies a set of triggers that make a task seem insurmountable. People procrastinate is they believe a task is:

- boring
- frustrating
- difficult
- scary
- not rewarding
- no fun
- ambiguous
- unstructured

Once you know the triggers, you can identify what you need to move forward.

2. Find techniques to help you turn things around. Here are some ideas.

- **Forgive yourself.** Beating up on yourself for not getting something done will not help you get it done! Pat yourself on the back for deciding to get it done, and then proceed.
- **Stop the name-calling.** Calling yourself lazy, using negative labels, or kicking yourself when you are down does not help you get up.
- **Change what you are telling yourself about the task.** Instead of focusing on the dread of doing it, give yourself some encouragement. You might say, “This is not my favorite thing to do, but I can get through it,” or “It will feel so great to cross this off my list.”
- **Sit down and consider the pros and cons.** What are the benefits of completing this task? What does avoiding the task cost you?
- **Get a buddy.** Use peer support and peer pressure. Ask a friend to be your accountability partner and explain how they can help. Sometimes just knowing someone will ask about it is enough to move you into action.

- **Establish a reward.** You know all those fun things you do to distract yourself? Use them (or something else) as a reward for finishing the task.
- **Reduce overwhelm.** Make the task less overwhelming by dividing it into chunks. Ask yourself, “Can I work on this chunk for an hour? 30 minutes? 15 minutes?” Choose the amount of time, set the timer, and go for it.
- **Use tools.** Get out your calendar and schedule time for the task (or a chunk of it). Constantly saying, “I’ll get to it when I have time,” is not working, so make time.
- **Reduce temptations and distractions.** Turn off your phone and close your email, web browser, and IM. Turn on some quiet music, or ensure you have total quiet. Tell your housemates you are unavailable.
- **Do not let perfectionism slow you down.** If you think a task must be done perfectly, you will never start. Decide you would rather have it done than have it be perfect.

What to Do

Think of two things you are procrastinating about: one small and one more complex or challenging task.

Project #1	Project #2

Using Pychyl’s list on the previous page for inspiration, name the obstacles for accomplishing each project or task. Be very specific in describing them and write how you feel about each one. For example, one obstacle might be, “This feels too hard. I don’t know how to do it and I don’t think I can do it. I’m frozen.”

	Project #1	Project #2
Obstacle 1		
Obstacle 2		

Obstacle 3		
------------	--	--

List as many actions as you can think of that you can take to address those blocks.

	Project #1	Project #2
	Actions I can take	Actions I can take
Obstacle 1		
Obstacle 2		
Obstacle 3		

Write an action plan (*when, where, how, who*) to address each of the blocks.

	Project #1	Project #2
Obstacle 1		
Obstacle 2		
Obstacle 3		

Fill out the chart below.

Project #1		Project #2	
Benefits of getting it done	Costs of not getting it done	Benefits of getting it done	Costs of not getting it done

What techniques can you use to make each of these tasks easier?

Project #1	Project #2

Now pull all of that together into a plan to successfully achieve your two projects!

Project #1	Project #2
I will:	I will:

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you overcome procrastination? Why or why not?

Did this exercise allow you to identify why you procrastinate? Explain.

What accommodations might be helpful to increase the likelihood of your success?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Reducing Stress by Organizing Your Paperwork

Objective

To develop a system for organizing your paperwork to reduce the stress in your life.

What to Know

Do you find that your paperwork and mail keep piling up? Do you waste hours searching for important papers or overdue bills that you have misplaced? Disorganization creates unnecessary stress in your life, making you less productive and even affecting your self-esteem.

The key to staying on top of paperwork and mail is to create an easy and efficient system that works for you. Start by asking yourself the following questions:

The best method to sort and organize paperwork is one you can easily set up, maintain, and access. Here are a few strategies to help you get started:

Consider past/present/future. PAST refers to papers you need to keep, but you do not have to access regularly. This might include tax-related documents or insurance policies. You can either scan and store them on your computer, or store physical copies in a file cabinet, box, or binder. PRESENT refers to items you need and use now, including current bills or medical information. You might place these in an easily accessed desktop file or in a basket on your kitchen counter. FUTURE refers to papers you will eventually need but not right now. Again, store them where they are easily accessible. For example, you might use a binder with clear plastic sleeves to hold items you will need in the future.

Use wall space. Hang magazine holders or wire files on the wall to organize mail and paperwork. Label or color-code hanging files. You might create a message center by using a magnetic, dry-erase, or cork board, to pin papers you need to access quickly and keep to-do lists in sight.

When in doubt, throw it out. Sort all incoming mail and paper near the recycling bin or shredder. Get rid of what you do not need before it takes up space.

Go paperless as much as possible. Pay your bills online, scan important receipts, and sign up for a mobile app to scan and store important documents. Create folders on your computer. Reducing the paper coming in will reduce overwhelm.

What to Do

Identify a central location near a shredder or recycling bin where you will sort and review all paperwork and incoming mail. Recycle junk mail immediately, and shred items with personal information that you do not need to retain (e.g., credit card offers). Goal: keep only the minimum amount of paper needed.

Central location: _____

Decide on the receptacle you will use. You might use a wicker basket, file tray, drawer, or box for this purpose. This might be near your computer, and if you do not pay bills electronically, you might need pens, stamps, checkbook, envelopes, calculator, and so forth, nearby.

What will you use? _____

Set up some “rules” for keeping mail, bills, or paperwork. For example, you might keep important paperwork for six months or scan items and discard the originals to reduce clutter. You can also take a picture with your phone and transfer the photo to a folder on your computer for important documents. Describe your rules:

Identify three times per week when you will review the paperwork and mail and take required action (pay a bill, make a phone call, respond to a letter, and so forth). Add this to your planner or task list. Choose days and times when you will have enough time to deal with everything. Avoid times when you are tired or stressed.

Write down days/times:

Once you have a system in place, practice sorting and organizing your mail and paperwork for the next two weeks. Use the following chart to track your progress. Choose at least three times per week to start. Include actions taken (shredding, sorting, filing, etc.), how the action(s) worked for you, and any notes (for example, what you can do differently).

Date	Actions taken	How did it work out?	Notes

Date	Actions taken	How did it work out?	Notes

Reflections on This Exercise

Was there anything that surprised you during this exercise?

What did you find most challenging about this exercise?

What did you find most helpful?

What else can you do to become more organized?

Are there ways to streamline how you deal with paperwork (for example, paying bills online, setting up automatic payments, or scanning important documents for online storage)?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Your Time Management Skills

Objective

To learn techniques that will make you more aware of the passage of time. To learn techniques that will keep distractions from making you late.

What to Know

Do you frequently arrive late to meetings or appointments? Do you feel like you never get enough done? Are people often annoyed at you because of time-related issues?

