# Supporting Executive Functioning Q & A

**What is executive functioning (EF)?**
It is the traffic control center of our brain! It plans, regulates emotion, directs and regulates attention, self-monitors, organizes, and initiates tasks.

**What are the skillsets of EF?**
EF includes cognitive flexibility (can I switch gears quickly?), working memory (will I be able to remember information while you tell me something new?) and inhibitory control (can I keep myself from reacting immediately and without thinking?).
Students may need differing levels of support with each component of EF.

**How do these skillsets work together?**
Working memory and inhibitory control have a reciprocal relationship in that both functions support one another. Working memory helps students to remember what to inhibit or hold back. Then, to put information together for working memory, they must resist focusing on external stimuli in order to make sense of material in front of them. Cognitive flexibility builds on both working memory and inhibitory control
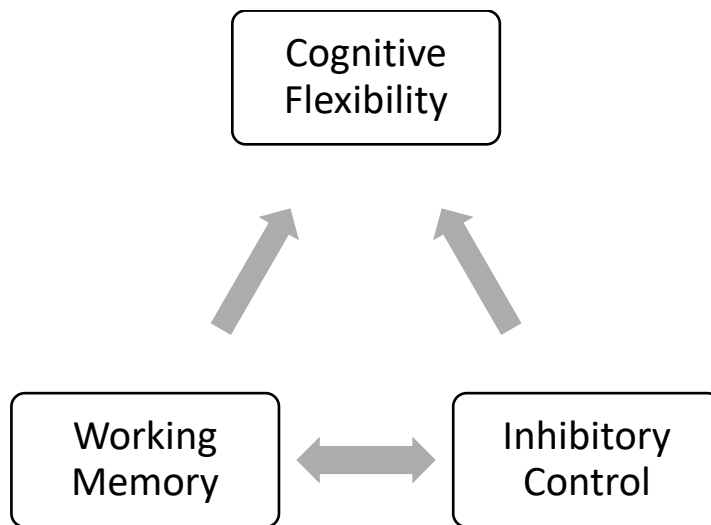


**What might challenges with working memory (WM) look like in the classroom?**
– Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words and comprehending for meaning
– Difficulty remembering to add an apostrophe to a word while also remembering the rest of the sentence while writing.
– Incomplete class notes

**What might challenges with inhibitory control (IC) look like in the classroom?**
– Distracted by external or internal stimuli.
– Impulsive reactions to others or calls out.
– Missing directions or instructions.
– Risk taking behaviors

**What might challenges with cognitive flexibility (CF) look like in the classroom?**
– Not understanding a math problem can be solved in multiple ways.
– Resistance to transitioning from group work to individual tasks.
– Struggles with cumulative tests, especially in math.
– Refusal to stop using strategies, even if they are wrong.

**How do I help students with executive functioning needs?**
- KWL Charts (CF, WM)
- Multiple opportunities to learn information (CF, WM)
- Graphic organizers (WM)
- "Concentration corners" (IC)
- Mnemonics, rhymes, songs, games (WM, IC, CF)
- List of materials for each task (WM, CF)
- Learning zones (WM, IC)
- Planners and agendas (WM)
- Cues for off-task classroom behavior (IC)
- Board games (WM, CF, IC)
- Show examples of completed projects and papers (CF, IC)
- Templates for routine assignments (WM)
- *Limited* choices (CF, IC, WM)
- Checklists (materials, self-reflection, due dates) (CF, IC, WM)

**Where can I find more information?**
A full report can be found at IES Executive Function: Implications for Education. Chapter 2 provides additional information about the role of executive functioning in learning.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncer/pubs/20172000/pdf/20172000.pdf

CEC's Support Executive Function in the Classroom: Improve Student Learning Webinar
https://exceptionalchildren.org/webinar/support-executive-function-classroom-improve-student-learning