EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING
&
STUDY SKILLS

Tangible tools & strategies

marigold prep

About Us

- Virtual support for test prep, executive functioning, and every major academic subject
- Decades of tutoring experience
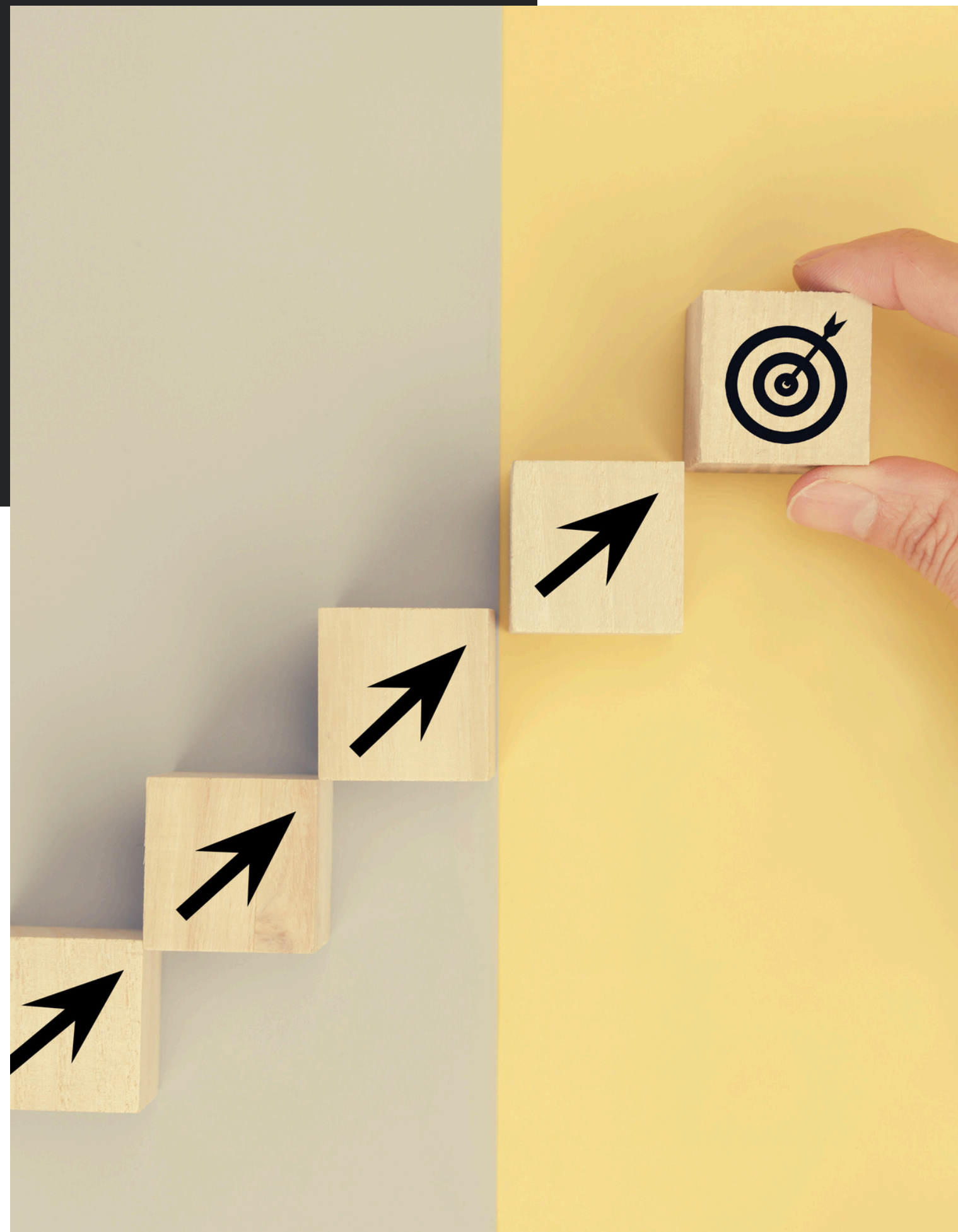- Provided online instruction "before it was cool"