Effective time management requires two groups of skills – planning ahead and marking the passage of time. Fortunately, you can learn these skills if you are motivated to change your behaviors and you take the time to practice doing things a little differently.

Some people have difficulty paying attention to the passage of time. How many times have you been overly involved in something and lost track of time? Do you ever become involved in an interesting activity, lose your sense of time, and as a result be late for an important appointment? When you become unaware of the passage of time, you may not allow time to finish a project, you may find yourself taking a phone call or getting involved in an activity even though you have to leave for an appointment.

Another element that impacts your use of time is the “time eater” – a small, unexpected activity or occurrence that accompanies actions you take. Examples of time eaters are getting caught in a traffic jam, searching for a parking spot, or making a “quick” stop to find yourself waiting in line for thirty minutes! They might also include distractions such as phone notifications, constantly checking social media, or answering texts. Time eaters interfere with on-task effectiveness and time management.

Here are techniques you can try to use your time more efficiently.

- **Plan ahead.** Choose a daily planner that works for you, either electronic or print. Consider size, technology, ease of use, portability, color, and feel. Block out times for known events, such as work, meals, and standing appointments.
- **Avoid over-scheduling.** You might overestimate how much you can get done in a given period of time.
- **Practice saying “no.”** Over-committing will set you up for frustration.
- **Differentiate between what you "should" do versus what you "want" to do.** For example, you might want to organize your messy closet, but you should first complete a report that is due tomorrow.
- **Create a to-do list.** Choose no more than three high-priority tasks to complete on a given day, marking them with an asterisk or color-coding system. Write or type those tasks in your planner in the gaps of available time. When you add an item to your daily plan, delete something else or move it to tomorrow’s schedule. Remember, there is a finite number of minutes in your day. Consider delegating some tasks to others.

- **Break large projects into multiple mini tasks.** Include a deadline for each small task.
- **Create “holding places” near the door.** Make it a habit of placing keys, wallets, and other important items in one designated place any time you walk in the door. Place any items you need to take with you on the floor next to the door. Encourage family members to do the same.
- **Reduce morning stress by preparing the night before.** Organize and lay out all items for your morning outfit before you go to bed. Post your morning routine tasks and do only those items. Avoid squeezing in anything else!
- **Set timers as external cues of elapsed time.** For example, you can use a combination of a vibrating watch alarm set as a warning signal and a timer set 15 minutes later as a reminder to stop what you are doing. Set an alarm to vibrate every 10 or 15 minutes. When the alarm goes off, use it as a cue to orient yourself in time. Ask yourself if you are doing what is most important in that moment, and if you are where you need to be.
- **Double the amount of time you think it will take to do something and then plan accordingly.** Set and stick to your deadlines and to-do list.
- **Practice to have a greater sense of time.** First, estimate how long tasks will take. Write or type your estimates in your planner next to each item and keep track of the actual time spent. Look for patterns. For example, do you often underestimate how long it takes to drive to places? With practice guessing and recording the actual elapsed time, the gap between your estimated and actual time will narrow.
- **Consider “time eaters.”** For example, double the amount of buffer time you normally allow for traveling to a destination. To optimize task completion, turn off phone notifications and e-mail alerts. Hang a sign on your closed door requesting no interruptions.
- **Pack a “found time” tote bag and keep it in your car to use when you arrive early.** Choose items or activities you enjoy but often deny yourself due to a perceived lack of time. You might include magazines, novels, catalogs, or crossword puzzles, or projects without a set deadline, such as completing thank-you cards (along with pens, stamps, and envelopes) or balancing your checkbook. You might use the wait as downtime in your day, trying a simple meditation technique or breathing exercise.

What to Do

Starting your day stress-free can set the tone for your entire day. Determine how much time it actually takes for you to get ready in the morning, accounting for everything that must be done. Review the following example:

6:00 – 6:15 Wake up, morning meditation

6:15 – 7:00 Exercise (run or ride stationary bike)

7:00 – 7:30 Eat breakfast and read the newspaper

7:30 – 8:30 Shower, get dressed, pack lunch, ready for the day

8:45 Leave for work

Your schedule will look different if you have children, or pets to feed/walk.

Outline your morning schedule:

Time:

Task:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Use a separate piece of paper or your planner if you require more space.

What are some challenges/obstacles you have preparing for your day?

Next, review the list of techniques for using your time more efficiently, and identify four you are willing to try for the next week.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Now, use the following chart to practice techniques to use time more effectively. Note the date, and the technique(s) you use that particular day. Identify any "time eaters" you experience, then describe what worked well and what you can do differently.

Date	Technique(s) incorporated into your schedule	Time eaters	What worked well?	What can you do differently?

Date	Technique(s) incorporated into your schedule	Time eaters	What worked well?	What can you do differently?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise increase your ability to use your time more efficiently? Explain.

Did this exercise allow you to identify time management strategies that work for you?
Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using a Calendar and Task List to Effectively Manage Your Time

Objective

To use a calendar and task list system to effectively manage your time.

What to Know

Calendars and task lists are the foundation of organizing your time effectively. A planner or calendar is a necessary tool for you to track your short-term and long-term schedule, as well as your responsibilities and tasks. Your task list will contain information you need to remember not tied to specific dates, and it replaces easily misplaced slips of paper. Your calendar includes appointments, meetings, and events that have specific dates and times. Developing the habit of using a planner and task list will help you:

- Replace all loose pieces of paper, especially appointment cards.
- Manage your time and remember your responsibilities.
- Stay organized.
- Log phone messages and calls you to return.
- Review your task list every day and revise accordingly.

You might choose a comprehensive planner that includes a calendar and space for lists. Some planners include a section for frequently used phone numbers, email addresses, and other important pieces of information. There are different types of planners:

- **Print/paper-and-pencil.** You might review brands like Franklin Planner, Day-Timer, or Planner Pad.
- **Tablet or smartphone app.** Check your app store for apps such as Things, Any.do, TeuxDeux, or Todoist.
- **Computer time management software.** There are several options, including Focus Keeper, Rescue Time, or MyLifeOrganized.

Each has its advantages, and you will need to decide which type works best for you. If you like always having your schedule visible, a paper planner might be best. You can review those options in an office supply store or online. If you are worried you will misplace a paper planner, use a phone app, which can send reminders via notifications, texts, or email. Apps can also sync with online calendars at home and work.

Because there are so many options, the “best” system for you is the planner, app, or software you will actually use. Remember, learning any new skill takes practice and time. You might not be used to writing down appointments or checking a planner or app. Be aware of self-sabotaging thoughts, such as, “I’ve never been organized – why bother?” Just focus on your reason for wanting to manage your time more effectively and imagine the sense of accomplishment you will feel for taking this positive step.

