

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING & STUDY SKILLS

Similarities, differences &
tangible strategies for success



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m a r i g o l d p r e p

About Us¹

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



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Today we will cover

- Definitions & Differences
- Identifying Challenges
- Tangible Tools & Strategies
- Anxiety Management
- Live Q & A

PART 1: DEFINITIONS & DIFFERENCES



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What is executive functioning?



A set of *mental processes* (functions) that govern our conscious decisions and voluntary actions.

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

Some key executive functions are:



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."



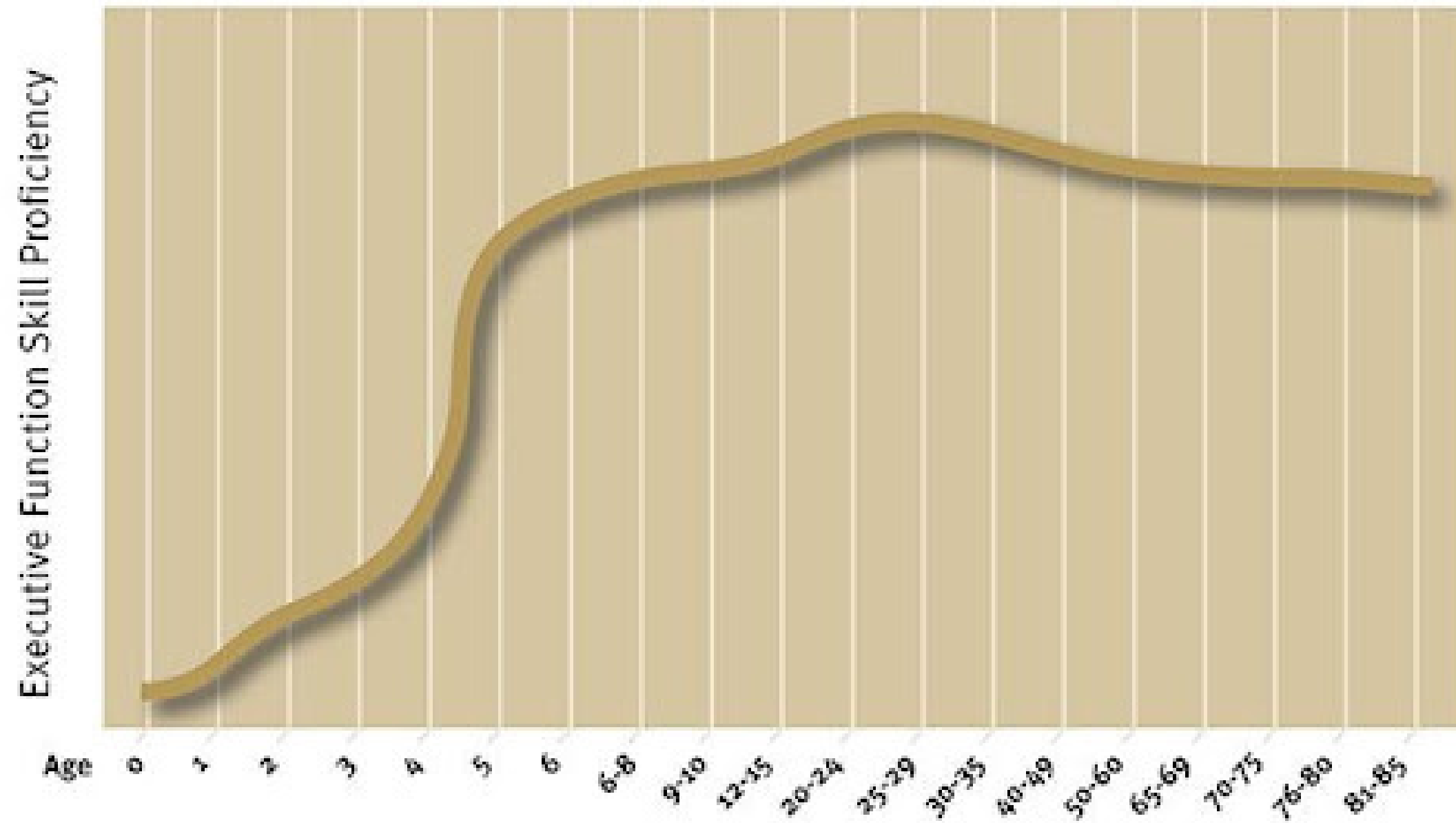
TRUTH

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



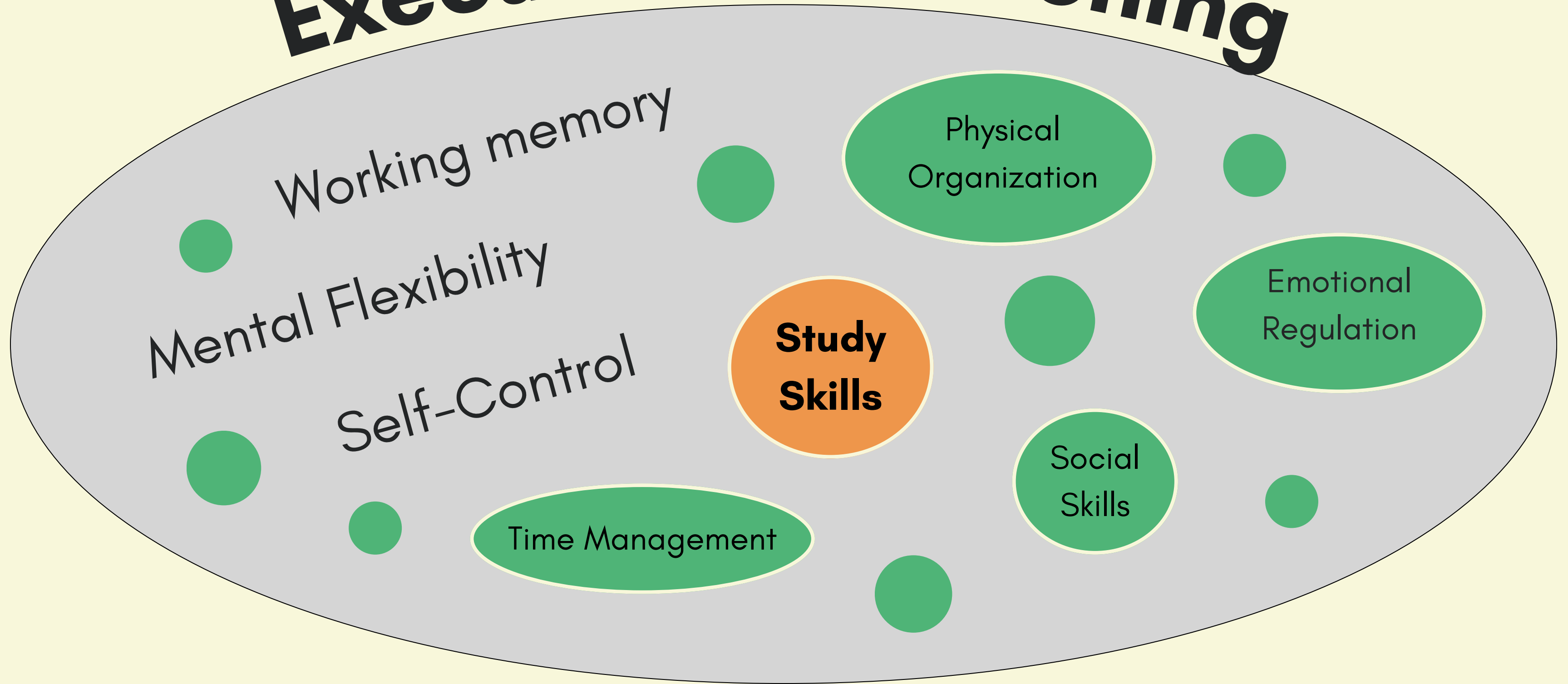
What are **study skills**?