marigold prep

Cassie Brown

Founder & Principal

---

415 237 3377

cassie@marigoldprep.com

Today we will cover

- Executive Functioning vs Study Skills

- Identifying Challenges

- Tangible Tools & Strategies

- Live Q & A

PART 1:
DEFINITIONS & DIFFERENCES

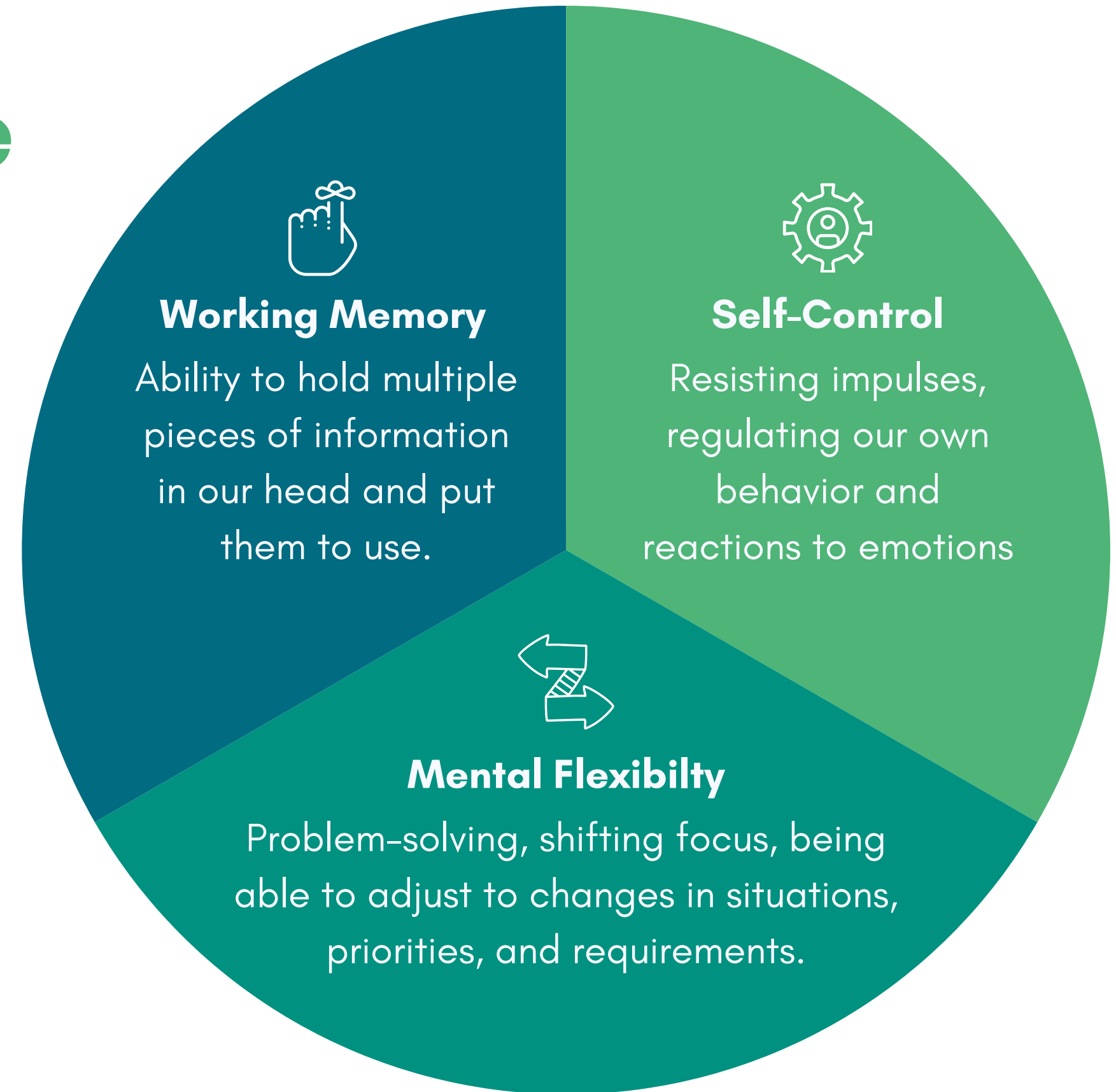marigold prep

What is **executive functioning?**

Executive: "having the power to put plans, actions, or laws into effect"

Functions: A set of **mental processes** that govern our conscious decisions and voluntary actions.

Some key executive functions are:

Harvard-backed research describes these skills as an **air traffic control system** that helps multiple planes land and **take off simultaneously.**

Just like the air traffic control system, executive functioning skills allow us to **initiate, organize, and shift focus** between multiple tasks fluidly.

Working Memory
Ability to hold multiple pieces of information in our head and put them to use.

Self-Control
Resisting impulses, regulating our own behavior and reactions to emotions

Mental Flexibilty
Problem-solving, shifting focus, being able to adjust to changes in situations, priorities, and requirements.

Where do executive functioning skills come from?

MISCONCEPTION

"You can't teach this stuff – you either get it or you don't. Some people are just born better at staying organized, controlling their temper, or adjusting to new situations/ than others."

TRUTH

No one is born with executive functioning skills. They develop over time. A child's experiences and environment can have a profound effect during this period of development.

Because it deals with conscious decisions, executive functioning can absolutely be taught and learned.

Executive Functioning Skills Build Over Time

Executive Function Skills Build Into the Early Adult Years
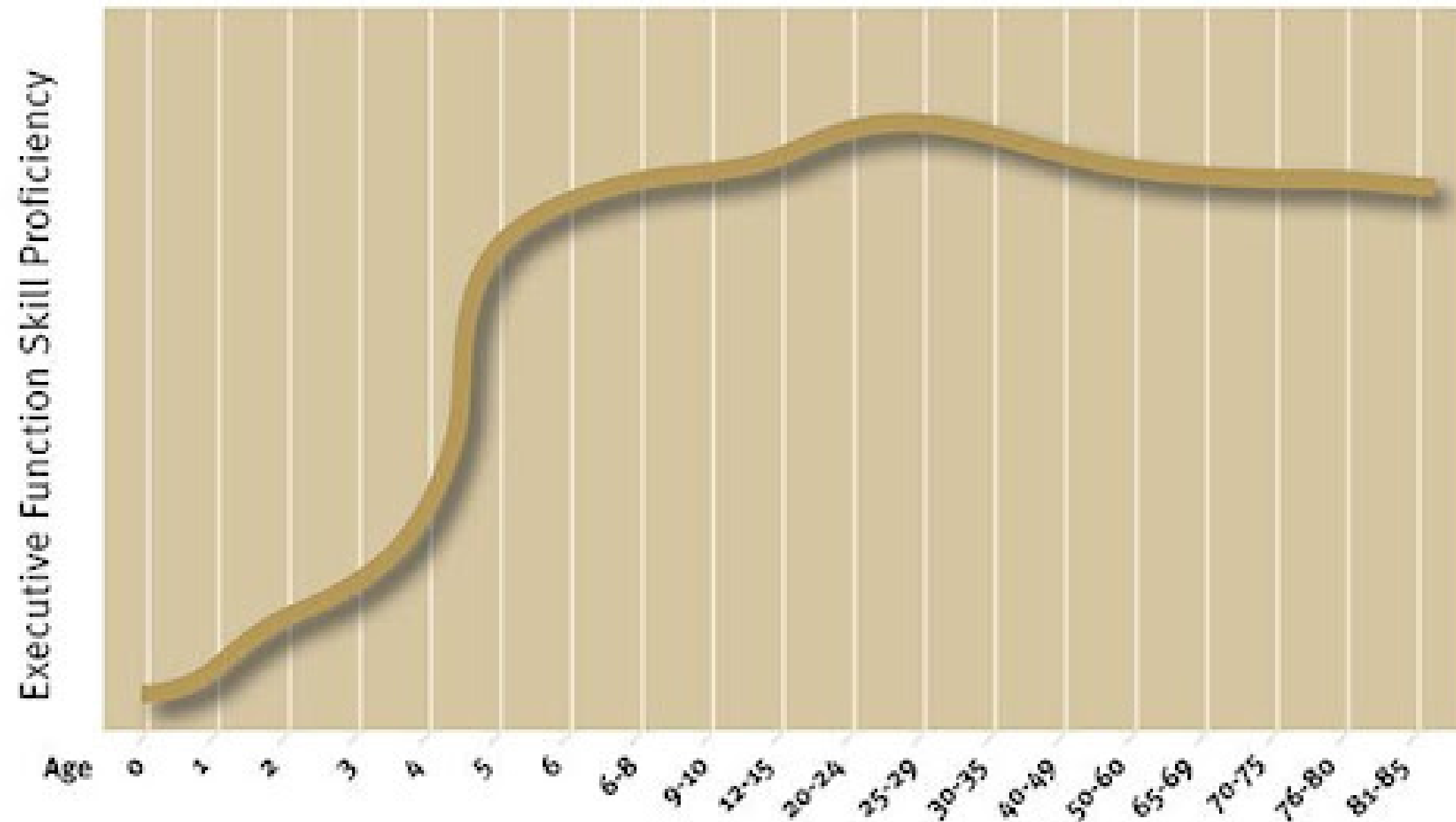
What are study skills?

