FREE MINI-MODULE

START THE TASK

Executive Functioning | Grades 7-12

Five practical, classroom-ready activities that help students begin tasks when starting feels difficult.

01 Identify the barrier

Find what is making the start difficult.

02 Shrink the first step

Turn a big task into one visible action.

03 Use a five-minute start

Make the initial commitment manageable.

04 Remove friction

Set up materials and reduce distractions.

05 Start before motivation

Practice taking action without waiting to feel ready.

INCLUDES **5 activities + student check-in + teacher guide**

Works as a stand-alone 3-5 lesson mini-module or a targeted intervention.

WHAT IS BLOCKING THE START?

SKILL Identify the real reason a task is being delayed.

DIRECTIONS Match each situation to the most likely barrier. Choose from: unclear, too large, boring, distracting environment, worried about doing it wrong, or low energy.

1 Mia keeps opening a blank document because she does not know what the first paragraph should include.

Likely barrier: _____

2 Jordan has a 12-page packet and keeps thinking, “There is no way I’m doing all of that.”

Likely barrier: _____

3 Alex knows exactly how to fold the laundry but keeps choosing videos instead.

Likely barrier: _____

4 Riley tries to work while notifications appear every few minutes.

Likely barrier: _____

5 Cameron rewrites the first sentence repeatedly and never moves forward.

Likely barrier: _____

6 Taylor planned to clean the room at midnight after a long day.

Likely barrier: _____

USE THE BARRIER

Choose one situation. What strategy would address the barrier instead of simply saying “try harder”?

_____

_____

SHRINK THE FIRST STEP

SKILL Make the beginning small enough to start.

DIRECTIONS Rewrite each task as a first action that could usually be started in five minutes or less. Use a visible verb: open, find, list, read, gather, write, ask, plan, or schedule.

1 **Do my research project.**

My first action: _____

2 **Clean my room.**

My first action: _____

3 **Apply for a job.**

My first action: _____

4 **Study for the test.**

My first action: _____

5 **Get caught up in math.**

My first action: _____

6 **Plan for college or training after high school.**

My first action: _____

WHY IT WORKS

Why can a tiny first action be more useful than writing the entire goal on a task list?

_____

_____

USE THE FIVE-MINUTE START

SKILL Begin without committing to finishing everything.

THE IDEA Plan a five-minute start for a 45-minute assignment you have been avoiding. Work for five focused minutes, then decide whether to continue or schedule your next work block.

The task I need to start

The exact first action

What I need in front of me

What I will remove or silence

My five-minute start time

AFTER FIVE MINUTES, I CAN:

A. Continue because I have momentum.

B. Take a planned break and schedule the next work block.

C. Stop indefinitely and hope the task disappears.

THINK IT THROUGH

Which choices are strongest, and why does a five-minute start make beginning easier?

REMOVE FRICTION BEFORE YOU BEGIN

SKILL Prepare the environment for action.

DIRECTIONS For each task, identify one source of friction and one change that would make starting easier.

TASK	POSSIBLE FRICTION	MAKE IT EASIER
Morning workout		
Homework after school		
Bringing required materials tomorrow		
Completing an online application		
Cleaning a shared space		

PREP AHEAD

What is one thing you could prepare the night before to make tomorrow easier to start?

START BEFORE YOU FEEL READY

SKILL Separate useful action from waiting for motivation.

DIRECTIONS Mark each statement HELPFUL or UNHELPFUL. Then rewrite one unhelpful belief as a practical action statement.

1	I'll wait until I'm in the mood.	Helpful	Unhelpful
2	I only need to complete the first step right now.	Helpful	Unhelpful
3	If I cannot finish the whole thing, there is no point starting.	Helpful	Unhelpful
4	Starting may make the task feel more manageable.	Helpful	Unhelpful
5	I can do ten minutes even if I do not feel motivated.	Helpful	Unhelpful
6	I need the perfect plan before I begin.	Helpful	Unhelpful
7	A rough first attempt gives me something to improve.	Helpful	Unhelpful
8	I can schedule a start time instead of waiting for motivation.	Helpful	Unhelpful

REWRITE IT

Choose one unhelpful statement and turn it into a practical action. Complete: I do not have to feel ready before I begin. One action I can take anyway is...

MINI-MODULE CHECK-IN

SKILL Reflect on strategies and identify one next action.

RATE EACH STATEMENT 1 Not yet 2 Sometimes 3 Usually 4 Consistently

I can identify why I am delaying a task.	1	2	3	4
I can make the first step smaller.	1	2	3	4
I can use a short starting period to create momentum.	1	2	3	4
I can prepare my environment so starting requires less effort.	1	2	3	4
I can begin without waiting to feel motivated.	1	2	3	4

THE STRATEGY I AM MOST LIKELY TO USE

ONE TASK WHERE I COULD USE IT THIS WEEK

ONE ACTION I CAN TAKE IN THE NEXT 24 HOURS

TEACHER / FACILITATOR GUIDE

SKILL Suggested responses and implementation notes.

Suggested use: 3-5 short lessons, small-group intervention, resource-room support, advisory, study skills, transition, or individual skill practice. Student pages are 2-7.

ACTIVITY 1 / BARRIER MATCH

1 Unclear; 2 Too large; 3 Boring; 4 Distracting environment; 5 Worried about doing it wrong; 6 Low energy. Strong answers choose a strategy that fits the barrier.

ACTIVITY 2 / SHRINK THE STEP

Accept small, visible starting actions (open, find, list, read, gather, write, ask, plan, or schedule). A first step should be realistic and actionable.

ACTIVITY 3 / FIVE-MINUTE START

Strongest choices: A or B. Five minutes reduces the initial commitment; continuing or scheduling the next work block supports follow-through.

ACTIVITY 4 / REMOVE FRICTION

Examples: lay out materials, pack required items the night before, gather application information first, silence notifications, and choose one work area.

ACTIVITY 5 / HELPFUL THINKING

Helpful: 2, 4, 5, 7, 8. Unhelpful: 1, 3, 6. A useful rewrite names a specific action rather than waiting for the perfect mood or plan.

Facilitator note: Students may use fictional examples instead of sharing personal information. Check-ins measure skill practice and reflection; they are not diagnostic scores.

KEEP BUILDING THESE SKILLS

SKILL Choose targeted practice or the full executive functioning system.

FOCUSED NEXT STEP

TASK INITIATION & PROCRASTINATION TOOLKIT

For students who benefit from more focused practice with barriers, starting cues, procrastination, accountability, restart plans, and progress tracking.

VIEW THE $4.95 TOOLKIT ON TPT

COMPLETE 12-UNIT SYSTEM

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING ACTIVITIES / MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

A complete system with 120 applied activities covering organization, planning, time management, starting tasks, focus, priorities, remembering, follow-through, and everyday responsibilities.

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