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



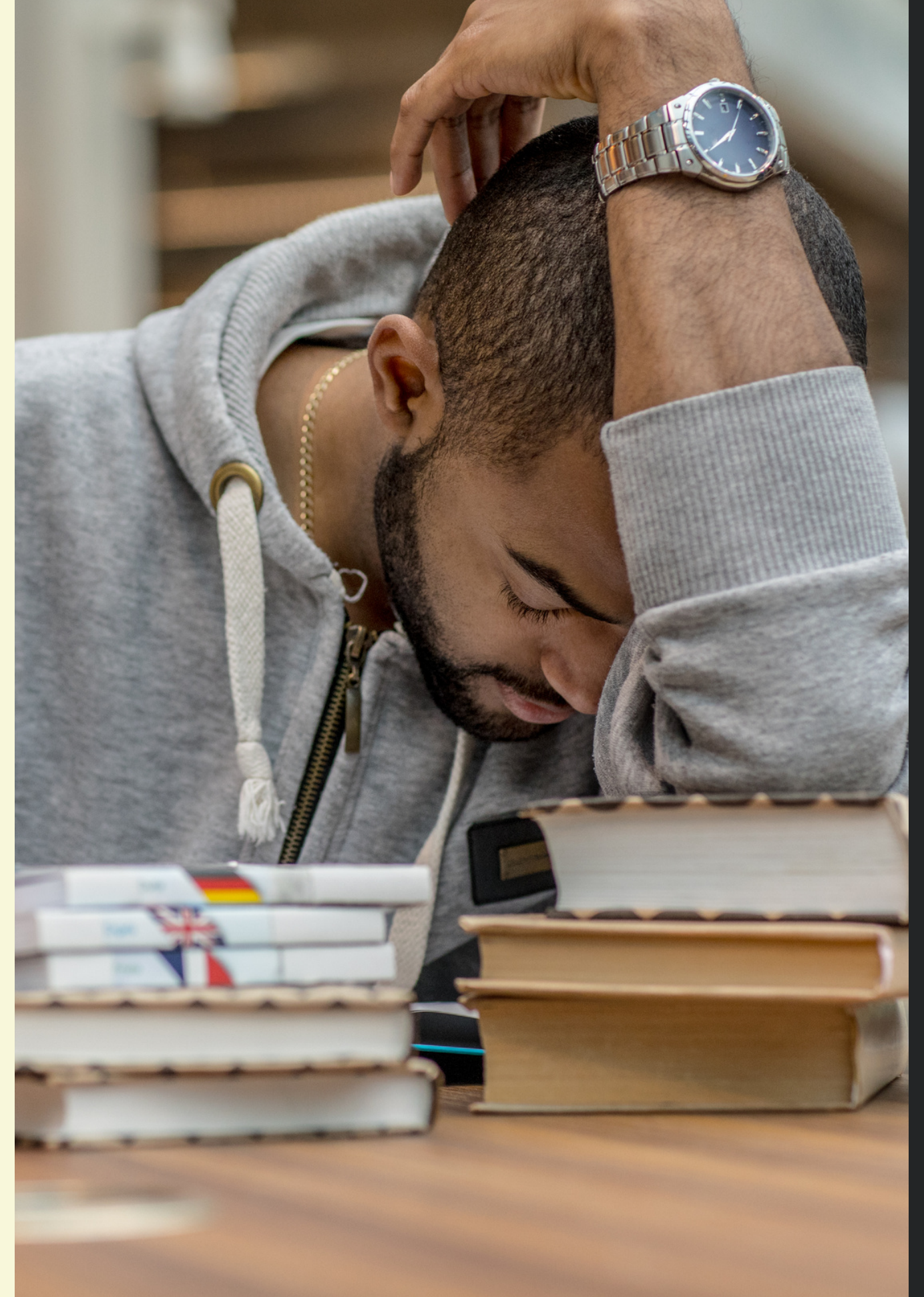
What is "studying" anyway?

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.