A set of *strategies* that are applied to learning.

Study skills are **a subset of executive functioning skills** that enable students to **understand and retain information** necessary for academic success.

Executive Functioning

Working memory

Mental Flexibility

Self-Control

Study Skills

Physical Organization

Emotional Regulation

Time Management

Social Skills

What is "studying" anyway?

When you hear the word "study", **what do you picture?**

A lot of people imagine a person **sitting alone, reading and re-reading** a textbook or their notes from class.

This is actually an **inefficient way to learn** for most students!

If you're "studying" for hours, chances are you aren't retaining that information in any useful way.
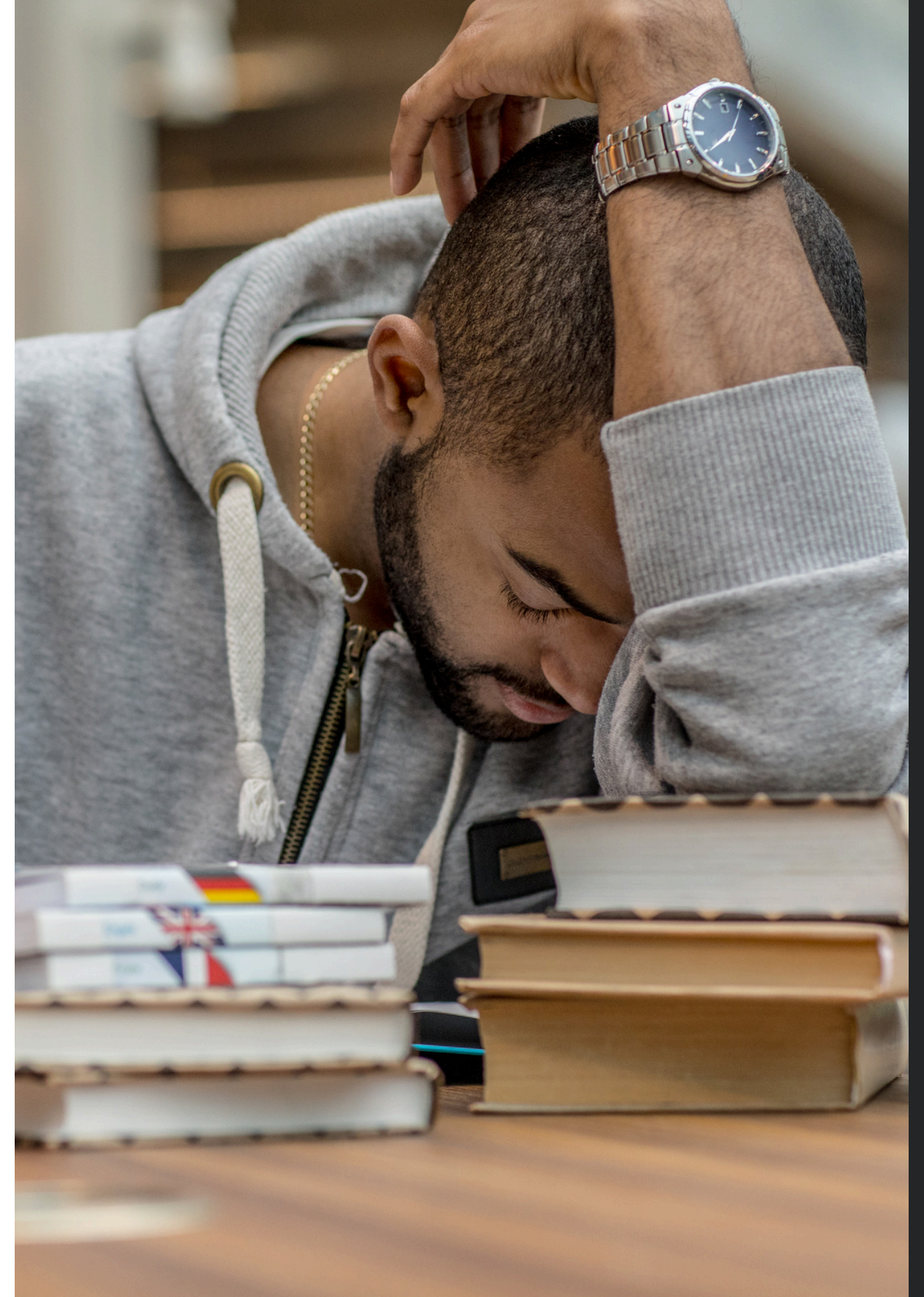
Where do **study skills** come from?

