



I Think I Did It, But I Can't Find It: Assisting Students Who Lack Organizational Skills

by Carolyn Ito

Students need organizational skills for school success. Students who lack organizational skills are at a disadvantage because they often seem to be "two steps behind" the rest of the class. They are late and unprepared. While they are looking for needed materials they miss critical information like, "Today we are going to ...," or "There will be a test on Friday," or "I changed the date of your book report." The following suggestions are for teachers and paraprofessionals who work with unorganized students of all ages and disabilities. Included is information on organizing students' personal space, notebooks, planners, time, and an annotated bibliography of resources.

Organizing Personal Space

Desk:

- *Pyramid Style*: texts on left, spines out, largest book on bottom, notebooks/supplies on right
- monitor work area: clear of unnecessary, distracting material
- shared desks: turn opening away from student so items are less likely to be left
- build in clean up time at end of each class and remind students to take personal belongings

Locker:

- arrange to have unorganized students' lockers near special education teacher's room
- interior arrangement of locker
 - top shelf: texts, horizontal, color-coded book cover spines
 - hooks: use for hanging clothing, bookbag
 - bottom shelf: notebooks vertical, in order of classes, supplies
 - contents: daily schedule, pictures, decorations, mirror
- clean out schedule: weekly clean out for first month, monthly after that or whenever lockers are not well-organized or necessary items cannot be found

Bookbag:

- weekly "dump" or clean out (Friday afternoon)
 - remove, discard: outdated papers, wrappers, non-working tools
 - put in right place: all papers, tools, clothing, books, notes, etc.
 - use check list of criteria as a part of notebook check
 - note needed repairs
- team decision: teachers decide where book bags will be kept during class (in lockers, under desks, or hanging on back of chairs)

Pockets:

Help students establish one designated pocket for money, one for notes

Purses:

Encourage use of book bag for personal belonging

- guys: deodorant, comb, keys (no cologne)
- girls: lipstick, comb, deodorant, female necessities, keys (no nail polish, perfume, hair spray, etc.)

Organizing the Notebook

Teachers should provide list of materials needed for the year. The list should be distributed prior to the beginning of school, at open house, and again at mid year. Be sure each newly enrolled student is given the list. Keep copies handy for parent conferences.

Notebook:

- one large notebook (2") with dividers is better because it is easier to keep up with and students have everything needed when schedules change
- arrange subjects in order of class schedule
- use front pocket for homework assignments to do, completed assignments, and notes to parents
- monitor for needed replacement when rings are bent or cover is mutilated (write or phone parents)
- include plastic pencil pouch for 2 or 3 pencils, 2 pens, reinforces
- label notebook with student's name, team, etc.

Teacher support for maintaining organized notebooks:

- keep a folder of worksheets for absent students and so that

- students can get a replacement sheet for those lost
- keep a master notebook containing all the work, notes, etc. for student reference
- appoint someone to take notes for absent students-work out buddy system
- write the Table of Contents for each notebook on the board in a consistent area, adding to it daily
- consistency across teams is helpful

Checking notebooks:

- collect notebook contents periodically-at least every 3 weeks or when units are complete
- grade the notebooks for completeness and organization (can give a notebook quiz instead) team decision as to percent of grade earned through notebooks refuse to grade notebooks without a complete table of contents, name, class students can assist with grading own, partners
- allow class time for ordering pages 1 or 2 days prior to when notebook is due
- make notebook preparation a homework assignment
- save selected notebooks for portfolio, conferences, and exam study

Assignment Recording: Using a Planner

Necessary features of planners:

- adequate space for:
 - the daily recording of class homework assignment(s) or word *none*
 - writing numbers to indicate the order in which the assignments will be done
 - checking off completed assignment(s)
 - parent comments
 - teacher comments
- other desirable features of student planners
 - place to record long term assignments
 - place to record test grades
 - motivational blurbs
 - place to record peers' telephone numbers binding so all pages stay together for the year
 - pass system for documenting permission to leave class
 - school/team rules
- commercially prepared planners
 - cost about \$6.00 per student
 - are personalized for the school

- come with teacher's edition of lessons on organizational skills
- last a year
- ensure that all students have the same information

Organizing Time

Setting goals, making choices and establishing priorities:

When you manage time, you make the most out of life. (Santeusanio, 1989, p. 53)
lifetime goals, long-range goals (3-5 years), short-range goals(this week)

Daily schedule:

- whole day=24 hours, school=6.5 hours, eating=1, sleeping=9, grooming<1, studying=1
- locker, notebook, team area, homeroom board
- write on index card, move a paperclip down as each class is complete

Weekly schedule:

168 hours in a week, 30=school, 56=sleeping, 10=eating, 72=left over

Long-range planning-projects:

- group and individual
- choose project within 2 days of its assignment
- discuss project with parents
- check progress by using a sequential list of tasks with due dates

Social-time for friends:

- phone
- school-sponsored activities: clubs, games, dances, sports
- community sponsored: sports activities
- done in groups-skating, movies, church

Work:

- students are often one or two years older than peers
- need to have work permit
- have an interest in pocket money
- experience seems to build the student in peers' eyes
- work on weekends in bussing tables, cutting lawns, newspaper route, child care
- paid under table so learning poor things about the world of work when work
- during the week, it is too much, tired, not doing homework usually school work suffers

- monitor closely, advise parent(s) when work begins to interfere with school

Annotated Bibliography: Resources for Teaching Organizational Skills

Curie, P., deBrueys, M., Exnicios, J., & Prejean, M. (1987). 125 ways to be a better student. East Moline, IL: Lingui Systems.