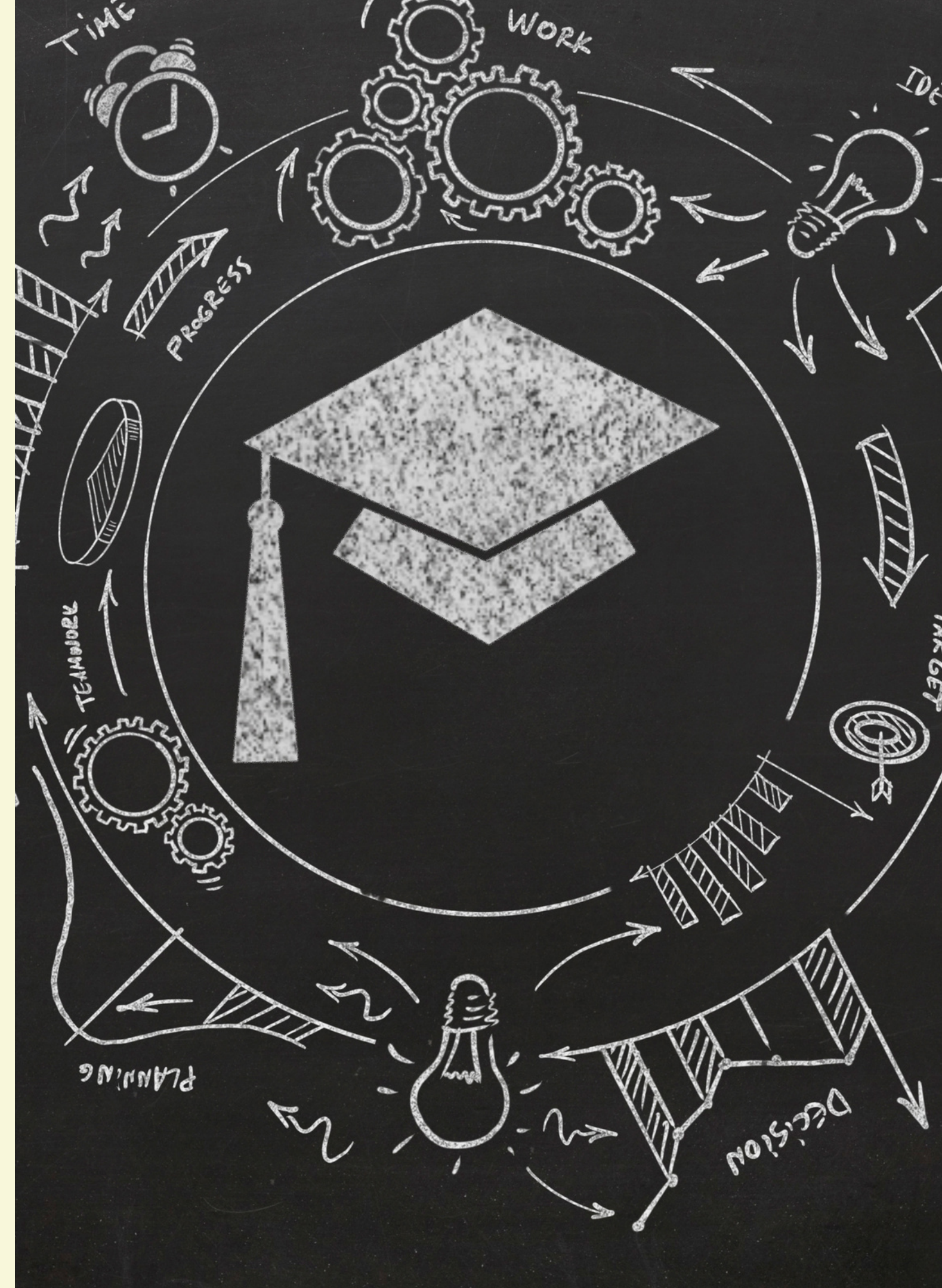
This is actually an **inefficient way to learn** for most students!

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!



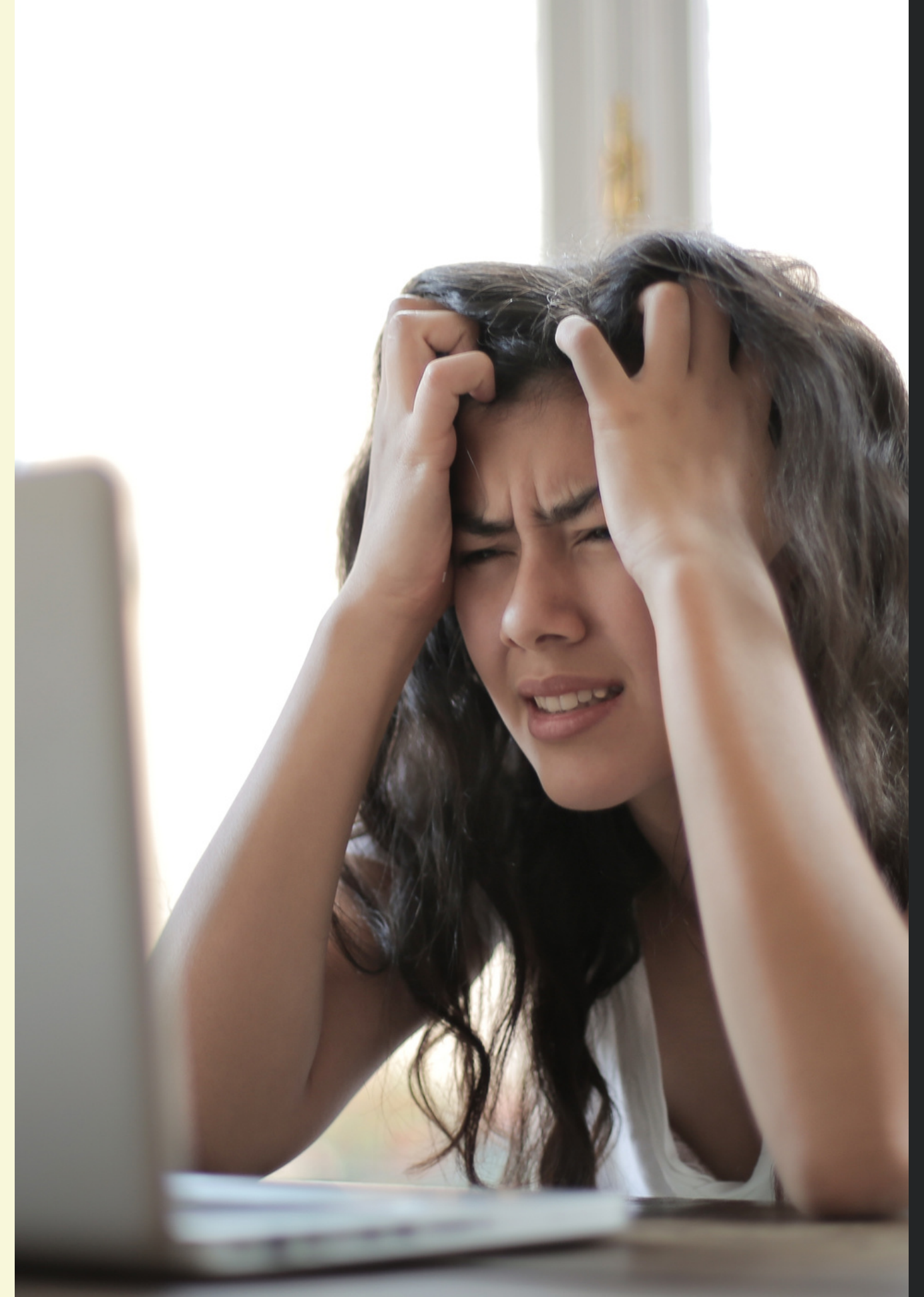


What do **good executive functioning & study skills** look like?