You might find it useful to break the process of using a planner and task management list into manageable steps. Follow the steps for a week or so until using your planner and task list becomes a habit. You might also ask a family member or friend to be your “planner coach.” That person can prompt you to practice the steps and encourage you to complete and stick with your system.

- 1. Enter your information in the planner.** Include contact information for medical professionals and others you might need to contact.
- 2. Get in the habit of carrying your planner (or phone, to access the app) with you.** If you carry a bag, store your planner or phone there. Keep it on your desk when you are at work and take it with you to meetings in case you need to take notes.
- 3. Keep the planner/phone in one spot when you are not carrying it.** That way, you will know exactly where it is when you need it. You might keep it wherever you keep your keys, for example.
- 4. Conduct a daily planning session.** Schedule time every day to do your daily planning (put it on your calendar until it becomes a habit!). Spend 30-60 minutes planning the next day’s activities, errands, required tasks, and appointments. If you have open slots of time, you might transfer tasks from your master task list for completion.
- 5. Refer to the calendar and task list regularly.** Check your planner at least three times a day: once in the morning, once around midday, and once in the evening.
- 6. Use the planner as your calendar for everything.** Include medical appointments, exercise classes, meetings, family members’ appointments, and expense due dates. If you have recurring events, put them in your electronic calendar once and choose how often they should appear.
- 7. Use your planner as a “brain dump.”** Note ideas or important thoughts, rather than relying on your memory to retain them. You can brain dump during your scheduled daily planning time.

If the above step-by-step approach is hard for you, consider breaking it down into even smaller steps.

What to Do

Check off the following steps when complete.

_____ Choose a planner that works for you. Spend some time reviewing your options. What did you choose? _____

_____ Once you have your system set up, add your appointments, meetings, and any scheduled tasks for the next week (*and beyond that if you have repeating events or scheduled appointments*).

_____ Enter important information, such as phone numbers, addresses, email addresses.

_____ Create a “master” task list. Remember, these are items that do not have a date/time attached. Some examples: paint the shed or organize bedroom closet. You might also include weekly grocery lists or project materials you need to purchase.

_____ If you have a paper planner or you are using a phone app, choose a spot where you will store your planner and/or phone when you are not carrying them with you. What is the dedicated spot you have chosen? _____

_____ (*optional*) Who can be your “planner coach?” _____

Did you ask this person for help? Y N

Describe how this person can support you, including how frequently you will check in.

For two weeks, use the chart and track your planner and task list use. Include the date, and each day schedule 30 minutes for daily planning. Note if you did it or not. Mark off if you checked your planner three times each day. Finally, discuss how using your planner and task list went each day.

Date	Daily planning complete? Y / N	Check planner and task list at least 3 times? If not, why not?	Notes

Date	Daily planning complete? Y / N	Check planner and task list at least 3 times? If not, why not?	Notes

Reflection on This Exercise

Describe your experience using the planning system you chose. Did you experience any challenges? Explain.

If you have experienced a lifetime of organizational and planning difficulties, discuss the emotions or challenges you faced establishing your calendar and task list system.

If you asked for help from a “planner coach,” did you find it helpful to receive feedback and support from this person? Why or why not?

What did you learn about yourself during this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Getting Organized with the Three-Card Technique

Objective

To increase organizational skills using the three-card technique.

What to Know

When you have ADHD, it can be challenging to get and stay organized. Being organized might not come naturally to you, and you may be overwhelmed if you are unsure how to get organized. Starting some regular routines to get organized can help you feel less overwhelmed and frustrated. The “3-card technique” is a simple way to take some of the guesswork out of organization.

But first, consider Celia as an example. Celia’s family often jokes about her forgetfulness and disorganization. She lost her cell phone and frequently misplaces important papers. Celia does not find it funny at all. She is tired of misplacing things, losing track of time, and forgetting important project deadlines. Her boss expresses frustration and irritation, and Celia worries she will lose her job. She is starting to feel depressed because she just cannot seem to get her life together.

What to Do

First, identify the areas of your life that need more organizing. For example, you might have a disorganized closet or a messy desk. Your office might be filled with papers, stacks of unopened mail, or other items. You might experience “electronic” disorganization, where your phone, planner, or email might be impossible to navigate. List three areas that need consistent organizational help.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Next, take out an index card for each area and label the top of the card. On each card, write three specific tasks you can do every week to keep each area organized. On the same day and at the same time each week, pull out the cards and complete the three items. Make this a routine by setting up a notification on your phone, or create a reminder using a reminder app.

What day and time will you complete the three items on each card? Would it be easier to do one card at a time, on three days? For example, complete tasks on card 1 on Monday, card 2 on Wednesday, card 3 on Friday. Describe your plan.

Put the cards in a specific place or ask a loved one for help keeping track of your cards. Do not worry if you forget one week – just pick up where you left off. Here is Celia’s example:

BEDROOM

1. Place all dirty laundry in the hamper and put all clean clothes away.
2. Put items in the closet: shoes, tennis racquet, etc.
3. Clear off desk and put items in drawers or in the trash. Place important papers for work in the red folder.

Reflections on This Exercise

Once you have practiced the 3-card technique for several weeks, describe your experience.

Did you find this task easy or hard? Did you ask for help? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise in helping you get organized? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

How to Stop Losing Things Using the 6-H Technique

Objective

To reduce misplacing and losing belongings by using the 6-H technique.

What to Know

Everyone occasionally misplaces things, but some people seem to misplace something every day, creating stress for themselves and for the people around them.

To help you stop losing or misplacing belongings, you can follow the 6-H technique.

1. Home. Perhaps you have heard the slogan often used by professional organizers, “everything has a home.” When you designate areas of your home for categories of items, it is easier to find them. For example, store your family’s essential items in an attractive storage unit by the front door. You might store household tools and batteries in a bin in the laundry room. Spend a few minutes every evening returning items to their “home.”

2. Hub. Like the “home” concept, a hub is the place to store most-used items. For example, place your wallet, phone, and keys in the kitchen hub. Use an attractive basket or bowl to make your hub noticeable so it draws your attention when you are in the room.

3. Habit. Get into the habit of visually scanning the space you are leaving to check for items to avoid leaving them behind.

4. Highlight. Make commonly misplaced items stand out with bright colors and unique shapes. Some ideas:

- use a large, colorful keychain
- carry a unique, brightly colored tote or purse
- add fluorescent tape to the TV remote control
- protect your phone in an eye-catching case

5. Here. Be aware anytime you put something down. You might say to yourself, “I’m putting my _____ here.” Look at the spot, pause, and give yourself a moment to take in the location. This will help you remember where you placed the item.

