



## How To: Use Checklists to Measure Academic Survival Skills

Students who hope to achieve success on the ambitious Common Core State Standards must first cultivate a set of general 'academic survival skills' that they can apply to any coursework (DiPerna, 2006). Examples of academic survival skills include the student's ability to study effectively, be organized, and manage time well.

When academic survival skills are described in global terms, though, it can be difficult to define them. For example, two teachers may have different understandings about what the term 'study skills' means. A solution is to complete a 'task analysis' of a given global academic-survival skill, dividing that larger skill into a checklist of component sub-skills (Kazdin, 1989). (Review the set of academic survival skills checklists appearing later in this article for examples of what these component-skills checklists look like.)

With a checklist in hand that breaks a global academic survival skill into components, a teacher can judge whether a student possesses those essential building-block strategies that make up a larger global 'survival skills' term. Teachers have access to good sources of information to verify what academic survival skills a student possesses, including direct observation; interviews (of the student, past teacher, or parent); and student work products.

**TIP:** Teachers can access a *free* web application to create customized student-skill checklists. The *Academic Survival Skills Checklist Maker* provides a starter set of strategies to address homework, note-taking, organization, study, test-taking, and time management. Teachers can use the application to create and print customized checklists and can also save their checklists online. This application is available at: <http://www.interventioncentral.org/tools/academic-survival-skills-checklist-maker>

Schools can find a number of valuable uses for 'academic survival skills' checklists, including the following:

1. *Consistent expectations among teachers.* Teachers at a grade level, on an instructional team, or within an instructional department can work together to develop checklists for essential global academic-survival skills. As teachers collaborate to create these checklists, they reach agreement on the essential skills that students need for academic success and can then consistently promote those skills across their classrooms.
2. *Proactive student skills training.* One excellent use of these checklists is as a classwide student training tool. At the start of the school year, teachers can create checklists for those academic survival skills in which students are weak (e.g., study skills, time management) and use them as tools to train students in specific strategies to remediate these deficiencies. Several instructors working with the same group of students can even pool their efforts so that each teacher might be required to teach a checklist in only a single survival-skill area.
3. *Student skills self-check.* Teachers can use academic survival-skills checklists to promote student responsibility. Students are provided with master copies of checklists and encouraged to develop their own customized checklists by selecting and editing those strategies likely to work best for them. Instructors can then hold students accountable to consult and use these individualized checklists to expand their repertoire of strategies for managing their own learning.
4. *Monitoring progress of academic survival-skills interventions.* Often, intervention plans developed for middle and high school students include strategies to address academic survival-skill targets such as homework completion



or organization. Checklists are a good way for teachers to measure the student's baseline use of academic survival skills in a targeted area prior to the start of the intervention. Checklists can also be used to calculate a student outcome goal that will signify a successful intervention and to measure (e.g., weekly) the student's progress in using an expanded range of academic survival-skills during the intervention period.

For example, a teacher may develop a checklist (like that appearing in Table 1) outlining 11 sub-skills that define her expectations for 'study skills'. Through interview, direct observation, and examination of student work products, the teacher ascertains that the student reliably used 7 of the 11 skills during baseline. She sets the outcome goal that--at the conclusion of a 5-week intervention period--the student will reliably use all 11 of those study sub-skills. Once per week during the intervention, the teacher meets with the student to review the checklist, record which additional study skills--if any--the student is now using, and chart this growth on a simple visual graph.

5. *Parent conferences.* When teachers meet with parents to discuss student academic concerns, academic survival-skills checklists can serve as a vehicle to define expected student competencies and also to decide what specific school and home supports will most benefit the student. In addition, parents often appreciate receiving copies of these checklists to review with their child at home.

When students struggle with global academic survival skills such as study, organization, or time management, those deficits can seem so all-encompassing as to inspire a sense of helplessness. In contrast, targeted and prescriptive checklists (such as those described here) that outline practical strategies to enhance school survival skills can serve as a tool to focus and empower teachers, parents, and students to accomplish the shared goal of turning every student into a effective, self-managing learner.

## References

- DiPerna, J. C. (2006). Academic enablers and student achievement: Implications for assessment and intervention services in the schools. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*, 7-17.
- Kazdin, A. E. (1989). *Behavior modification in applied settings* (4th ed.). Pacific Gove, CA: Brooks/Cole.



## ACADEMIC SURVIVAL SKILLS CHECKLIST: STUDY SKILLS

This form includes (1) your selected Academic Survival Skill Checklist items, (2) a column to verify whether the student possesses each survival skill (Y/N), and (3) a column to list the information used to verify each skill (Observation/Interview/Work Product).

Academic Survival-Skill Checklist	Student Displays Skill? (Y/N)	Data Source? (Observation/Interview /Work Product)
<input type="checkbox"/> MAINTAIN A STUDY SCHEDULE. Maintain a regular (e.g., daily) study schedule with sufficient time set aside to review course content and information.		
<input type="checkbox"/> AVOID DISTRACTERS. When studying, avoid distracters (e.g., cell phone, television, Internet) that can erode study time and divert attention.		
<input type="checkbox"/> CREATE AN ORGANIZED STUDY SPACE. Prepare the study environment by organizing a space and setting out all necessary work materials before beginning study.		
<input type="checkbox"/> SET STUDY GOALS. Prior to a study session, define one or more specific study goals to accomplish (e.g., to review information for an upcoming quiz; to locate key information to include in an essay).		
<input type="checkbox"/> MAKE A STUDY AGENDA. If studying multiple subjects in one session, create a study agenda for that session with a listing of the key information to be reviewed for each subject and the time allocated for that review.		
<input type="checkbox"/> DO THE TOUGH STUDY WORK FIRST. Tackle the most difficult or challenging study objectives first during study sessions, when energy levels and ability to concentrate are at their peak.		
<input type="checkbox"/> VARY ACTIVITIES. Mix up study activities during a study session (e.g., alternating between reading and writing) to maintain engagement and interest.		
<input type="checkbox"/> CHUNK A LARGE STUDY TASK INTO SMALLER UNITS. If studying a large amount of material in a single session, 'chunk' the material into smaller units and take short breaks between each unit to maintain focus.		
<input type="checkbox"/> TEACH CHALLENGING CONTENT. When studying complex or challenging material,		



