How To: Improve Student Self-Management Through Work-Planning Skills: Plan, Work, Evaluate, Adjust

It is no surprise to teachers that, when students have poor work-planning skills, their academic performance often suffers. Work-planning is the student's ability to inventory a collection of related sub-tasks to be done, set specific outcome goals that signify success on each sub-task, allocate time sufficient to carry out each sub-task, evaluate actual work performance, and make necessary adjustments in future work-planning as needed (Martin, Mithaug, Cox, Peterson, Van Dycke & Cash, 2003).. When students are deficient as work planners, the negative impact can be seen on in-class and homework assignments as well as on longer-term projects such as research papers. Teachers can develop students' work-planning skills by training them in a simple but effective sequence: to plan upcoming work, complete the work, evaluate their work performance, and adjust their future work plans based on experience (Martin et al., 2003).

The vehicle for teachers to train students to develop strong work-planning skills is through conferencing: the teacher and student meet for a pre-work *planning* conference and then meet again after the work is completed at a *self-evaluation* conference. NOTE: The *Student Independent Work: Planning Tool* that appears later in this document is a graphic organizer that can be used to structure and record these 2-part teacher-student conferences.

Phase 1: Work-Planning Conference

Before the student begins the assigned academic work, the teacher meets with the student to develop the work plan. (While the teacher often initially assumes a guiding role in the work-planning conference, the instructor gradually transfers responsibility for developing the plan to the student as that student's capacity for planning grows.)

There are 3 sections in the work-planning conference: (1) inventory the sub-tasks to be done, (2) assign an estimated time for completion, and (3) set a performance goal for each item on the task list:

1. *Inventory the sub-tasks to be done.* The student describes each academic task in clear and specific terms (e.g., "Complete first 10 problems on page 48 of math book", "write an outline from notes for history essay"). For this part of the work plan, the teacher may need to model for the student how to divide larger global assignments into component tasks.

2. *Assign an estimated time for completion.* The student decides how much time should be reserved to complete each task (e.g., For a math workbook assignment: "20 minutes" or "11:20 to 11:40"). Because students with limited planning skills can make unrealistic time projections for task completion, the teacher may need to provide additional guidance and modeling in time estimation during the first few planning sessions.

3. *Set a performance goal.* The student sets a performance goal to be achieved for each sub-task. Performance goals are dependent on the student and may reference the amount, accuracy, and/or qualitative ratings of the work: (e.g., for a reading assignment: "To read at least 5 pages from assigned text, and to take notes of the content"; for a math assignment: "At least 80% of problems correct"; for a writing assignment: "Rating of 4 or higher on class writing rubric"). The teacher can assist the student to set specific, achievable goals based on that student's current abilities and classroom curriculum expectations.

Phase 2: Self-Evaluation Conference

When the work has been completed, the teacher and student meet again to evaluate the student's performance. There are 2 sections to this conference: (1) Compare the student's actual performance to the original student goal; and (2) adjust future expectations and performance in light of the experience gained from the recently completed work.

1. *Compare the student's actual performance to the original student goal.* For each sub-task on the plan, the student compares his or her actual work performance to the original performance goal and notes whether the goal was achieved. In addition to noting whether the performance goal was attained, the student evaluates whether the sub-task was completed within the time allocated.

2. *Adjust future expectations and performance.* For each sub-task that the student failed to reach the performance goal within the time allocated, the student reflects on the experience and decides what adjustments to make on future assignments. For example, a student reviewing a homework work-plan who discovers that she reserved insufficient time to complete math word problems may state that, in future, she should allocate at least 30 minutes for similar sub-tasks. Or a student who exceeds his performance goal of no more than 4 misspellings in a writing assignment may decide in future to keep a dictionary handy to check the spelling of questionable words before turning in writing assignments.

References

Martin, J. E., Mithaug, D. E., Cox, P., Peterson, L. Y., Van Dycke, J. L., & Cash, M.E. (2003). Increasing self-determination: Teaching students to plan, work, evaluate, and adjust. *Exceptional Children, 69*, 431-447.

Student Independent Work: Planning Tool

Student: _____ Teacher/Staff Member: _____ Date: ___/___/___

	Date:	Planning Sub-Task: Describe each assignment sub-task to be completed.	Planning Time Allocated: Estimate the time required for this task. E.g., "20 mins"; "11:20-11:40"	Planning Performance Goal: Write your goal for the amount, accuracy, and/or quality of work to be completed.	Self-Evaluation Actual Performance: After the assignment, record the amount, accuracy, and/or quality of the work *actually completed*.	Self-Evaluation Goal Met?: Did you achieve the goal within the time allocated?
1	___/___/___					☐ YES ☐ NO
2	___/___/___					☐ YES ☐ NO
3	___/___/___					☐ YES ☐ NO
4	___/___/___					☐ YES ☐ NO

Adjustment: Find any 'NO' responses in the **Goal Met?** column. In the space below, write the number of that goal and your plan to improve on that goal next time.

Number of Goal Not Met & Action Plan to Fix: _____ _____

Number of Goal Not Met & Action Plan to Fix: _____ _____

Number of Goal Not Met & Action Plan to Fix: _____ _____