- Some students **develop their own strategies** for studying. Other students must be **taught study skills explicitly**.
- Almost everyone can use some help refining their strategies.
- **There is no one-size-fits-all solution:** It is vital to find study skills that *work* for the individual who uses them – just because you studied one way when you were a kid doesn't mean it will work for your students!
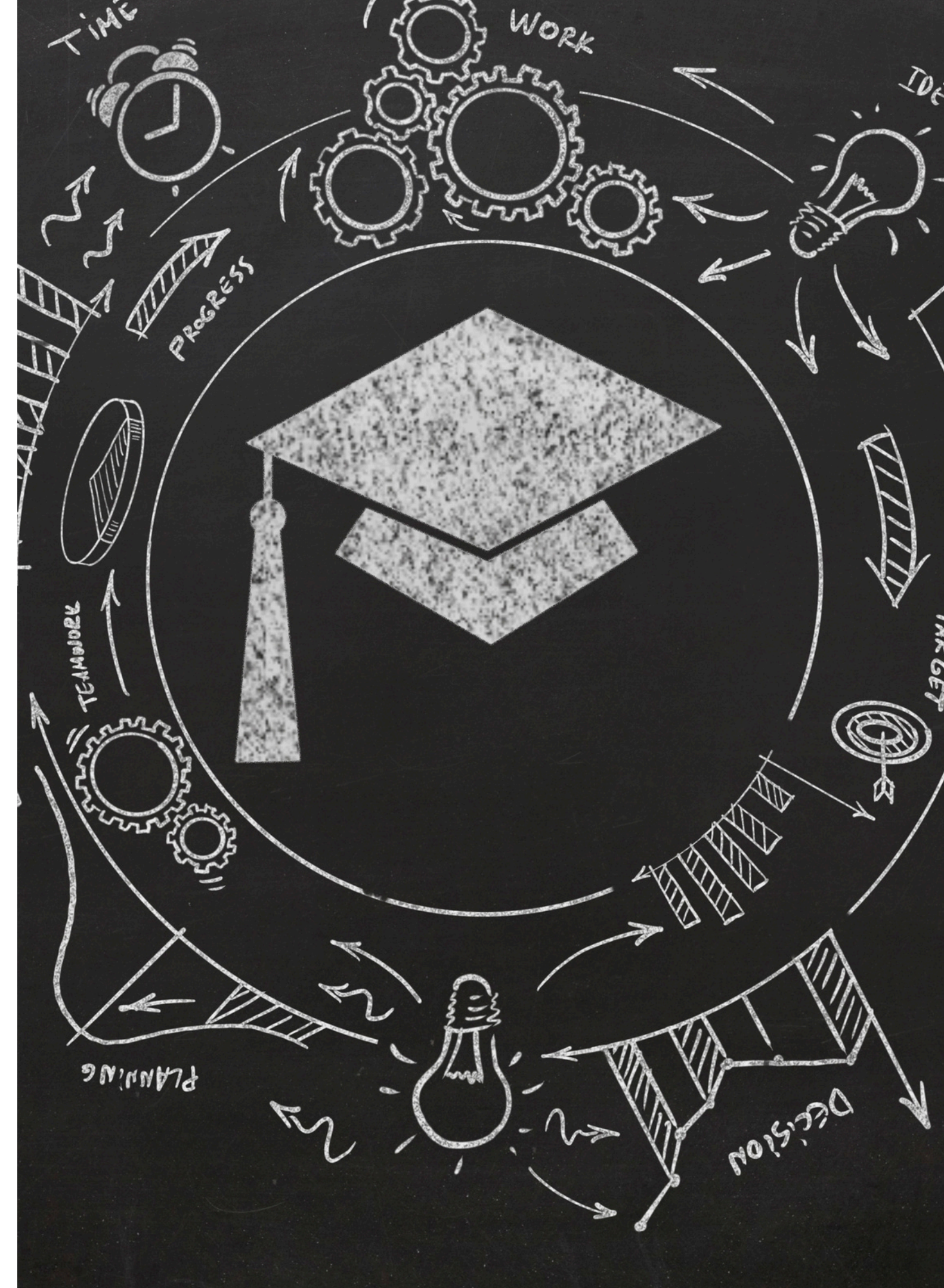
PART 2:
IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES

marigold prep

Some symptoms of challenges are...

- Missing assignments or turning in work **late/incomplete**
- Studying for hours with little to show for it
- Grades and **test scores don't seem to correspond to ability**
- Finding it difficult to start and/or finish projects, including homework, essays, and studying
- Low **retention of new information**
- Difficulty summarizing paragraphs or finding main ideas
- Trouble showing their work, **forgetting crucial steps**
- Trying to hold all necessary information in their head (and failing)

- **Procrastinating** to the last possible minute
- Feeling overwhelmed by projects
- Priorities that seem out of step with their real needs
- Losing or **forgetting basic materials** like pencils, notebooks
- **Messy work area**, always have to hunt for what they need
- Struggling with problem–solving in their personal life; every situation feels like a crisis
- **Explosive reactions** to stress
- Insufficient sleep due to anxiety and **poor time management,** or excessive sleep due to fatigue and feeling overwhelmed

What do good executive functioning & study skills look like?

- Studying **efficiently**
- Starting assignments **early**
- Breaking complex projects into smaller, more manageable pieces
- **Prioritizing** the most important tasks
- Knowing where all necessary materials can be found
- **Organized notes and physical spaces**
- Using self-soothing strategies to manage reactions to strong emotions
- Asking for help when needed
- **Setbacks feel manageable**
- Reliable routine that includes **time for fun and a healthy sleep schedule**

✕ MISCONCEPTION

"Students who exhibit poor executive functioning and study skills just need to try harder/pay more attention/take their education seriously/develop some discipline"
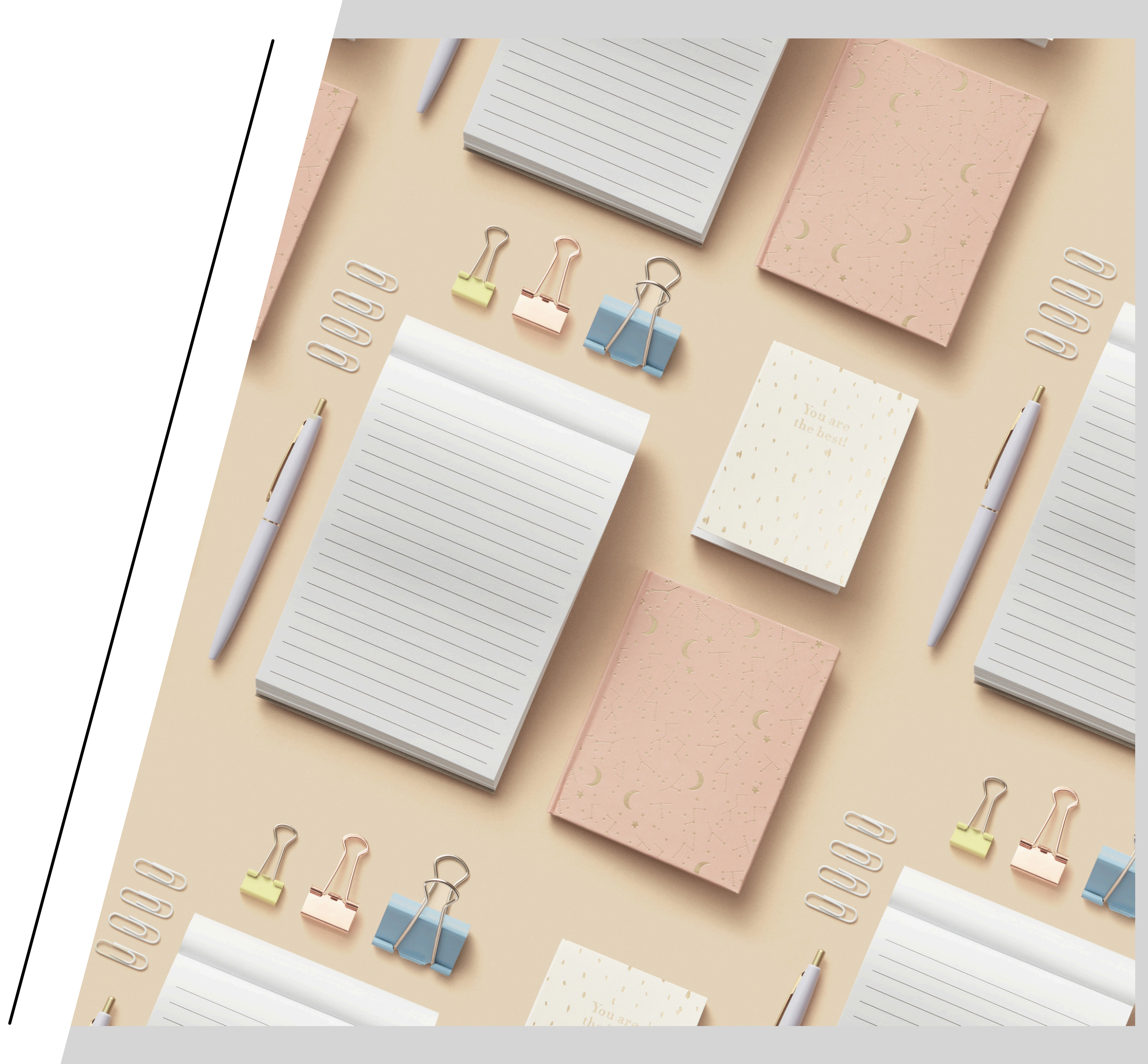
✓ TRUTH