Best suited to middle and high school students, this is a compilation of study skills units including background information for the teacher, lesson plans, and reproducible student worksheets. Teachers may choose individual units or use the book as a whole to enhance organization and independence. The units included are: Organizing Yourself and Your Study Time, Organizing Your Materials, Organizing Your Work Area at Home, Using an Assignment Book, Surveying, Underlining or Highlighting, Skimming, Outlining, Taking Notes, Following Oral directions, Responsibility for Behavior, Test Preparation, Test-Taking, and Test-Proofing.

Florey, H. (1987). Study orientation skills. Tuscaloosa, AL: Henry E. Florey, Jr., 3714 Paver Drive, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405.

Designed for secondary and college students, this study skills program covers a number of topics. Terms are defined and illustrated with many examples. Many pages are provided for self-inventories and practice. Topics presented include Motivation, Goal Setting, Time Management, Listening, Note Taking, Textbook Reading, Concentration, Preparing for and Taking Tests, and Organizing and Writing Papers. This manual and the Student Manual (see McDonald, B., Dickerson-Young, L., and Florey, H.) are given to participants who attend the successful study skills workshop.

Heacoz, D. (1991). Up from underachievement. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.

Irvin, J., & Rose, E. (1995) Starting early with study skills: A week-by-week guide for elementary students. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

McDonald, B., Dickerson-Young, L., & Florey, H. (1986). SSS: Successful Study Skills: The success program Student manual. Tuscaloosa, AL: Henry E. Florey, Jr., 3714 Paver Drive, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405.

Ten study skills chapters suited to secondary and college students contain definitions of terms, rating scales, and some practice activities. The ten chapters are: Motivation, Goal Setting, Time Management, Learning Styles, Listening, Note Taking, Textbook Analysis, Organization, Memory/Concentration, and Test Taking. The manual is given to participants who attend the Successful Study Skills workshop sponsored by Henry Florey.

McMurchie, S. (1994). Understanding LD-learning differences: A curriculum to promote LD awareness, self-esteem and coping skills in students ages 8-13. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Press.

Rooney, K. (1988). Independent strategies for efficient study. Richmond, VA: JR Enterprises, 2115 Willowick Lane, Richmond, VA 23233.

Karen Rooney presents many strategies to assist upper elementary through high school students with organization. Each strategy presented has some background information, visual examples, and limited practice. Among the included skill areas are Time Management, Notebook Organization, Textbook Reading, Flashcard Study, Wheels for Reading, Writing, Math, and Literature, Notetaking, Spelling, Vocabulary and Memorization, and Test-taking Strategies. Research on the development of the

strategies concludes the book. Teachers will need to supplement what is presented in order to have enough relevant material for student practice.

Santeusanio, R. (1989). Improving your study skills: Developing study skills Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service, Inc.

This student WorkText contains nine units including Locating Information, The Library, Taking Notes, Using Visuals, Managing Time, HEART: A Study System, Reading Rates, Taking Tests, and What to Do When You Don't Understand. The material is suited to middle and high school students. Questions and exercises follow background information. Teachers may need to supplement the materials presented.

Santeusanio, R. (1988a). Study skills and strategies: Student text. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service, Inc.

The student worktext contains practical suggestions and strategies. Each chapter explains what, why, and how the student will learn the material. Practice material follows. Topics presented are Getting Ready to Study, HEART-A System for Studying (seven chapters), Managing Your Time, Learning from Visuals, and Using Research to Learn. The program is suited to middle and high school students.

Santeusanio, R. (1988b). Study skills and strategies: Teacher's manual. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service, Inc.

The Teacher's Manual contains background material for teachers including an extensive reference list. Materials for each chapter include objectives, Teaching Suggestions, and the answers to the questions in the Student Text.

Strichart, S., & Mangrum, C. (1993). Teaching study strategies to students with learning disabilities: ready-to-use reproducible, teaching plans, and resources for middle to high school. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

This teacher resource text contains background information, teaching plans, reproducible pages, and exercises to practice new skills in a variety of subject areas. Topics covered in the text are Remembering Information, Reading and Taking Notes from Textbooks, Solving math Word Problems, Taking Notes from Class Presentations, Using the Library, Using Reference Books, Interpreting Visual Aids, Writing a Research Paper, Taking Tests, and Using Time. The References and Bibliography section is extensive.

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