

Assistive Technology for Study and Organizational Skills

Generally when I write these assistive technology pages, I take the information I have received from the ADE Conference and summarize it. I may replicate some charts but overall the words are mine. For this one, though, I am going to quote Judy Sweeny from Onion Mountain Technologies. Here is what she has to say regarding organization:

“Organizational skills plague many students-in and out- of special education. Students have problems keeping track of assignments and long term projects; finding and storing papers, keeping their desks, lockers, and backpacks organized; making their work readable and organized; prioritizing the importance of competing tasks; and remembering the sequence of steps in order to complete a task. These problems are really quite diverse and surprisingly often contradictory. They appear in some situations and classes but don’t appear in other environments or with different teachers. Some children seem to grow in and out of the problems. I believe that the problems we have helping our children or students deal with organizational tasks and strategies lie in the fact that we **haven’t comprehensively looked at the needs and skill sets associated with organization**. We haven’t considered the student’s native and inborn ways to create meaning and establish patterns in their own lives and we don’t recognize how our efforts to organize them **in our own patterns make or don’t make sense to them**. When we can categorize our students’ (or our own!) organizational problems and styles, we have a starting point that allows us to more accurately find specific tools that would help remediate and/or compensate for the difficulty in many areas of organization.”

We tend to be one of two different kinds of thinkers. We are either Global Thinkers or Linear Thinkers.

Global Thinkers tend to:

- Miss details and small things
- Like to see all the things they are currently thinking about/doing
- Skip steps
- Like to set up the categories so everything can be included (but the actual sorting is too boring/time consuming).

Linear Thinkers tend to:

- Be concerned with details
- Have trouble working in the midst of visual clutter
- Like things put away in an organized system
- Do things precisely and in order
- Like to put things away but may have more trouble defining meaningful categories that include everything.

The message I take away from Judy Sweeny is:

Don’t try to organize the students into Mini Mes. Their styles may be completely different and still acceptable.

Watch your students. If that child with the messy notebook can put his/her hands on the specific paper you are wanting, maybe their organizational style works for them and changing it may make YOU feel better but not them.

So what do we do with students who don't have an organizational style; who struggle to get things done and feel good about it when they put their heads on their pillows at night?

Breaking down possible issues into categories, here are a few suggestions for each.

Trouble with keeping track of time:

- Time timer
- Time Pads
- Visual Picture Schedules
- Homework Binder

Trouble with organizing their notebooks, keeping lockers and desks "neat":

- Binders and Folders
- Use of color coding
- Hefty Tabs
- Filing systems for
 - Notebooks
 - Lockers
 - Storage bins or containers

Trouble with knowing which folder work goes in or they can't identify folders they need:

- Teach sorting techniques
- Using multiple colors of highlighters
- Talking photo album which "tells" students where things need to be placed
- Color coding file folders and book covers

Trouble with attending to only part of the assignment or only have some of the tools they need:

- Using color/lights to increase attention
- Non-verbal cuing (notes, picture cards, rubrics etc)
- Background "noise" aids for auditory students
- Scent machines to encourage learning and concentration

Trouble with prioritization issues:

- Choosing the first thing that causes the most anxiety to get it out of the way
- Color coding from "hot/red" to "cool/blue"
- Using different color ink in plan book to note work that must be done first
- Re-ordering work in homework folder so the most important work is on top.

Trouble with sequencing and doing work in the proper sequence:

- To do lists
- Visual cue reminders
- Step by Step Communicator
- Talking Photo Album

Here is a website for teachers:

<http://www.onionmountaintech.com/>

Along the lower left hand side are a variety of articles written by Judy Sweeny and her staff at Onion Mountain Technology. Explore those for almost any area of assistive technology you are interested in learning more about.

Free On-Line Homework Help Websites for K-12

<http://www.kids.gov>

First Gov for Kids--U.S. government site that provides links to sites that cover a variety of topics including American History, U.S. government, science and even law.

<http://ipl.org>

The Internet Public Library-features directories on online texts, newspapers, magazines and reference materials

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/education/homework/index.html>

National Geographic Homework Help-offers pictures, articles, maps, and multimedia presentations on an array of subjects.

<Http://www.ipl.org/div/aplus/>

Research and Writing for High School Students: Includes step by step instructions on researching and writing, how to find information online and offline as well as links to useful resources.

I have many more links for a variety of subjects. If you have any specific needs for students please contact me and I will send you what I have.

These websites are provided as information only. Assistive Technology is an IEP process which is a team decision. If something here makes you think that a student may benefit from the product or website, please go to the IEP team with your thoughts before implementing. Although I reviewed all the websites prior to posting here, please understand that links are often changed without notice. If something here no longer applies, please contact pkeeling@ccusd93.org and advise her that the website no longer reflects the topic being considered.