Students who struggle are often working harder than their peers just to get through the day, but they lack the necessary tools. Their brain is throwing up barriers to their success, but with support, these barriers can be identified and removed.
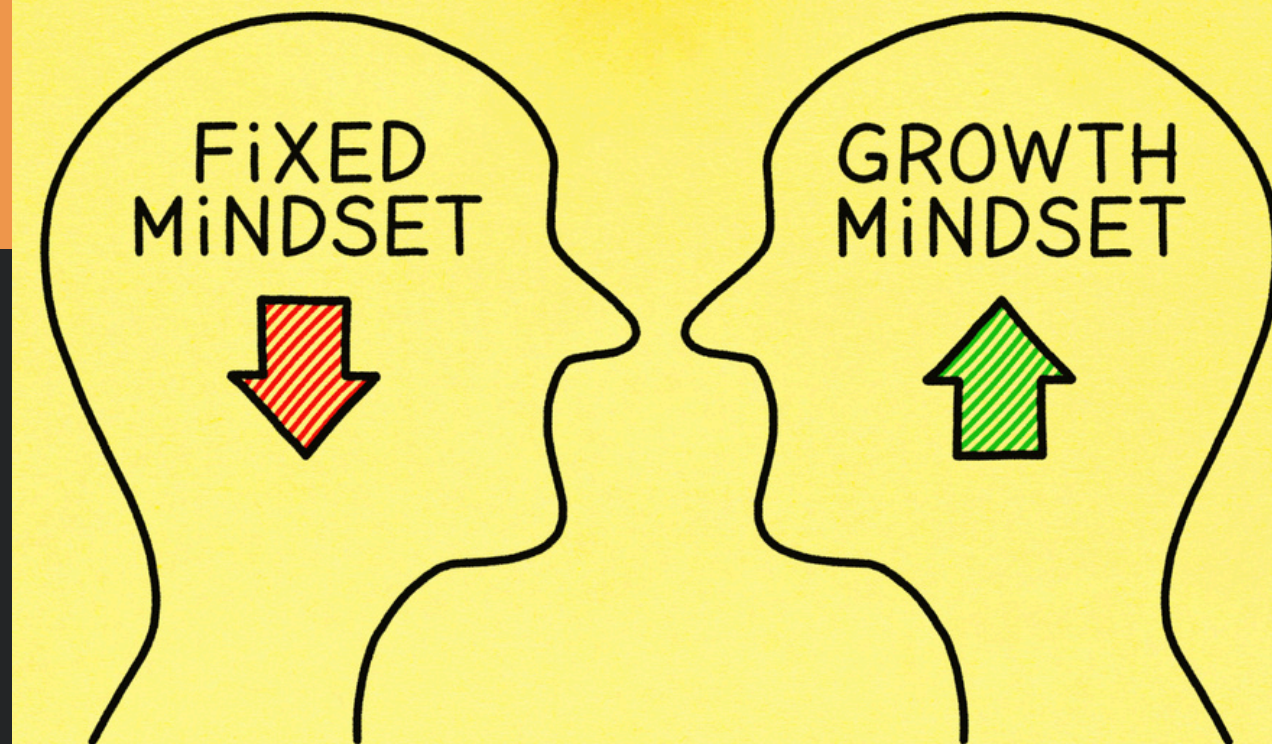
PART 2:
TANGIBLE TOOLS & STRATEGIES

marigold prep

How you can help...

Executive functioning is an **intensely personal process,** and strategies that work for one student won't necessarily work for another. However, **all executive functioning skill development benefits from three essential pieces:**

01 Give students **tools to build** a system

02 Check in on **progress** often

03 **Adjust** the system as needed

Goals & Accountability

We encourage our students to work with **SMART goals**, a method of setting meaningful objectives with its origins in corporate planning. Quite simply, SMART is an acronym that **frames goals in five tangible ways.**

Prioritization

The Eisenhower Matrix helps us **understand the difference between urgent and important**, and prioritize tasks accordingly. Organizing a to-do list into four separate buckets helps us **navigate the psychologically proven "Mere-Urgency Effect"**, which compels us to focus on the "urgent, non-important" at the peril of the "important, non-urgent".

URGENT

NOT URGENT

JUST DO IT

SCHEDULE IT

IMPORTANT

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW, AND WILL HAVE MAJOR CONSEQUENCES IF IT'S NOT?

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE BY A SPECIFIC LATER DATE, AND WILL HAVE MAJOR CONSEQUENCES IF IT'S NOT?

ASK FOR HELP

DITCH IT

NOT IMPORTANT

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE NOW, BUT DOESN'T NECESSARILY NEED TO BE DONE BY ME?

WHAT TASKS CAN I ELIMINATE, BECAUSE THEY DO NOT HELP ME ACCOMPLISH MY GOALS?