6. Hear. Invest in noise-emitting trackers for important items you repeatedly misplace. There are several brands (see www.thetileapp.com or Apple AirTags) that can attach to keys, phones, wallets, and other small items.

Here are a few more suggestions.

- Avoid hiding items in “special places” because you believe you will remember where you put them.
- Keep a notebook to tape small but important slips of paper inside.
- Do not use sticky notes for important information because they may lose their “stickiness” and become misplaced.

- Avoid relying on your memory – take notes in your phone or in a small notebook.

Frequently using these tips will diminish the likelihood of losing or misplacing items.

What to Do

Use the following chart for the next two weeks. In the first column, write down belongings you typically misplace or lose. Pick a strategy from the list above write it in the second column. Describe how the strategy helped you keep track of the item. If the strategy did not help, write down what happened.

Item	Strategy used	How it did (or did not) help

Item	Strategy used	How it helped

What strategy helped you the most? Why?

Did you find that you lost items even when using the above strategies? Explain.

Can you think of other things you can do to avoid misplacing your belongings? List them.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Rely on Your Problem-Solving Ability Even When You Feel Hopeless

Objective

To identify one or more strategies to solve specific problems in your life and to develop a “problem-solving attitude” to cope with life’s difficulties.

What to Know

You might feel so hopeless about your current problems that you feel there is nothing you can do about them. But is that true? In fact, there are very few problems that cannot be made better. You simply must be creative about finding solutions. Solutions may not always be simple, nor do they always address the whole problem that is causing you distress. However, even small changes can make a big difference in your life. Having a problem-solving *attitude* is the most important part of getting over your depression and hopelessness. This assignment is intended to help you develop a problem-solving attitude toward your life, rather than just dwelling on your problems and feeling hopeless.

Finding solutions to the problems that are weighing you down requires a different way of thinking. Albert Einstein once said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.” In other words, to solve your problems, you need to change the way you think.

There are many different approaches to solving problems. Cognitive psychologists tell us that there are at least 60 different problem-solving strategies. This worksheet reviews five popular ones.

To understand how you can take different approaches to the same problem, consider an example, John, who described himself as being “hopelessly stuck” in his life. John was depressed because his wife had just left him, taking their two small children. He had a low paying job and was deep in debt. He could barely afford to pay his rent and buy food. He could not see any way to make his life better, until he decided to try some new problem-solving strategies. Here are the different strategies that John used to get “unstuck.” These may help you, too.

Break your problem into small solvable steps.

John knew that there are two ways to get out of debt – make more money and spend less money. He decided to look for small ways to do both. He was able to save over \$100/month by getting rid of his cable TV and just watching shows on Netflix. He also found that he could make money by selling things on eBay. This seemed too easy, so he began to look at other simple ways to change his finances. Can you think of two or three small things you can do that might impact your problem? Write them below.

Ask for help.

When people are depressed, they tend to isolate themselves, forgetting that there are many people who can help with their problems. John was a veteran and found free counseling advice as well as free financial advice at veteranscrisisline.net, a service of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Other free advice and support can be found through places of worship or community service organizations – and remember your network of friends and relatives. Write down several people or organizations that could give you help.

Try a brainstorming session.

Sometimes you must be creative to solve a problem. Brainstorming is best done in a group of four people or more, but it can be done with just one other person. The idea of brainstorming is to come up with as many possible solutions to a problem as possible without worrying about whether they are realistic solutions or not. Make a list of all the possible solutions, no matter how far-fetched they may be. Then, review the list and find a solution that is most practical and most likely to succeed.

John had a brainstorming session with his brother Matt. They came up with a list of more than 100 ways to make extra money. Eventually, John decided to borrow Matt’s lawn mower and he began cutting his neighbors lawns for \$25 a lawn.

Write down a problem that you can brainstorm solutions.

Write down the name of people who help you brainstorm. _____

Try brainstorming solutions to this problem for at least 30 minutes *without censoring any solutions*. The purpose of brainstorming is to come up with as many possible solutions as possible, and then choose the ones that seem the most likely to succeed.

Write down all your brainstorming ideas on a separate piece of paper and then write down the two or three best solutions here.

Challenge the assumptions about the nature of your problems.

Often it is hard to see new solutions when you are viewing your problems through false assumptions. Try making a list of all the reasons your problems are unsolvable, and then sit down with a trusted friend or a professional and determine which of your reasons are not based in fact.

John assumed that he could not get a better job because he barely finished high school and had no real skills. Over time, he realized that neither of these assumptions were true. Through a friend, he found a job salvaging automobile parts, where he was making twice what he made at his previous job. John enrolled in a school to learn to be an auto mechanic, which he felt would be a permanent solution to his money problems.

Write down any assumptions you have about your problem and then ask someone you trust to help decide if they are true or false.

Root Cause Analysis.

You might only view a problem as it exists in the present. However, serious problems usually go far back in your life. Identifying the root causes means going back to where the problem might

have originated. Understanding the root cause can give you deeper insight into what is the underlying cause of a problem.

During therapy, John talked about when he started to feel hopeless and powerless. It was not when his wife left him. It was not when he left the military. He remembered having these feelings when he was just nine years old, and his parents were getting a divorce. He remembered that his mother was very depressed, and his father was distant and always drinking. John felt that perhaps his own divorce triggered memories about this time and made him identify with his parents. He eventually realized that he did not have to relive his parents' mistakes, but instead could make his own choices and certainly be a more active parent with his own children.

Write down your thoughts on what could be some of the root causes of your current problems.

Secret of Success: When you practice problem solving, you are working your survival muscle and getting mentally stronger, much like working out in the gym makes you stronger. Try focusing on solutions throughout the day. Even when faced with small problems, be aware that you are always finding solutions.

What to Do

What are the problem-solving strategies you think could be most helpful to you?

Are there any problems in your life that you think are unsolvable? What are other ways to cope with these issues? Describe.

Do you know anyone who could be a mentor in helping you develop better coping skills? Is there anything preventing you from talking to this person on a regular basis? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Building Cognitive Flexibility

Objective

To increase cognitive flexibility.

What to Know

Cognitive flexibility is the ability to:

- adapt to changing situations.
- shift between tasks.
- think in a non-rigid and open way.
- juggle many concepts at once.
- see things from different perspectives.

Cognitive flexibility occurs when you interact with people that have differing points of view, or when you move from talking to a customer or your boss to chatting with a child. Without cognitive flexibility, you would be unable to “switch” your mind from situation to situation. It is essential for success in the workplace and in everyday life.

If you have rigid thinking, you may struggle to solve problems or relate to others. If you struggle with cognitive flexibility, you can improve and develop it. Practicing this skill can create new neural pathways in your brain, improving your cognitive flexibility.

Here are some ways you can improve your cognitive flexibility.

1. Start small. Introduce cognitive flexibility in small, low-risk ways. You might expose yourself to new situations without moving too far outside your comfort zone. Here is an example: The next time you order a meal at a restaurant, choose something from your top three meals instead of ordering your first choice. Then, imagine the menu changes or the restaurant is out of your favorite food. By taking small steps and opening yourself up to new challenges and experiences, you will identify other options when you need to be flexible.

2. Build empathy. Understanding others’ experiences helps you build cognitive flexibility. If you find being empathic challenging, try these activities.

- read fiction to see a story from someone else’s point of view
- ask co-workers how they would approach a problem
- practice active listening and intentionally see things from another perspective
- connect with an upset loved one and put yourself in their shoes

3. Interrupt and redirect your thoughts. If you tend to have negative thoughts about yourself, stop and redirect. Here is an example: Think about a time you experienced an unpleasant event and started telling yourself negative statements, such as, “I can’t ever get anything right!” Did your mind immediately begin reviewing all the ways you have failed? When something like this happens, practice redirecting your thoughts. Pay attention to what you are thinking and interrupt the negative thoughts. Then, focus on something else entirely. If this is challenging,

change your environment. Take a walk, chat with a loved one, or do something else that will distract you. Pressing “pause” on your thoughts, redirecting, and focusing on something else is cognitive flexibility.

4. Ask, “What else could be true?” Ask this question if you feel stuck, frustrated, or resistant. Do this in a gentle and kind way to take a broader view of a situation, consider other perspectives, or identify other options. Here is an example: You planned to meet your friend for lunch, and she cancels at the last minute. You might think, “I bet she’s mad at me! I wonder if she just found something better to do. Maybe she’s meeting another friend for lunch instead of me...” But what else might be true? Pause and breathe for a few seconds and consider what else might be possible in this situation. Maybe your friend is sick, or perhaps something urgent came up. There are many alternative explanations in this situation. Asking this question and considering options enhances cognitive flexibility.

What to Do

Answer the following questions to assess your current level of cognitive flexibility.

How easily do you adapt to changes in your routine or plans?

How comfortable are you with uncertainty?

How often do you try to see things from someone else's perspective? Explain.

How often do you engage in activities that require you to think creatively or outside the box? Describe one example.

How often do you seek out new experiences or challenges?

Reflect on your answers to the questions above.

What surprised you about your answers?

What areas of cognitive flexibility do you feel most confident in? What areas do you need to work on?

How has a lack of cognitive flexibility impacted your life? Give specific examples.

What benefits do you think you would experience if you were more flexible?

Identify three strategies you can use to improve your cognitive flexibility. Some examples:

- trying something new
- taking on a new challenge
- practicing mindfulness or meditation to increase awareness of thoughts and emotions
- seeking out different perspectives or opinions
- changing your routine or doing things in a different order to challenge your brain

What will you do?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For each strategy, answer the following questions.

How do you plan to implement it in your daily life?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are some potential obstacles or challenges?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How will you measure progress and success?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Next, create an action plan for increasing your cognitive flexibility, including:

- 1. Three goals you want to achieve** (e.g., “I will adapt to changes in my schedule without feeling anxious.”).
- 2. Steps you will take to achieve those goals** (e.g., “I will meditate ten minutes each day to increase my awareness of my thoughts and emotions.”).
- 3. A timeline for achieving your goals** (e.g., “I will review my progress in one month and adjust as needed”).
- 4. Resources or support you require to achieve your goals** (e.g., “I will ask my counselor for feedback on my progress.”).

Write down your goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Steps to achieve your goals:

Goal 1

Timeline: _____

Goal 2

Timeline: _____

Goal 3

Timeline: _____

What are some resources or support you will need to achieve your goals?

Remember, improving cognitive flexibility takes time and effort, but it can have significant benefits for your mental health and well-being.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Inhibitory Control

Objective

To identify ways to stop or delay thoughts, actions, and impulsive behaviors by improving inhibitory control.

What to Know

Inhibition is an executive function that helps you suppress irrelevant or automatic responses in favor of more appropriate ones. When you have good inhibition, you can stop or delay impulses, thoughts, or actions. Resisting temptations, thinking before speaking or acting, and reducing impulsivity are easier when you have inhibitory control. Discipline and perseverance—staying on task despite setbacks or boredom as well as delaying gratification—also require inhibitory control.

If you have ADHD, inhibiting yourself can be challenging, leading to impulsive choices, inappropriate behavior, and difficulties with regulating emotions. This worksheet is designed to help adults with ADHD improve their inhibitory control.

What to Do

Read the following scenarios and rate your ability to inhibit yourself from 1 to 10, where 1 = it would be very difficult for me to control myself, to 10 = it is very easy to control myself. Then, identify specific strategies you could use for each situation.

Write down your strategies in the space provided.

Scenario 1: You are at a meeting and a colleague is giving a presentation. The presentation is long, dull, and you have an idea you think could improve the project. You realize that interrupting your colleague would be rude and disruptive, but you want to share your ideas.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- take a deep breath and wait for your turn to speak
- write down your ideas to discuss later
- visualize yourself waiting until your colleague finishes speaking before contributing

Strategies:

Scenario 2: You are at a party, and someone offers you a drink. You must drive home later, and drinking could impair your ability to drive safely.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- decline the offer and order a non-alcoholic beverage
- set a limit for yourself and stick to it
- have a friend hold you accountable by reminding you of your commitment to avoid drinking
- if you decide to drink, take a taxi or Uber

Strategies:

Scenario 3: You are running late for work and you notice a text message from a friend. You know that responding to the message will make you even later for work.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- remind yourself of the consequences of being late for work
- set aside time later in the day to respond to the message
- use an app that blocks notifications during certain hours

Strategies:

Scenario 4: You are in an argument with your partner, and you are angry. You know that saying hurtful things will make the situation worse.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- take a break from the conversation and take a few deep breaths
- use “I” statements to express yourself without blaming your partner
- visualize a positive outcome to the conversation before continuing

Strategies:

Scenario 5: You find an interesting article on the Internet. You start reading it, but realize you have other important tasks to complete.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- set a timer for a specific amount of time to read the article
- use a website blocker to restrict access to distracting websites during work hours
- prioritize your tasks and remind yourself of the consequences of procrastinating

Strategies:

Next, describe four scenarios from your own life.

Scenario:

Ability to inhibit: _____

Write down some ideas of what you could have down in this situation.

Scenario:

Ability to inhibit: _____

Write down some ideas of what you could have down in this situation.

Scenario:

Ability to inhibit: _____

Write down some ideas of what you could have down in this situation.

