



# Understanding Executive Functions

**DEFINITION:** Executive Functions (EF) are a conscious process that controls and organises goal directed behaviour. EF can be thought of as the air traffic controller of the brain, helping with emotional control, behavioural control and cognitive functions. Good EF allow us to purposely manage our thinking and behaviour - they allow us to STOP and THINK.

## There are 3 strands to EF

### Metacognitive strand

Goal setting  
Planning  
Sequencing

### Organisation strand

Time management  
Task initiation  
Goal directed attention  
Task persistence  
Working memory  
Self monitoring

### Social/emotional strand

Impulse control  
Emotional control  
Adaptability

What will help me to achieve my goals? This can be short term goals e.g I need to complete this piece of work in 30 minutes or long term goals e.g what subjects do I need to go to university?  
List your strengths and positive factors that will help you achieve your goals

## Goal Setting



What will stop me from achieving my goals? e.g attention thieves: - phones/tablets friends, not understanding what to do, not knowing where or how to start  
List your challenges, barriers and negative factors



## How can I achieve something when I don't understand and I am stuck?

7 metacognitive steps

- Get knowledge of the task or activity
- Develop self-knowledge about the task or activity or about your understanding
- Develop knowledge of strategies you can use
- Set yourself achievable goals to do the task
- Monitor the use of strategies while doing the task
- Evaluate self regulation and use of strategies
- Become a lifelong learner -
- What exactly must I do? Do I have all the instructions?
- Have I read ALL the instructions carefully? Have I underlined key words? What exactly is it I don't understand? Can I get more information from a book or the internet? How is my mindset - growth mindset or fixed mindset?
- What strategies do I know of that I could use? Where or who can give me more support?
- What is the goal? What is the 1st step, the 2nd step the 3rd step etc
- Which strategies work for me? How can I monitor myself to stay focused? Who can help me to monitor?
- What went well with the task?, What did I need help with? Next time it would be even better if..., Did I put in enough effort?
- How can I use what I have learnt in this task for another time, what strategies can I use in the future, What skills do I need to develop myself further.

## Strategies for focus

- Prioritise - what do you NEED to get done
- Use positive self talk - I can do this
- Remind yourself of your goal
- Eliminate attention thieves - phones, video games TV etc they steal your attention.
- Train your brain daily (like a muscle)
- Make a plan before you start
- Get enough sleep and movement
- Use visual timers

Stay Focused



## Strategies for organisation

- Keep your things tidy, label drawers, cupboards, books etc
- Have a set time to complete homework every day and stick to it
- Build a system and routine and stick to it every day
- Use visual supports for routines
- Have defined areas in the home for different activities
- Checklists by the door to encourage independence
- Use file folders and colour codes for paper
- Clean out bags each week
- Write things down in a diary or planner (paper or online)