Visualize Your To-Do List

To-do lists have a funny way of controlling us when we should be controlling them. **Try getting out of your head by visualizing what's in front of you.**

We're fans of the classic **Google Calendar** because it integrates with platforms like Google Classroom and Schoology, pushes reminders to your phone, and can be **easily shared with a parent or tutor**.
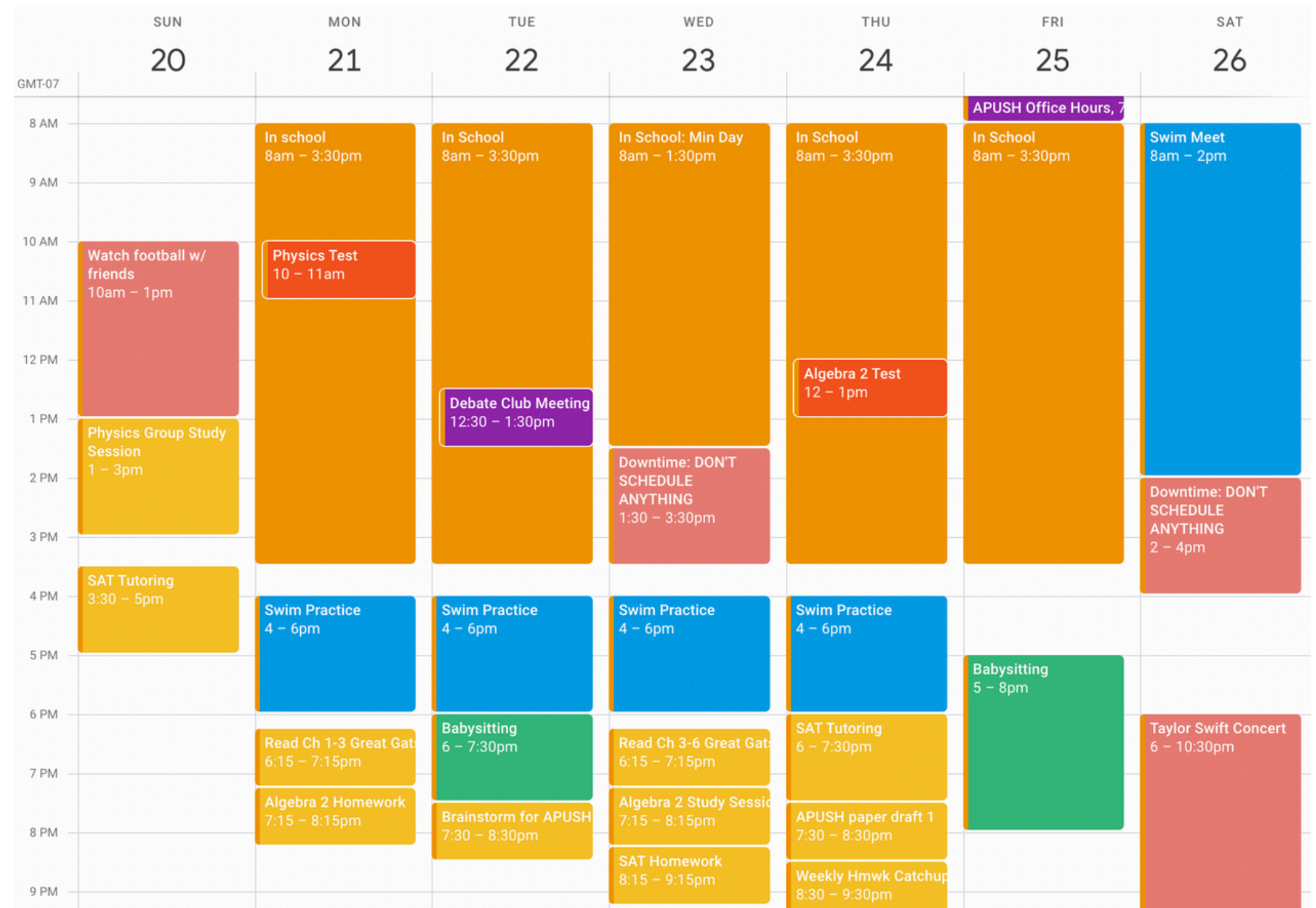
Check in on **progress** often

Good habits take time to develop, and students need support to make them **"stick."**

You can help by:
- Checking in on students with consistency, enforcing **accountability and a routine**
- Co-creating an improvement plan with students
- Helping **break down large tasks into manageable pieces**
- **Scaffolding** big picture goals into actionable steps
- **Discussing progress** regularly
- Providing a safe **place to discuss challenges** students face
- Supporting and **guiding a student's problem-solving process**
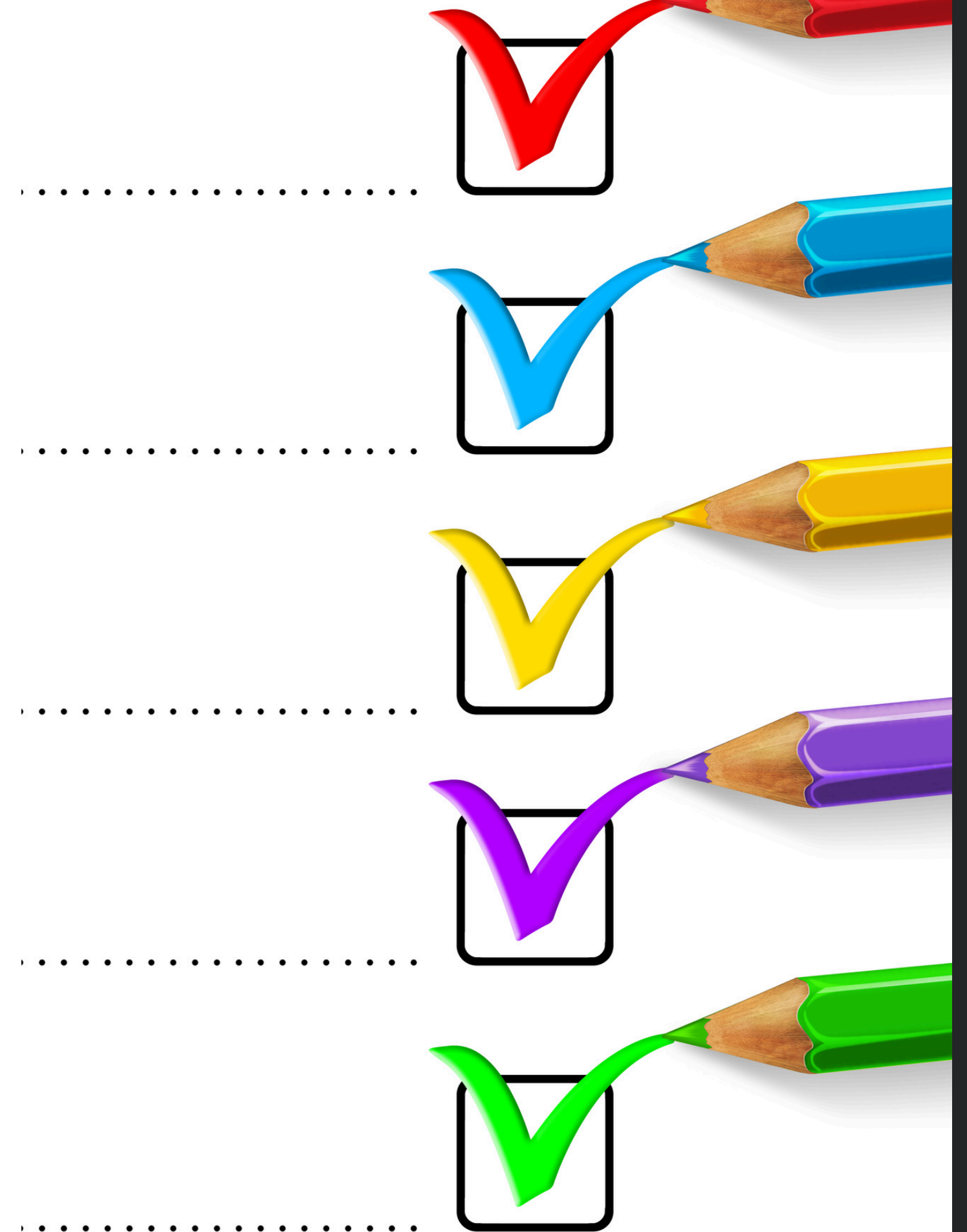
Adjust systems as needed