Scenario:

Ability to inhibit: _____

Write down some ideas of what you could have down in this situation.

Practicing inhibition exercises can help you improve your ability to control your impulses and make more mindful decisions. Remember that improving inhibitory control takes time and effort, but the rewards of being able to focus, complete tasks, and make better decisions are worth it. Use the strategies you identified in this worksheet to help you develop inhibitory control. By developing this skill, you will improve your relationships, work performance, and overall well-being.

Reflections on This Exercise

How has lack of inhibition negatively impacted your life? Be specific.

What are three things you can do to stop or delay thoughts, actions, and impulsive behaviors?

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing Metacognition

Objective

To increase your awareness and understanding of your thought processes.

What to Know

Metacognition, a key executive function skill, is the awareness and understanding of your own thought processes, behaviors, and feelings. If you can manage your own thinking and emotions, you can improve learning and performance, see the big picture, self-evaluate, and monitor yourself for successful task completion. This self-awareness can improve time management, goal achievement, planning ability, focus, and more. You can more easily apply what you have learned to the completion of future tasks and solve problems.

Metacognitive thinking, along with self-regulation, helps you choose, monitor, and evaluate how you approach tasks. It helps you measure progress and transfer learning and information to different contexts and tasks, increasing awareness of strengths and challenges.

For example, imagine Joe is completing an important project for work. If Joe has strong metacognition skills, he will be aware of his progress, acknowledge and cope with distractions, and make different choices to be more efficient with his time. If, upon self-reflection, he notices it is too loud in the coffee shop to work, he will move to a quieter space. He also realizes late evenings are not a good time to work on the project because he is too tired to focus. When his next project is assigned, he will have learned he is more productive during the morning hours and gets better results in a quiet environment.

Metacognitive processes can be applied at any point throughout the execution of tasks. You learn and adjust along the way. You might ask yourself these questions:

- 1. Before you begin, analyze what is ahead.** What is the goal of the task, project, or assignment? Do you have what you need to work on this task? What is the first step? Second step?
- 2. During the task, pay attention to your progress.** How is your plan working? Are you making progress? Do you need to make any adjustments? Where do you need help? Who will you ask for assistance? What do you know about this topic/situation/problem that can help you? Where can you find the information you need?
- 3. After you finish the task, consider the process as well as your accomplishments.** What did you do well? What could you have done differently?

In addition to task completion, metacognitive skills can be applied to social interactions. You can ask yourself open-ended questions to foster self-reflection:

- How am I feeling?
- What's helped me in the past that I could apply to this situation?

- What is the impact of my words, choices, and behaviors on others?
- Where has my attention been drawn to during this conversation?
- What is their non-verbal communication telling me?

Here are some additional tips to develop metacognition.

1. Practice body awareness. Notice your body sensations throughout the process.

2. Keep observations neutral. Remain neutral and avoid using self-evaluation as a path to self-criticism. Instead of asking, “Why am I such a failure?” ask, “How can I do this differently, and what support do I need?”

3. Focus on growth mindset. Reframe self-evaluation from good/bad to working/not working to avoid negativity and boost resilience. Acknowledge problems without giving up or feeling like a failure. Focus on learning, improving efficiency in problem-solving, and identifying the tools and resources you need.

4. Question yourself. Pause throughout a task or project to check your own actions. Ask yourself:

- Is this the best way to carry out this task?
- Did I miss something?
- Did I follow the right procedure?
- How could I do better next time?
- Am I looking at this task the right way?
- How can I do a better job at thinking about what I’m doing?

5. Meditate. Meditation involves clearing your mind, reducing mental chatter, reaching a calm and focused state, and becoming more aware of your inner dialogue.

6. Reflection. Pause to think about a task – reflect, identify ways to improve, try again, return to reflection. Reflective cycles often include the following phases.

- plan the task or project
- attempt the task
- look at how you did the task
- identify what you did well and areas for improvement
- plan the next task, focusing on improving on your weaknesses
- try again...
- reflect again...

Once you become skilled at reflection, you will begin to “reflect in action” while doing tasks so you can adjust as you go.

7. See your strengths and weaknesses. Make a genuine assessment of your strengths and weaknesses by using a SWOT chart:

- Strengths – write down your strengths

- Weaknesses – write down your weaknesses
- Opportunities – identify opportunities to improve your cognitive skills in the future
- Threats – identify potential threats or obstacles that may prevent you from improving

8. Consider your learning style. People learn in different ways, and if you are aware of your learning style, you can utilize your strengths while working on your weaknesses. Common learning styles include:

- Visual – learns best through images, graphics, and graphs; good at identifying patterns and matching complementary colors
- Auditory – learns best through listening rather than watching or reading
- Kinesthetic – learns best through action or movement; learn by doing things rather than reading or listening
- Logical-Mathematical – good at using reasoning to find answers
- Interpersonal – enjoys learning through social interaction; good at group work, have high emotional intelligence, and can compromise to get the job done
- Intrapersonal – enjoys considering ideas in their own heads; happy to learn in silence and isolation and may find working with others to be a distraction

9. Use mnemonic aids. These strategies improve information retention and involve using rhymes, patterns, and associations to remember.

10. Write down your work. Show others how you went about completing a task. If you are an expert on a topic, you may not think about your thinking (“unconscious competence”).

11. Think aloud. Thinking aloud makes you really think because you must talk through what your brain is doing. You become more conscious of your cognitive processes as well as help others identify areas where you might be going off-track.

12. Use a graphic organizer. Graphic organizers include mind maps, flow charts, and spider diagrams. They help you consciously improve your thinking processes through:

- organizing your thoughts
- creating connections between things you know
- thinking more deeply
- visualizing processes and procedures

13. Use regulation checklists. This can be task-based or generalized. A task-based regulation checklist, created before a task begins, includes:

- thought processes required to succeed in the task.
- observable outcomes of higher order thinking associated with the task.
- checkpoints during the task where you can pause to reflect on your thinking.

A general regulation checklist includes strategies that that include:

- reminders to pause and reflect-in-practice at regular intervals.

- prompts to remind you to think about what strategies you are using and whether they are appropriate.
- self-questioning prompts to remind you to question your choices.
- charts and questionnaires to help you focus.

14. Use active reading strategies. These strategies ensure you are concentrating while you read to comprehend the information. Examples of active reading strategies include:

- underlining important pieces of information to highlight their importance in your mind.
- placing a ruler under the sentence you are reading to help you focus.
- scanning for the main ideas.
- asking yourself questions to check comprehension.
- summarizing what you just read in one or two sentences to check for comprehension.

15. Use active listening strategies. Active listening strategies help you listen attentively. Focus on:

- turning your body to directly face the speaker.
- making eye contact.
- asking questions.
- nodding when appropriate.
- repeating what was said to you.