- 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**

But this might sound more familiar...

- “I studied for hours, but I **couldn't remember anything** when I took the test”
- “It made sense while the teacher was explaining it in class, but **when I went to do the homework** it looked completely different”
- “I have an essay **due tomorrow and I haven't started**; guess I'll pull an all-nighter”
- “There's so much **drama going on at school**, I can't pay attention in class”
- “How do teachers expect us to get all this homework done? There **aren't enough hours in the day.**”
- “Wait, I have a test **today?**”



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



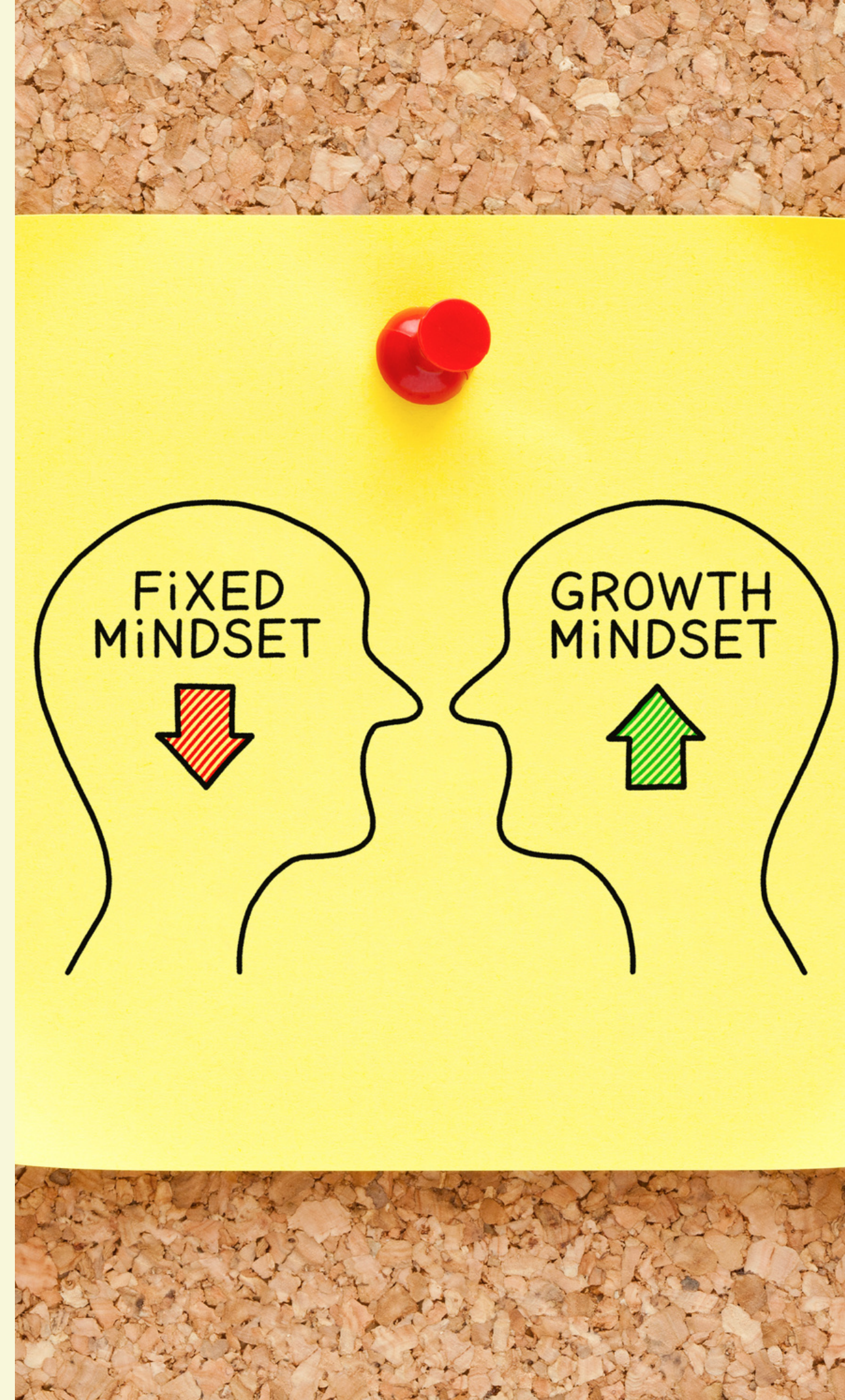
MISCONCEPTION

“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



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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**.



**SMART
GOALS**

S	SPECIFIC WHAT DO I WANT TO ACCOMPLISH?	
M	MEASURABLE HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN IT IS ACCOMPLISHED?	
A	ACHIEVABLE WHAT AM I ABLE TO DO TO ACHIEVE IT?	
R	RELEVANT WHY IS IT WORTH MY TIME AND EFFORT?	
T	TIME BOUND WHEN CAN I REASONABLY ACCOMPLISH IT BY?	

	ACTION ITEM	DUE DATE
PLAN OF ACTION WHAT ARE MY ACTIONABLE NEXT STEPS? WHEN DO THEY NEED TO BE COMPLETE?		

	OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS
OBSTACLES & SOLUTIONS WHAT OBSTACLES DO I EXPECT AND HOW WILL I PREVENT OR SOLVE THEM?		