The measure of good executive functioning system is **how well it serves at student's needs.**

Is his/her **stress** level going **down**?

Is she/he **meeting deadlines** more often?

Are his/her **grades improving?**

Does he/she have more **time for hobbies?**

Does he/she **feel** more **confident**?

Is he/she **progressing** towards his/her goals?

Developing Metacognition

An awareness of one's own thought process; understanding how the brain processes information and learns new skills.

Checking-in on and refining systems also helps students develop self-awareness, which can directly contribute to their study strategies.

1. Identify separate skills you are expected to master
   a. **Good tools include the class syllabus, unit names, class objectives, talking to your teacher...**
2. Learn to recognize **(accurately!)** which skills are the greatest challenge for you
3. Distinguish between concepts that are good to learn by memory and concepts that require critical thinking – **these require very different study strategies!**

Effective Studying: Note Taking

Chose a note-taking system that **works for each class.**

Keep in mind, some systems may work better in some classes than in others!

01	**Cornell Notes**
02	**Outlining**
03	**Mapping**

Cornell Notes

Cornell Notes use two separate columns. One for information you learn in class, and the other for cues and reminders you can fill in later while studying.

CORNELL NOTE-TAKING TEMPLATE

Topic:_____   Class:_____

Source:_____   Date:_____

Step 1: Record Notes

Use this section to **record** as much information as possible **during class**, like names and dates, charts and formulas, examples and case studies. Put notes into your **own words**, using symbols and abbreviations when necessary.

Step 2: Reduce Notes

Use this section to **reduce your notes into main ideas** shortly after class so you can practice **recall.** Write down key words, concepts and facts from the right column, then **formulate concise questions** based on your reduced notes.

Step 3: Summarize Main Ideas

Review the main ideas and **reflect** on their importance. Briefly summarize the main points in your notes and try to **draw 2-3 conclusions** about their importance.

marigold prep   hello@marigoldprep.com | 415-237-3377

Outlining

Outlining organizes main ideas under different headings and categories, and often uses numbers and bullet points.

Mind Mapping

Mapping is a non-linear method of taking notes that uses arrows and circles to connect main ideas.

Taking notes while reading

Taking notes while reading is an **effective way to retain complex information.** Look out for:

- Key terms
- Main ideas
- **Questions** that come up while reading

Try the use methods to remember the information listed above:

- Highlighting/underlining
- **Annotating** in the margins
- Take notes on an active reading template to **organize your thoughts**

Active Reading

Try **guiding your understanding** by asking yourselves these questions as you read.

Effective Studying

Time Management

Hours-long study sessions are not the most efficient use of time. In any given study session, the **learning curve** looks something like this: It **starts slow, speeds up,** and then **levels-off** entirely around **30 minutes.**
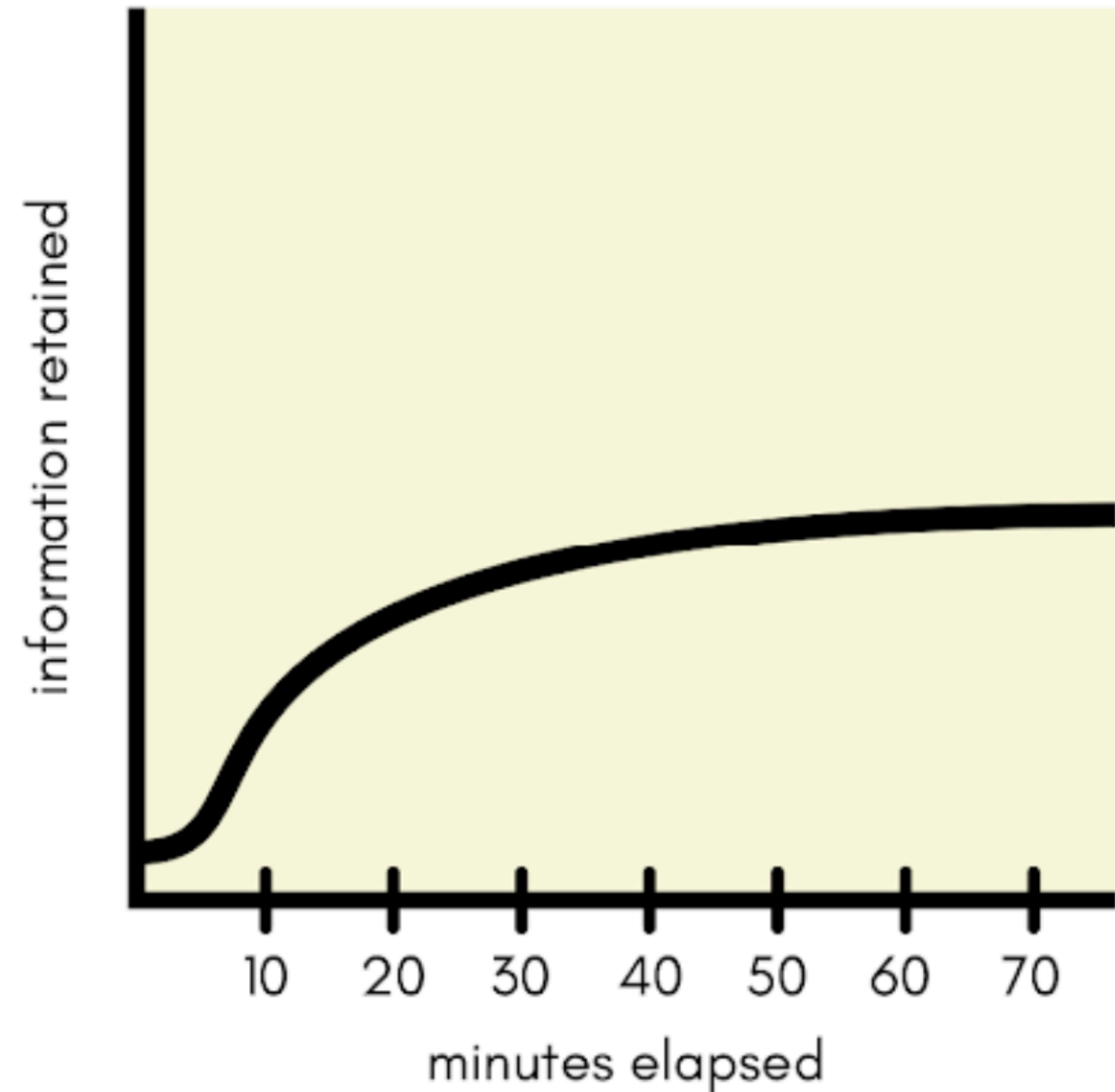
Effective Studying