16. Plan. Think about how you will complete a task or project. During your planning phase:

- decide what strategies you will use when your task or activity begins.
- consider a range of different thinking skills you might use when approaching a task.
- remind yourself not to make the same mistakes you made last time.
- prepare tools that will help you keep your thinking on track, such as a graphic organizer.

For adults with ADHD, metacognition is an essential skill that can help them manage symptoms and improve their ability to focus, plan, manage time, regulate emotions, and prioritize.

This worksheet is designed to help you develop your metacognitive skills.

What to Do

The first step in developing metacognitive skills is to understand how your ADHD symptoms affect you. Answer the following questions.

What are your most significant or bothersome ADHD symptoms?

How do your symptoms affect your ability to focus?

How do your symptoms affect your ability to plan and prioritize tasks?

How do your symptoms affect your ability to manage your time?

How do your symptoms affect your ability to regulate your emotions?

How do your symptoms affect your ability to remember important information?

The next step is to identify your thinking patterns. This involves becoming aware of the way you think and the habits and strategies you use to manage your symptoms. Answer the following questions.

What strategies do you currently use to manage your ADHD symptoms?

What are your most common thinking patterns? (e.g., negative self-talk, catastrophizing)

How do your thinking patterns affect your ability to focus?

How do your thinking patterns affect your ability to plan and prioritize?

How do your thinking patterns affect your ability to manage your time?

How do your thinking patterns affect your ability to regulate your emotions?

How do your thinking patterns affect your ability to remember important information?

The final step is to develop skills that will help you manage your symptoms more effectively. Answer the following questions.

What new strategies can you use to manage your symptoms more effectively? Be specific.

What new thinking patterns can you develop that will help you focus on tasks, plan and prioritize effectively, manage your time more efficiently, regulate your emotions, and remember important information?

How can you monitor your progress and evaluate the effectiveness of your new strategies and thinking patterns?

How can you use the feedback from your progress monitoring to adjust and refine your approach?

How can you develop a growth mindset that will help you stay motivated and persevere through challenges?

Finally, apply your metacognitive skills to real-life situations. Answer the following questions.

What situations trigger your ADHD symptoms?

How can you use your metacognitive skills to manage your symptoms in these situations?

What steps can you take to prepare for challenging situations?

How can you use your metacognitive skills to reflect on your performance and make improvements?

What can you do to celebrate your successes and stay motivated to continue developing your metacognitive skills?

For the next two weeks, practice developing your metacognitive skills. Refer to the above suggestions and tips for ideas. Write down the date, describe the situation (task, project, or problem), and note any challenges or obstacles you face. Describe the metacognition skill or tool you used to cope.

Date	Situation	Challenges	How you coped

Reflections on This Exercise

What are the top three things you can do to continue developing your metacognitive skills?

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Creating Mental Images

Objective

To create mental images to increase attention and focus and the likelihood you will recall information.

What to Know

Aphantasia is a condition where people are unable to visualize images in their mind, making it difficult to daydream, picture how to solve a math problem, remember faces, or recall information and memories. Researchers have found a relationship between aphantasia and ADHD.

Some people may have mild difficulty with mental imagery, while others may be unable to visualize anything. Symptoms include:

- trouble daydreaming or imagining future events.
- difficulty remembering faces or visual memories.
- poor reading comprehension.
- difficulty learning new information.
- difficulty understanding maps or spatial concepts.
- trouble solving math problems.
- reduced emotional response.

If you have ADHD, you may have trouble with mental imagery and visualization. This may be due to a deficiency in dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is involved in attention, motivation, and reward-seeking behavior. Or there could be damage to the prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain that controls attention and executive function.

Creating mental images helps you pay more attention to what you see, hear, or read. When you create interesting images in your mind, the limbic system is stimulated by the new and interesting pictures.

Here are some suggestions to cope if you have problems visualizing images in your mind.

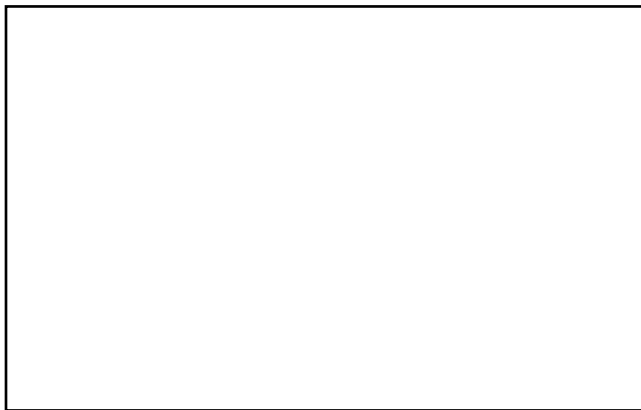
1. If you have difficulty visualizing images, use other senses to create mental pictures. For example, you can use your sense of smell or touch to imagine an object.
2. Use verbal cues and descriptive words to create mental images.
3. If you have trouble with reading comprehension, listen to audiobooks or use text-to-speech software.
4. Use mnemonic devices to learn and remember information, including rhymes, acronyms, and chunking information into smaller pieces.
5. Use external aids like flashcards or notes to create a visual representation of the information you can reference later.

6. Set aside time each day to practice generating mental images.
7. When you listen to something you want to focus on, pause to think about what it reminds you of (for instance, an animal, an object, or a location).
8. Connect words with images as much as possible throughout the day.
9. Make whatever you want to pay attention to more novel or interesting, so tune out distractions and create mental images.

What to Do

Consider the following scenarios and think about mental images you might create in each situation. Then, draw a picture and describe it in words.

1. Your friend is telling you about a new brand of shoes called Super Sneakers. He is raving about their comfort, style, and the rainbow of colors they are offered in. What is the mental image you will create? How will you remember the details if you decide to purchase these sneakers?



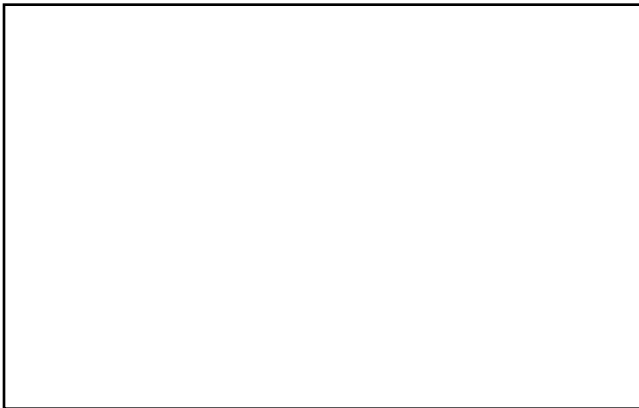
2. Your boss asked you to complete a big project by Friday. What images can you create as she explains the steps involved in completing the project? What can you do to focus on what she is saying so you do not forget the steps and you complete the project on time?