Prioritization

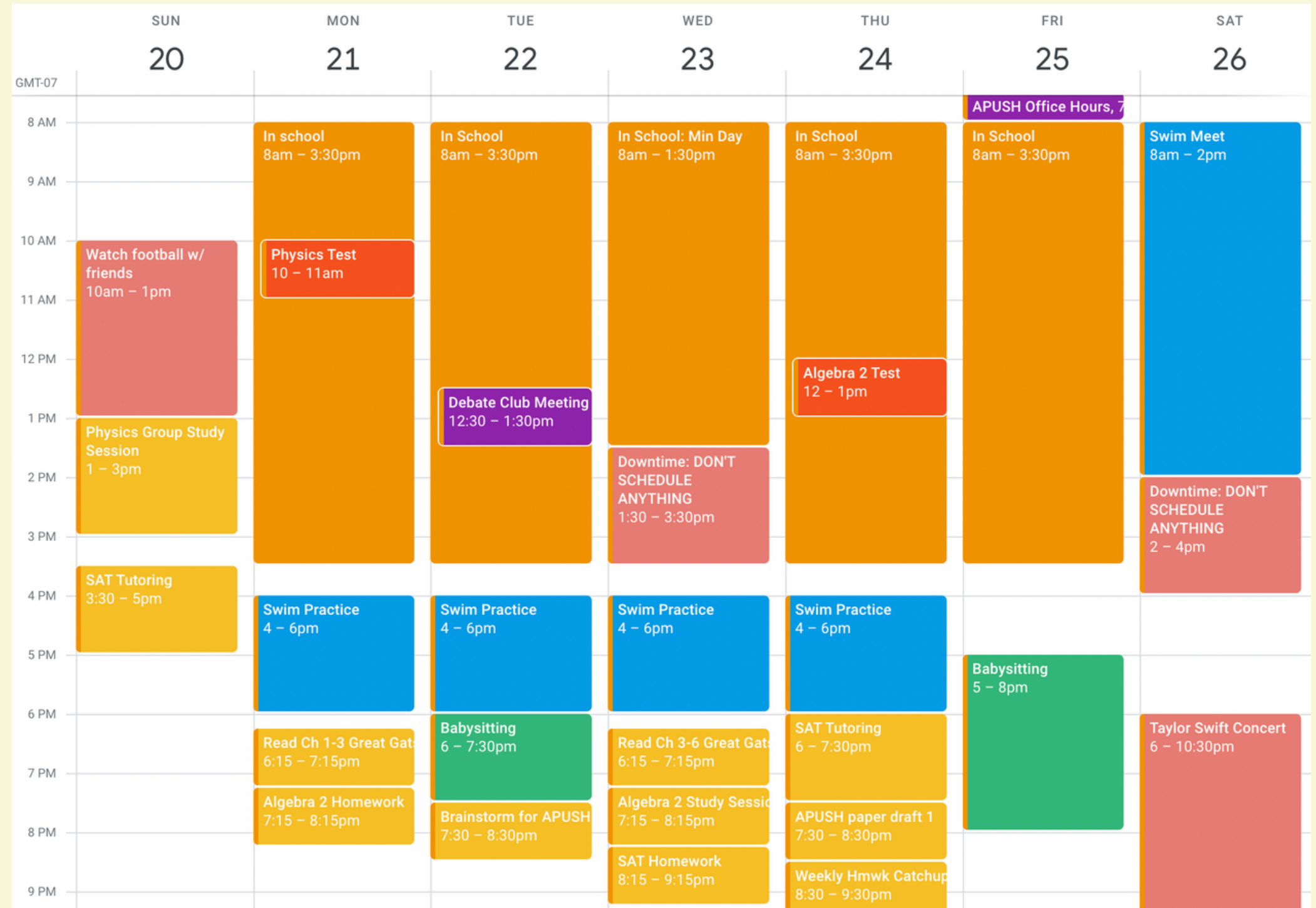
The Eisenhower Matrix helps us **understand the difference between urgent and important**, and prioritize tasks accordingly. Organizing a to-do list into four separate buckets helps us **navigate the psychologically proven “Mere-Urgency Effect”**, which compels us to focus on the “urgent, non-important”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