Pomodoro Method

Instead, **try the Pomodoro Method,** which interrupts the learning curve in order to restart it:

- Set a timer for 20 minutes*
- **Study hard** during those **20 minutes**
- Once the timer goes off, get up and take a **5 minute break**
- Do something **non-academic during those 5 minutes** – take a walk, watch some TikTok, get a snack
- Come back to your studying refreshed and ready for another 20 minute study session

Your mileage may vary – younger students may need shorter intervals and students who struggle with transitions may prefer longer intervals. Adjust the time on-task and the time off-task to suit your needs.
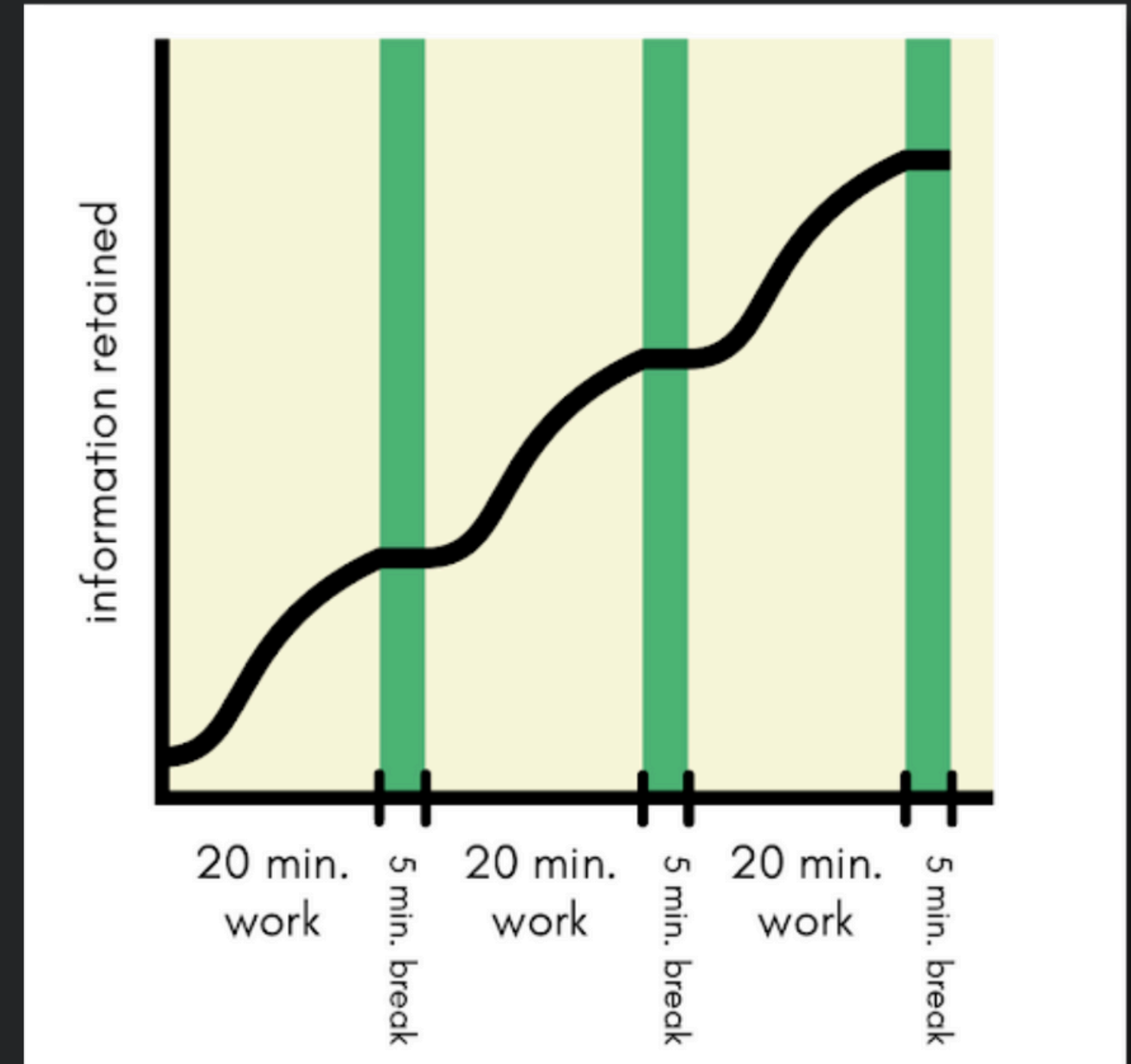
The breaks give the new learning a chance to settle into your brain and take hold, allowing you to retain more information over time.

Key take-aways

- **No one is born with strong executive functioning and study skills**; they develop in different ways and at different paces for different people over time.
- Study skills are a subset of executive functioning skills and refer to **how people process and retain learned information.**
- There is **no one-size-fits-all, and no shame** in needing to change a system.
- When a system doesn't work, us it as an **opportunity to build self-awareness**. Mistakes can be opportunities.