

Task initiation

Being able to start even the simplest of tasks or jobs requires a certain level of planning in order to perform it. Task initiation is a skill that falls under the category of executive function.

Put simply, executive functions are skills performed by our brain that help us to take a thought and make it an action.

Students might find it hard starting a task for a number of reasons, some of which may include:

- Feeling overwhelmed by a large or complex task
- Being reluctant to attempt a task for fear of failure
- Being uncertain of the steps required to complete the task
- Prioritising the importance of one task over another
- Estimating how long a task will take
- Thinking about starting something new

How to help students with task initiation

Time management

Give a list of actions or use visuals to help students start tasks, rather than using verbal prompts such as, 'Are you ready?'

Positive reinforcement

Use a reward system to praise target behaviour, rather than reminding students to cease a behaviour.

Organisational skills

Use visual examples of what is needed to assist students keep their environment organised.

Task completion

Try altering or breaking down the steps of a task and/or the response needed from the student (e.g. type a written draft in class and record this orally at home).

Self regulation

Consider whole class approaches to mindfulness and relaxation to assist with monitoring feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

Change management

Before asking students to attempt a task, model activities, allow observations and/or timed observations. Create a way to communicate discomfort.

References

Jordan, R. Roberts, J.M., & Hume, K. (2019). *The SAGE handbook of autism and education*. London: SAGE Publications.

Prath, S. (2019). Helping students with executive functions – what is our role as SLPs. *ASHA Leader – School Matters*, 24(9), 36 - 38. <https://doi.org/10.1044/leader.SCM.24092019.36>

