Teacher Tips for Improving Students’ Organizational Skills

It’s common for students with ADHD and/or LD to have difficulty with organizational skills and time management. Teachers can help provide needed structure, assist in becoming organized, and support these critical skills for success. The assistance you provide will depend on the child’s age and ability.

Classroom organization

- Encourage your school to establish a school-wide expectation for organization/study skills.
- Teach how to organize materials, desk, etc. Provide necessary supplies/time to get organized.
- Encourage students to organize materials at the beginning or end of class.
- Provide time and assistance (peer or adult) for cleaning out/sorting students’ messy desks, lockers, and backpacks. It helps to dump everything in a big bag and discard unnecessary paper or trash.
- Have periodic desk/binder checks and positively reinforce (e.g. prizes, privilege) for compliance.
- Clearly identify certain places in the room (e.g. trays, shelves, color-coded folders/boxes) where students know where to turn in assignments or store unfinished work.
- Present all assignments, page numbers, due dates, etc. to students verbally AND visually.
- Write assignments in one place (e.g. top of the board) and keep them posted for students to copy.

Materials

- Require the use of a 3-ring binder/notebook, subject dividers, and pencil pouch (with sharpened pencils, erasers, highlighter, and other essentials).
- Require students to carry a backpack/bookbag, and bring the binder/notebook every day.
- Require the use of a monthly assignment calendar or daily/weekly assignment sheet.
- Make sure any handouts/papers you give students are 3-hole punched.
- Give students a clipboard for papers on the desk.
- Provide bins, pencil cases, boxes and/or organizing trays for supplies and materials.
- Send home an extra set of books for the parents to keep at home.
- Require labeling of materials/supplies with students’ names.
- Encourage the use of self-stick notes for marking pages in books, jotting down key words and notes.

Visual cues

- Color-code books, folders, and materials. For example: blue math book, blue math notebook/section/folder, daily schedule has the subject ‘math’ highlighted in blue.
- Color-code important notices, handouts, and assignment details. Example: book reports in pink, weekly/monthly newsletters in blue. Try giving two copies (one for the notebook, and one for home).
- Use visual/graphic organizers with high frequency (e.g. sequence charts, story maps, sentence maps, webs, clusters, flow charts, Venn diagrams).
- Provide framed outlines for filling in missing words and phrases during instruction.

Providing assistance

- Provide enough time during transitions to put material away and get organized for the next activity.
- Provide models of well-organized papers, projects, science boards, etc.
- Provide in-school help and adult assistance for projects. This may include help organizing layout on a project board, printing from the computer, cutting papers with a paper cutter, etc.
- Help students organize ideas by using self-stick notes, dry-erase boards, and questioning/prompting.
- Give personal reminders (verbally or notes) about materials needed for class assignments.
- Allow for natural consequences of being unprepared. Give LESS DESIRABLE materials for those who need to borrow materials such as golf pencils, old pencils, and used papers (with a clean back side). DO NOT positively reinforce students by giving them a new pencil, notebook paper, etc.
Tips for Improving Students' Time Management

Time and schedules
- Teach students **how to tell time** and read a non-digital clock.
- Teach students **how to read calendars and schedules**.
- Establish a **daily routine and schedule** for the classroom.
- Post all **schedules** and refer to them frequently. With younger students, use a pictorial schedule.

Managing work
- Assist with **prioritization** of activities and workload.
- Utilize “things to do” lists. Model and teach how to write down and cross off accomplished tasks.
- Attach a “things to do” list on the student’s desk, and monitor the practice of crossing off items.
- Break down longer assignments into smaller, structured increments.

Planning ahead
- Provide **advanced notice** about upcoming projects and reports.
- **Call close attention to due dates**. Post those due dates and frequently refer to them as reminders.
- Keep a **master monthly calendar** posted in the classroom that contains all given assignments and scheduled activities/events. Provide checklists and schedules.
- Communicate and maintain the clear expectation that **all assignments are to be recorded** on the student’s assignment calendars/assignment sheets, and monitor that this is occurring.
- **Model writing assignments** using a transparency of the calendar/assignment sheet. Teach students to write the assignments (tests, book reports, etc.) on the day they are DUE. Walk them through recording on the correct date and monitor the assignment calendars.
- Take a few moments at the end of the subject period or school day to **lead students in the recording of assignments** on their calendars/assignment sheets/planners.

Providing assistance
- Try using a **contract for work** completed in class with positive reinforcement.
- **Use timers** for seatwork and set timers for transitions (First state: “You have 5 minutes to finish what you are working on and putting away your materials.” Then set the timer.)
- Encourage students taking medication at school to have a **beeper watch set** for the time they need to go to the nurse’s office.
- Check students with ADHD for **progress on long-term projects** (e.g. book reports, science fair projects). Check to see if they have the necessary materials. Ask to see what they have accomplished so far. Have a copy of all the guidelines/deadlines at home for the parents.
- **Assign study buddies**. They can check each other to make sure assignments are recorded on calendars/assignment sheets. Buddies exchange phone numbers to call each other when one is absent, communicate about what was missed in class, and collect handouts, notices, and assignments.
- **Provide additional assistance** either directly or from peer partners/study buddies.
- Routinely **ask table partners or groups to check each other** that everything is accurately recorded on each other’s calendars/planners.
- **Teach students how to self-monitor on-task behavior**, so that they are using class time effectively for getting work done.
- **Use frequent praise and positive reinforcement**. Reward for meeting deadlines, finishing in-school assignments, and so forth.

The information in this handout is adapted from materials written by Sandra Rief. Developed for the Learning, Education, and Attention in Pediatrics (LEAP) Clinic by the Center for Children with Special Needs (CCSN) and the Center on Child and Family Outcomes (CCSF) at Tufts-New England Medical Center in 2007.