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.**

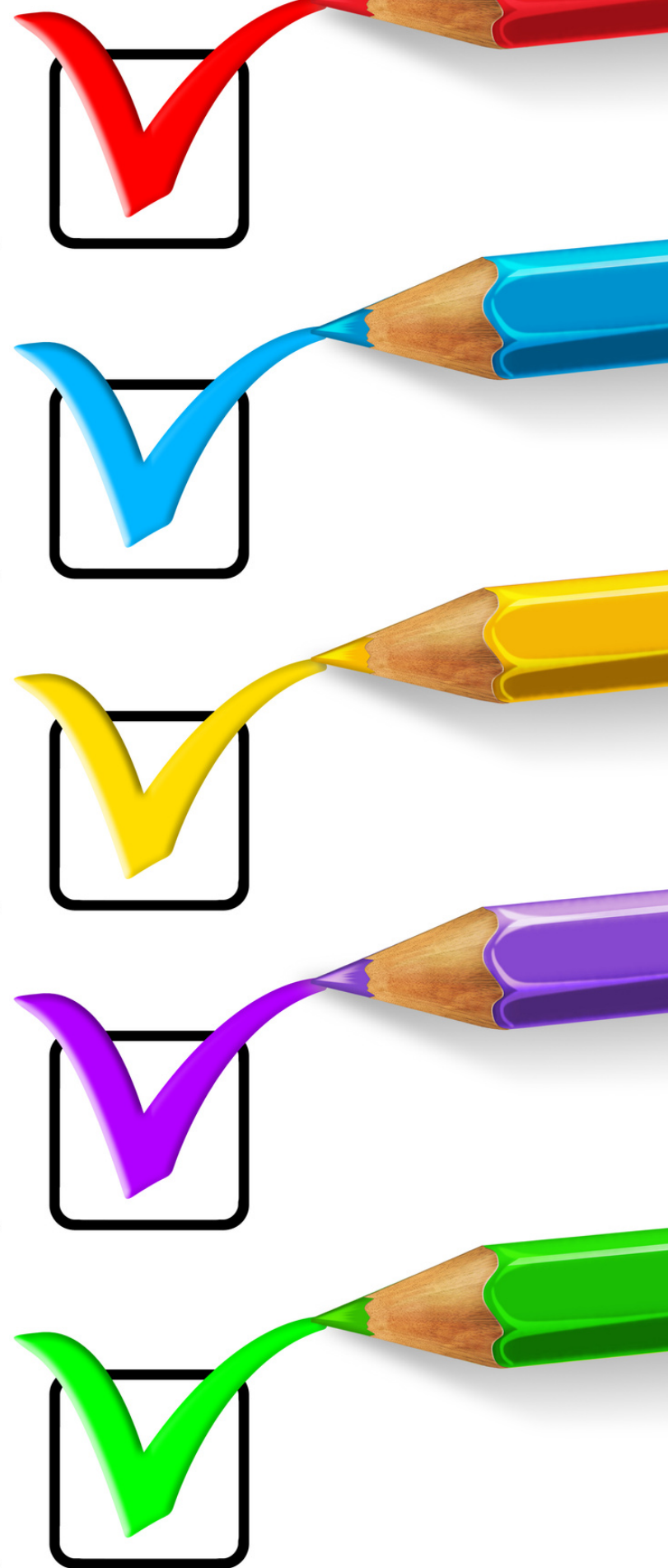


Check in on **progress** often

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?

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.

Outlining

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



OUTLINING TEMPLATE

Topic: _____

Class: _____

Source: _____

Date: _____

Subtopic 1

Supporting Ideas A. _____
B. _____
C. _____
D. _____
E. _____

Subtopic 2

Supporting Ideas. A. _____
B. _____
C. _____
D. _____
E. _____

Subtopic 3

Supporting Ideas. A. _____
B. _____
C. _____
D. _____
E. _____

Summary:

Mind Mapping

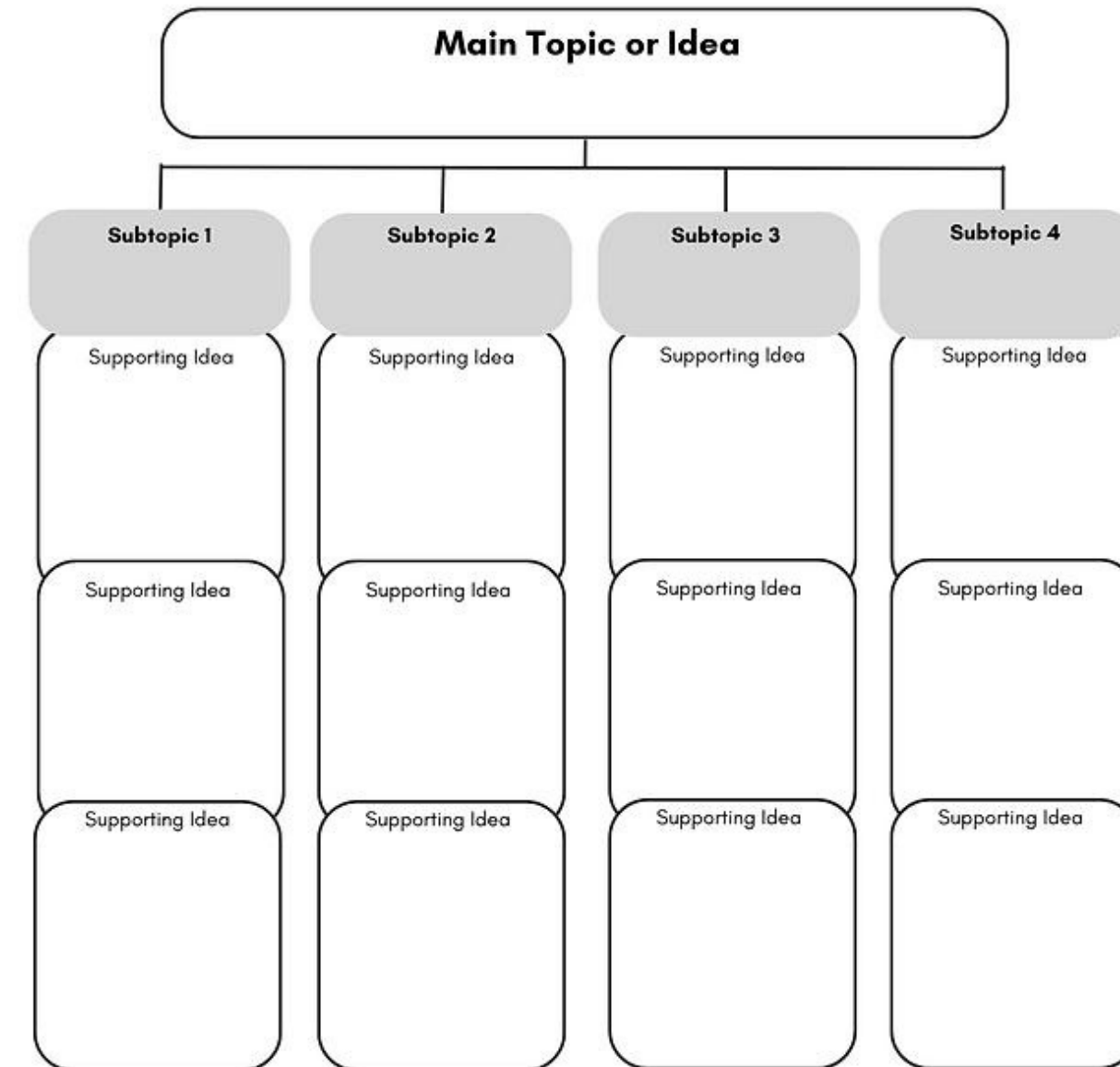
Mapping is a non-linear method of taking notes that uses arrows and circles to connect main ideas.



