

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION EXAMPLES IN REAL LIFE

Self-Assessment Workbook (PDF)

A gentle, practical tool for understanding your strengths, challenges, and patterns across the nine executive function domains.

This isn't about judgment—it's about clarity.

This isn't about perfection—it's about support.

This workbook helps you explore how executive functioning shows up in your **daily life** through clear examples, reflection prompts, and practical next steps.

What You'll Do

1. Review each EF domain.
2. Read real-life examples of what that skill looks like in action.
3. Use the rating scale to assess how easy or challenging that skill feels for you.
4. Reflect on the prompts to identify patterns.
5. Choose your top **2–3 focus areas**.
6. Apply the quick-win strategies to support your EF systems today.

Rating Scale

- **Easy** – This usually feels natural or manageable.
- **Sometimes Hard** – This varies depending on stress, energy, or context.
- **Always Hard** – This consistently feels difficult or overwhelming.

The Nine Executive Function Domains (Overview)

A quick guide to the domains you'll be assessing:

1. **Working Memory** – Holding information in mind long enough to use it.
2. **Planning & Prioritization** – Deciding what to do, when, and in what order.
3. **Organization** – Keeping your space, schedule, and systems workable.
4. **Task Initiation** – Getting started without excessive delay or avoidance.
5. **Time Management** – Feeling time, estimating time, and using it intentionally.
6. **Cognitive Flexibility** – Adapting when plans change or perspectives shift.
7. **Emotional Regulation** – Managing emotional intensity to stay functional.
8. **Impulse Control** – Pausing before reacting or shifting tasks.
9. **Perseverance (Sustained Attention)** – Continuing through friction or boredom.

Working Memory

What This Looks Like in Daily Life

Examples of strong working memory:

- You remember multi-step instructions.
- You keep track of what you were doing after interruptions.

Examples of working memory challenges:

- “Why did I walk into this room?”
- Forgetting items at the store even when they were the main reason for going.
- Losing your place in conversations or tasks.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- When do I most often lose track of information?
- What types of tasks overwhelm my working memory?
- What supports help me remember things better?

Quick-Win Strategies

- Externalize everything: timers, reminders, sticky notes, whiteboards.
- Use one “capture tool” (planner, notes app, or paper).
- Break tasks into smaller steps so fewer details must be remembered at once.

Planning & Prioritization

What This Looks Like in Daily Life

Examples:

- Knowing what needs to be done first.
- Breaking big tasks into steps.
- Feeling frozen because *everything* feels urgent.
- Difficulty deciding where to start.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- What kinds of tasks feel impossible to start?
- Do I get overwhelmed trying to plan my day or week?
- What helps me choose the “next right step”?

Quick-Win Strategies

- Use the “Big 3” method: choose only 3 priorities per day.
- Try sequencing tasks by energy, not urgency.
- Use visual workflows (brain dumps, checklists, step maps).
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Organization

What This Looks Like in Daily Life

Examples:

- Clutter piles and “doom boxes.”
- Losing items often.
- Feeling relief when there is a clear home for objects.
- Forgetting digital documents exist.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- What spaces get out of control the fastest?
- Which organizational systems *actually* work for me?
- What kind of clutter stresses me out the most?

Quick-Win Strategies

- One-home rule: give frequently used items a consistent home.
- Reset surfaces instead of whole rooms.
- Digitize papers when possible.

Task Initiation

What This Looks Like in Daily Life

Examples:

- Delay starting a task even if you want to do it.
- Feeling a physical “block” when trying to begin.
- Needing a countdown or external cue to start.
- Procrastinating due to overwhelm or uncertainty.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- What tasks do I avoid most consistently?
- What tends to help me break through the starting friction?
- Are unclear steps part of the problem?

Quick-Win Strategies

- Micro-starts: Do 20 seconds, or only the first step.
- Use body-doubling or co-working.
- Clarify the first action (“Open the Google Doc,” not “Write paper”).

Time Management

What This Looks Like in Daily Life

Examples:

- Time blindness (“Where did two hours go?”).
- Underestimating how long tasks take.
- Difficulty transitioning or stopping tasks.
- Running late despite good intentions.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- Which activities steal time without me noticing?
- Do deadlines help or overwhelm me?
- What helps me perceive time more accurately?

Quick-Win Strategies

- Use visual timers to make time visible.
- Time anchors: tie tasks to fixed events (e.g., “after lunch”).
- Pre-estimate: guess the time, then check the actual duration.

Cognitive Flexibility

What This Looks Like in Daily Life

Examples:

- Struggling when plans suddenly change.
- Getting stuck on an idea or method.
- Feeling thrown off by unexpected interruptions.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- What types of changes derail me most?
- How do I react when a plan falls apart?
- Where has flexibility helped me in the past?

Quick-Win Strategies

- Build buffer time into plans.
- Practice “backup plan” thinking.
- Use scripts like: “Something changed. What are my options now?”

Emotional Regulation

Examples:

- Shutting down during conflict.
- Feeling emotions too intensely, too quickly.
- Meltdown or overwhelm spirals.
- Needing more recovery time than others.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- What emotions come on strongest for me?
- What situations overwhelm me the fastest?
- What helps me come back to baseline?

Quick-Win Strategies

- 30-second grounding (feet on floor, breathe out longer than in).
- Label the emotion: “I’m overwhelmed, not broken.”
- Step away—even briefly—to reset.

Impulse Control

Examples:

- Interrupting without meaning to.
- Difficulty pausing before reacting.
- Clicking between tasks impulsively.
- Making fast decisions you later regret.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- What impulses cause the most trouble for me?
- When am I most impulsive—tired? stressed? bored?
- What helps me insert a small pause?

Quick-Win Strategies

- 5-second pause rule.
- Keep hands busy during conversations (fidget tool).
- Use “If-Then” scripts (If overwhelmed → Then step away briefly).

Perseverance / Sustained Attention

Examples:

- Drifting off during long tasks.
- Getting bored quickly.
- Forgetting to return to unfinished tasks.
- Losing momentum once something gets hard.

Rate Yourself

- Easy
- Sometimes Hard
- Always Hard

Reflection Prompts

- What tasks do I abandon most often?
- What helps me stay engaged longer?
- When does perseverance feel easier?

Quick-Win Strategies

- Break tasks into micro-checkpoints.
- Use Pomodoro with *reward-based* breaks.
- Keep a “task return list” to come back to after interruptions.

Choose Your Top 2–3 EF Domains to Focus On

Based on your ratings and reflections:

My Top Focus Areas Are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____ *(optional)*

Why I Chose These:

What improving these EF skills would change in my daily life:

Your Personalized Quick-Start Plan

Small Changes I Can Try This Week:

(Choose 2–3 from the Quick-Wins sections.)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How I Will Support My EF System:

- Environmental adjustments
- Visual supports
- External reminders
- Body doubling
- Reducing sensory load

(Write what applies.)

Final Reflection & Self-Compassion Note

Executive function is not a measure of character, intelligence, or potential.

It fluctuates with stress, sleep, demands, trauma history, and neurotype.

You are not “bad at life.”

You are navigating tasks with a different neurological toolkit—and now you have clearer insights into how to support it.

One thing I want to remember going forward:
