

Open Your Class With This Tomorrow- *Brain Hacks: Life-Changing Strategies to Improve Executive Functioning*

Background: The following activities are designed to help improve executive functioning in attention and focus. The book has many more tips and exercises for this area of executive functioning, as well as the other four covered in the book.

Career Brainstorming and Your Jet Stream

One “brain hack” for attention and functioning involves flying with your “jet stream”. A jet stream involves a rapid air current that allows planes to travel faster with less effort and fuel. The following activity helps students identify and employ their “jet stream” to help them reach their goals faster and with less effort.

Directions: Answer the following prompts about your career interests. Identifying your interests will help you choose a career or area of study that allows you to fly with your “jet stream.” It will help you stay focused and persist when studying gets difficult if you choose a career aligned with your strengths and interests.

1. Describe your ideal career or side hustle with specific details. For example, instead of saying, “I would like to be a personal trainer,” say in a more detailed manner, “I want to be a personal trainer to help college athletes prepare for a career in professional sports.”
2. Describe how your family and close friends might react to your career goal. How do the expectations of others encourage or create additional boundaries for career goals?
3. Could you get comfortable turning down jobs or extracurricular activities that you feel you “should” take but do not want to because they are unrelated to your goals? What would you say to yourself if you allowed yourself to say “no”?
4. What is one question you would ask of someone who has your dream job? Next, find a person working in your dream career and send an email asking the one question you created. If you are unsure who to email, network with teachers, family members, neighbors, and friends to find the email of one relevant person to ask your question.
5. Make a list of obstacles that you might face in pursuing this career. Predicting obstacles helps you be prepared when they occur and gives you time to plan how to respond.
6. Brainstorm a list of ways you might respond to the potential obstacles you predicted. How will you keep going in the face of rejection?
7. Create a list of ten actions you can take to be in the ideal job you are passionate about, and take the first action step as soon as possible.

“New Year’s Day” Every Week and the Five-Year Plan

Directions: Many people have difficulty keeping New Year’s resolutions because they lose momentum and focus. This activity will help you improve in the executive functioning area of attention and focus.

Set aside 10 minutes weekly to review your “New Year’s Day Resolutions” or goals for the year. Use a calendar reminder app or write it where you will see it daily. During those ten minutes, remind yourself of your long-term goal and what small steps you took in the last week. Track your progress in a journal, including small and large steps achieved.

Create a five-year goal by making a list of goals for various areas in your life (e.g., education, career, travel, hobbies, relationships, spirituality, health, romance). Set a monthly reminder to

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think about making progress toward longer-term goals. Track your progress in a journal, including small and large steps achieved.

Create A “Not-To-Do List”

Directions: This activity will help you improve in the executive functioning area of attention and focus. Create a physical reminder of the various factors that distract you and prevent you from finishing important tasks and making progress toward goals. Make a two-column list with your weekly to-do list of what you want to accomplish this week on the left and a not-to-do list on the right. Fill the not-to-do column with the “time stealers” that distract you. If something does distract you, ask yourself, “Can I come back to that when I finish what I am doing now?” If so, write it down and follow up after you finish your to-do items. As a bonus, reward yourself with something from the not-to-do list that you enjoy if you accomplish your goals.

Write A Mission Statement

Directions: This activity will help you improve in the executive functioning area of attention and focus. Companies and schools have mission statements to provide focus and meaning to work goals, and this idea can also help at the individual level. Mission statements also create end goals and something to aspire for in life. As a psychologist, the author’s mission is “Find gifts, meet needs.” She uses this to focus her attention and content message during consulting, speaking, research, and writing tasks. Mission statements allow individuals to define what should be on the to-do list and what should be relegated to the not-to-do list.