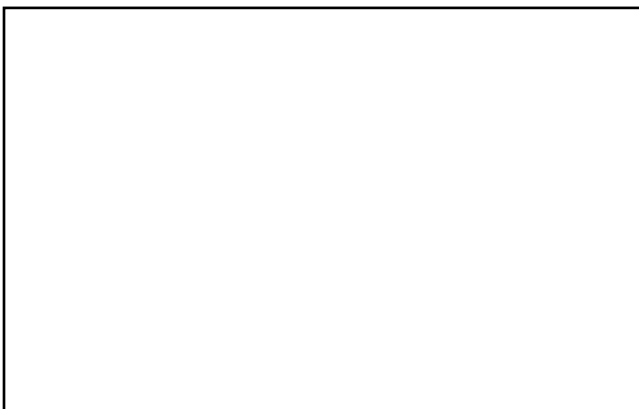
3. You are driving to a friend's home, and you get lost. You stop to ask for directions from someone, and they tell you to turn left at the yellow house and then right at the red fence. They tell you to go another 3 miles to reach the neighborhood where your friend lives. What is the mental image you will create?



4. You are at a gardening store, and the cashier suggests placing the tree you are purchasing in an east-facing spot on your property so it will grow better. What mental images can you create to remember this helpful information?



5. A friend introduces you to someone named Don Baxter from Wells, South Dakota. What mental image can you create to remember this person's name and where they are from?



Reflections on This Exercise

What are three things you can do to practice creating mental images to increase your attention and focus and the likelihood you will recall information?

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

Did this activity help you recall information? Why or why not?

What else can you do to help you more easily create mental images? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Working Memory

Objective

To improve your working memory by practicing seven activities.

What to Know

Losing your keys, leaving your wallet at the grocery store, or forgetting a loved one's birthday are often signs of poor working memory. Working memory problems are a symptom of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

“Short-term memory,” or working memory, refers to thoughts or information you hold temporarily in your mind. These bits of information are available when you need them to complete a task, have a conversation, or create a to-do list. You use working memory when reading, writing, planning, organizing, doing a mental math problem, or following multi-step directions. It helps you stay focused on (and engaged with) a task. When you mentally prepare a list before going grocery shopping or plan what you want to accomplish at work, you are using working memory.

If you have working memory problems, this part of your brain is like a loosely woven basket where items slip through the cracks. Imagine going to the store with a mental list, only to arrive home having forgotten many of the items! You might avoid having conversations because unless you interrupt the other person, you often cannot remember what you wanted to say. Perhaps you must reread paragraphs several times before you can move on. You may use external sources to help you track thoughts, ideas, lists, and so on, relying on written notes, smartphone apps, or other people's help.

Research indicates that young children have limited working memory skills, holding just one or two items in memory. Working memory continues to develop until around age 15, but not everyone develops at the same pace or has the same memory capacity.

You can use strategies to compensate for a poor working memory. Many people with ADHD use reminder systems to keep things in order, like a notepad app on their smartphone, or an alarm or calendar app to remind them of appointments. Here are some additional suggestions.

- 1. Break up large chunks of information.** Focus on one or two steps before moving on to the next. Imagine you are planning a party. You are overwhelmed with everything you need to do – shopping, cooking, cleaning your home, decorating, and setting up. Just focus on one item at a time (such as shopping) and ignore the other tasks until that item is complete. Delegate some of the tasks if a project is just too much for you to accomplish alone.
- 2. Use checklists.** You might create a checklist in the morning for what needs to be done during the day. Keep the checklist handy so you can refer to it frequently throughout the day.
- 3. Develop routines.** When you automate tasks, they no longer require working memory. When you are forced to remember what to do next, this takes up unnecessary cognitive workspace.

Create daily routines, such as placing your phone and keys in the same place when you enter your home.

4. Practice working memory skills. Experiment with ways of remembering information. Research apps, products, or services, such as [CogMed](#) and [Play Attention](#), that can help train your brain to improve working memory. Or come up with your own activities. For example, you can write down six unrelated words and try to remember the first two words without looking at the paper, then add another word to remember, and so on. You may remember lists more easily if you make it a song, make up a rhyme, or use visualization.

5. Reduce multitasking. It is far less efficient to try to do two or more things at once than to focus on one task at a time. Multitasking interferes with working memory, leads to poor academic performance, and may even contribute to long-term memory problems. According to [research](#), multitasking actually shrinks certain areas of the brain, and it is linked to shortened attention spans. Focus on completing one task and then moving on to the next.

6. Become more mindful. Regular meditation (as little as 20 minutes per day) increases blood flow to the brain, resulting in a stronger network of blood vessels in the cerebral cortex. This reinforces memory capacity. Actively minimize distractions through mindfulness exercises to increase recall.

7. Add physical activity to your daily routine. Research shows that working memory increases with daily aerobic exercise. Scientists believe physical activity improves the health of brain cells, indirectly helping by improving mood, helping you sleep better, and reducing your stress levels.

8. Group items together. Your social security number is nine digits long, while phone numbers are ten digits long. Both numbers are typically grouped or chunked, making them easier to remember.

What to Do

First, check off the following statements that apply to you.

___ I have a hard time remembering people's names, even if I have met them multiple times.

___ When I read something, I usually end up going back to re-read sections because I cannot remember what I just read.

___ I frequently misplace my phone, glasses, keys, or other personal items.

___ I feel like I waste time every day looking for misplaced items.

___ When I plan to complete work at home and pack up items I need at the end of my workday, I realize later that I forgot to bring home several essential items.

___ I have a hard time following conversations, forgetting what people said moments before.

___ I often forget what I want to say to others.

___ I frequently interrupt others because I fear I will forget what I wanted to say.

___ I have a hard time managing large projects – even when I break them down into steps, I either miss steps or spend too much time on unimportant tasks.

___ People accuse me of not listening because I fail to follow through on tasks I am asked to do.

___ In the morning, I usually rush to get ready for work, but I am still often late.

___ If I am completing a task with several steps, I often forget the final step.

___ I am a chronic multitasker.

If you checked off more than three statements, you may want to focus on improving your working memory.

For the next two weeks, use the following chart to record what you do to improve your working memory. Refer to the suggestions above or come up with your own ideas. Record the date and the activity, exercise, or action. Note whether it was helpful, and write down any related notes (for example, whether you will try the activity again, what you might do differently, and so on).

Date	Action	Helpful? Y / N	Notes

Date	Action	Helpful? Y / N	Notes

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help you improve your working memory? Explain.

What are the top three things you can do to continue improving your working memory?

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