MIND-MAPPING TEMPLATE

Topic: _____ Class: _____

Source: _____ Date: _____



Summary:



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

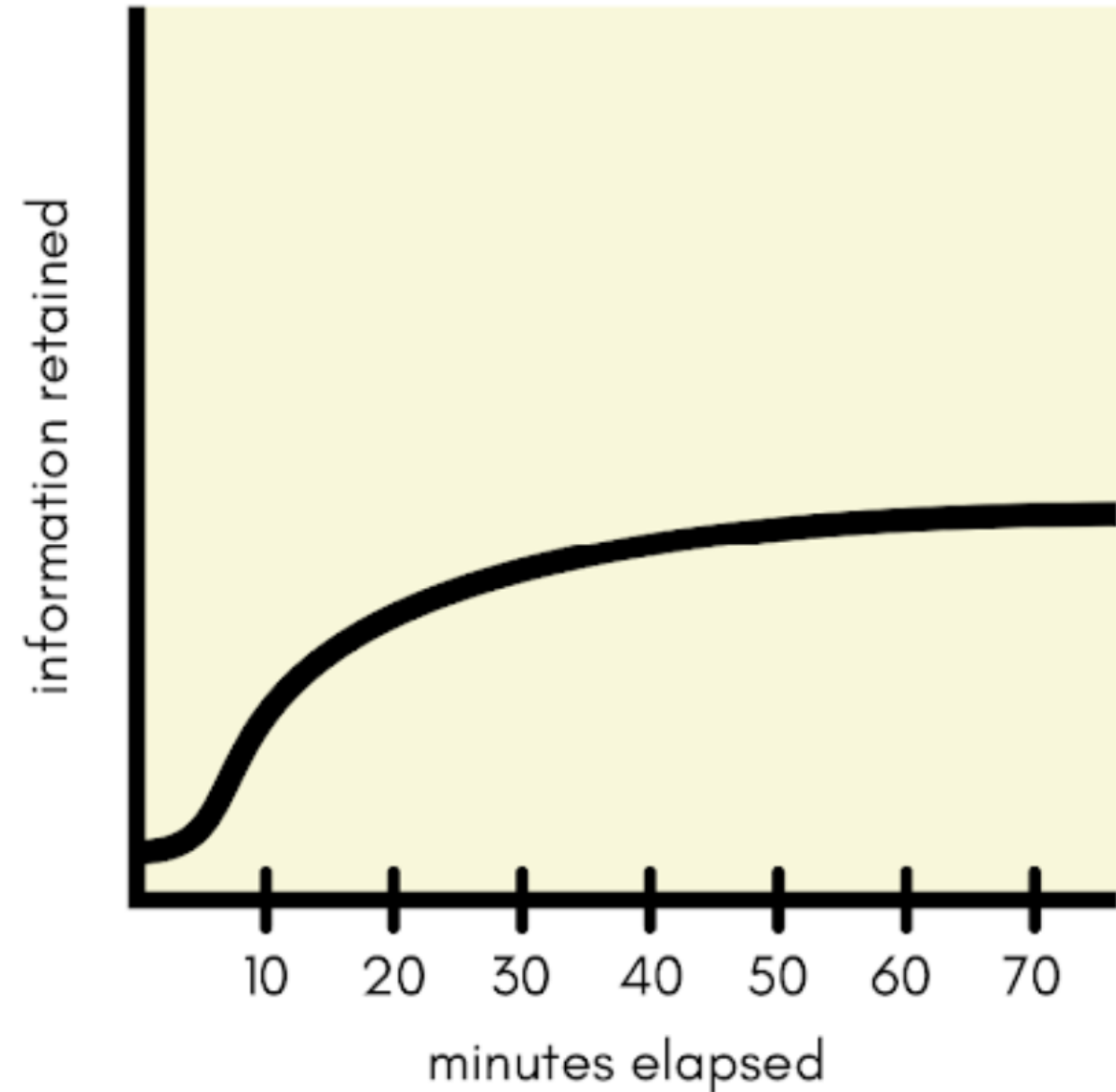
Try the use methods to remember the information listed above:

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

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.**



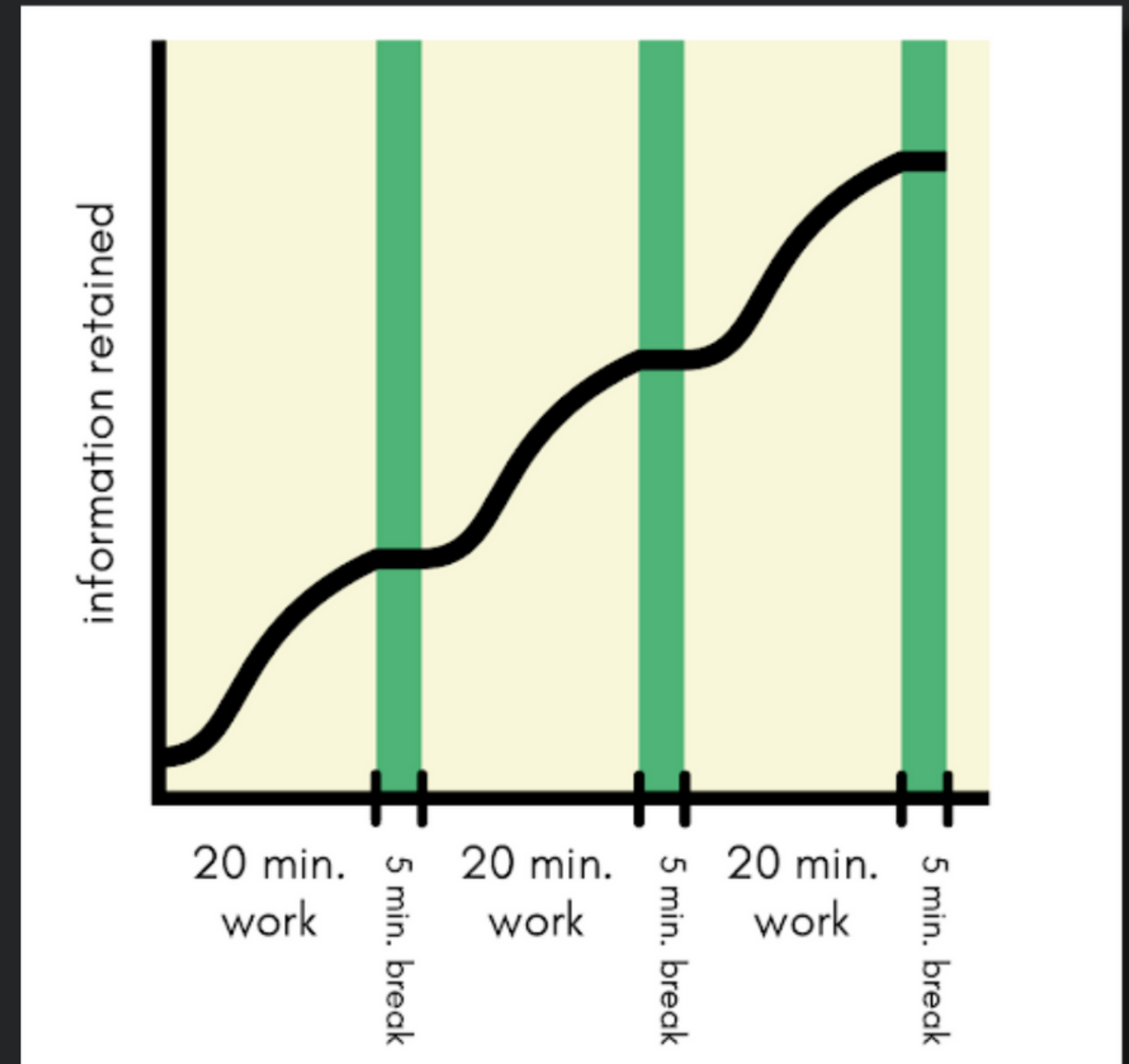
Effective Studying

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.

Effective Studying

Developing Metacognition

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

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!**



PART 5: ANXIETY MANAGEMENT



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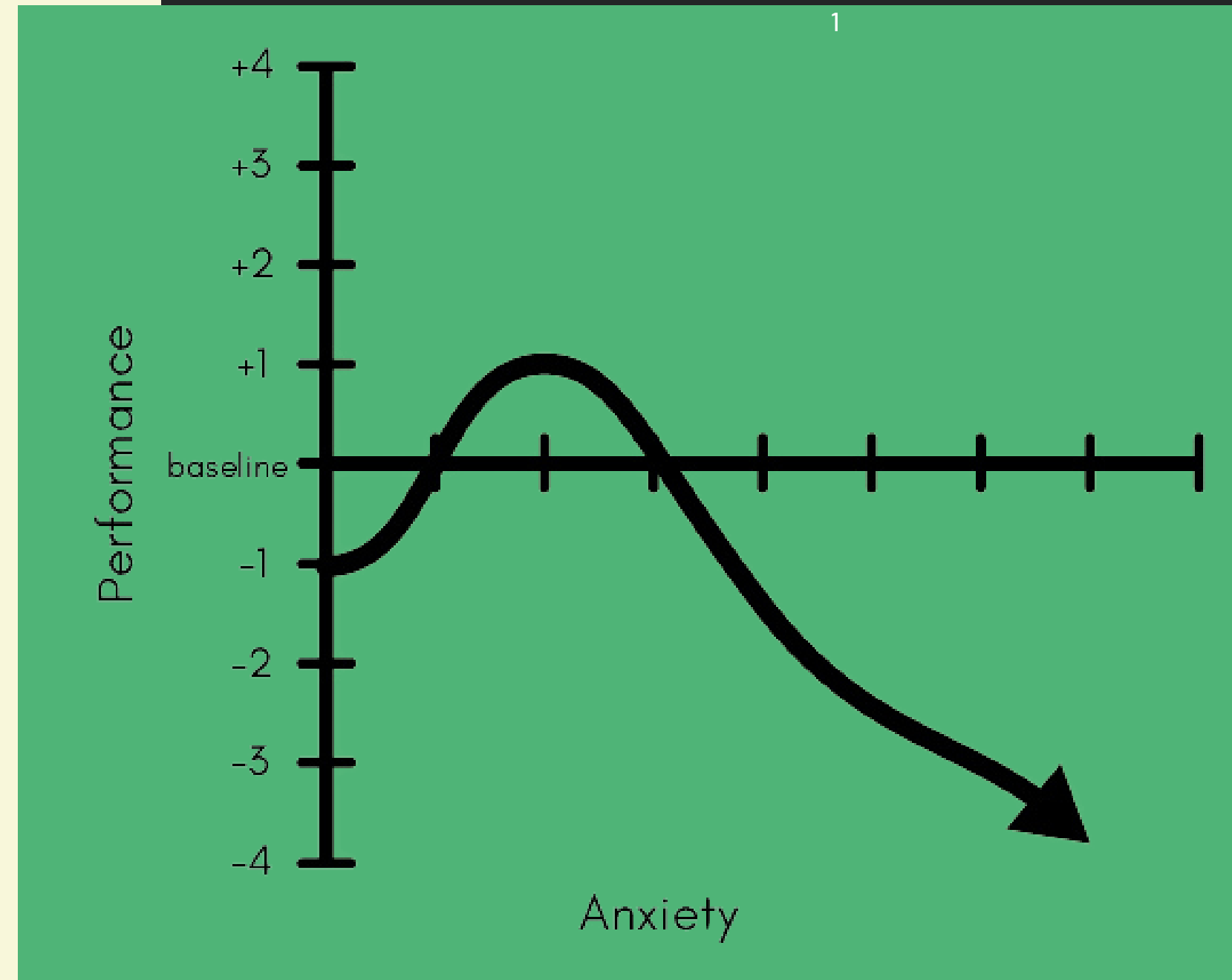


The Yerkes-Dodson Effect

A small amount of nervous energy can sharpen focus and improve performance, but **high anxiety** results in **worse performance** on tests and academic assignments.

Like most forms of anxiety and psychological distress, a **little bit is a perfectly normal** response to stress - in fact, it can help put us **"in the zone."**

But there is a threshold we can cross where anxiety hurts our performance.



Identifying Anxiety

from "Anxious for Success: High Anxiety in New York's Schools" from NY Association of School Psychologists

"In **middle school students**, symptoms of anxiety may **become more internalized** and manifest themselves through worry and/or withdrawal, as well as complaints of physical symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches. Teens may experience excessive worries and insomnia, and may appear preoccupied. **Teens are more likely to keep their worries to themselves because they are embarrassed or afraid they will be misunderstood.**"

Managing Anxiety



In professional psychology, the current best practice counselors recommend for managing anxiety is:

1

Notice how you feel and how it is manifesting

2

Realize that your feelings **conflict with reality**

3

Self-soothe to clear out the adrenaline

4

Replace adrenaline-based reactions with **more helpful coping mechanisms**

Questions?

We're here to help!

Contact us any time with questions about your student, our programs, and the best game plan to set them up for success.

 **Telephone**

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 **Website**

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