<p>assume the role of instructor and attempt to explain or describe the material to a real or imagined listener. Teaching study material is an efficient way to verify understanding.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>HIGHLIGHT QUESTIONS.</b> When reviewing notes or completing course readings, use highlighters, margin notes, sticky notes, or other notation methods to flag questions, unknown vocabulary terms, or areas of confusion for later review with teacher or tutor.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>SEEK HELP WHEN NEEDED.</b> Approach the teacher or tutor for help as needed to answer questions or clear up areas of confusion identified during study sessions.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>AVOID CRAM SESSIONS.</b> Stay away from all-night cram sessions before major tests. Cram sessions are ineffective because they are inefficient and often leave students exhausted and unable to perform their best on exams. Instead, distribute study and test-review time across multiple days and consider allocating an upward limit of about 1 hour per study session to maintain focus and energy.</p>		



## ACADEMIC SURVIVAL SKILLS CHECKLIST: HOMEWORK

This form includes (1) your selected Academic Survival Skill Checklist items, (2) a column to verify whether the student possesses each survival skill (Y/N), and (3) a column to list the information used to verify each skill (Observation/Interview/Work Product).

Academic Survival-Skill Checklist	Student Displays Skill? (Y/N)	Data Source? (Observation/Interview/Work Product)
<p><input type="checkbox"/> WRITE DOWN HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS CORRECTLY. Make sure that you have copied down your homework assignment(s) correctly and completely. If necessary, approach the instructor before leaving the classroom to seek clarification about the homework assignment.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> ASSEMBLE ALL NECESSARY HOMEWORK MATERIALS. Make a list of those school work materials that you will need for that night's homework assignments and ensure that you have them before going home. School materials may include the course text, copies of additional assigned readings, your class notes, and partially completed assignments that are to be finished as homework. Additionally, monitor your work supplies at home (e.g., graph paper, pens, printer cartridges) and replenish them as needed.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> USE AVAILABLE SCHOOL TIME TO GET A START ON HOMEWORK. Take advantage of open time in school (e.g., time given in class, study halls, etc) to get a start on your homework. Getting a head start on homework in school can reduce the amount of time needed to complete that work later in the day. Also, if you start homework in school and run into problems, you have a greater chance of being able to seek out a teacher or fellow student to resolve those problems proactively and thus successfully complete that assignment.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> CREATE AN OPTIMAL HOMEWORK SPACE. Create an organized space at home for getting homework done. The space can be temporary (e.g., kitchen table) or permanent (e.g., a desk in your bedroom). It should be quiet, well-lit, and include a table or desk large enough to lay out your work materials and a comfortable chair.</p>		



<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>SCHEDULE A REGULAR HOMEWORK TIME.</b> Homework is easier to complete if you set aside sufficient time in your schedule to do it. If possible, your daily routine should include a standing time when any homework is to be done. In deciding when to schedule a homework period, consider such factors as when your energy level is highest, when surrounding distractions are less likely to occur, and when shared resources such as a computer or printer may be available for your use.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>DEVELOP A DAILY HOMEWORK PLAN.</b> Before beginning your homework each day, take a few minutes to review all of your homework assignments and to develop a work plan. Your plan should include a listing of each homework task and an estimate of how long it will take to complete that task. It is a good rule of thumb to select the most difficult homework task to complete first, when your energy and concentration levels are likely to be at their peak. At the conclusion of your homework session, review the plan, check off all completed tasks, and reflect on whether your time estimates were adequate for the various tasks.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>DO NOT PROCRASTINATE ON LARGER HOMEWORK TASKS.</b> Some homework assignments (e.g., term papers) require substantial work and successful completion of several related sub-tasks before attaining the final goal. It is a mistake to put off these larger assignments until the night before they are due. Instead, when first assigned a comprehensive task, break that task down into appropriate sub-tasks. Next to each sub-task, list a target date for completion. When compiling a daily homework plan, include any sub-tasks with upcoming due dates. Monitor your progress to ensure that you remain on schedule to complete the larger assignment on time.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>USE HOMEWORK SUPPORTS SUPPLIED BY YOUR TEACHER.</b> Make use of homework guides or resources of any kind offered by your teacher. For example, be sure to review the course syllabus for information about upcoming homework, as well as any print or online listings of homework assignments for the day or week. Take advantage of teacher office hours to drop in and get help with homework as needed.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>GET YOUR HOMEWORK ORGANIZED.</b> When</p>		



<p>several homework tasks are assigned daily from several courses, the total volume of work can quickly pile up. Adopt simple but effective organizational strategies to keep track of all the paperwork. For example, consider maintaining two file folders labeled 'Work in Progress' and 'Completed Work'. Make a point of emptying the 'Completed Work' folder each day by turning in the finished homework.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>NOTE AREAS OF HOMEWORK CONFUSION.</b> If you are stuck on a homework item, be sure to note the specific reason(s) that you are unable to complete it. For example, you may have difficulty with a homework item because you failed to comprehend a passage in your assigned reading (note the problem by highlighting the confusing passage), do not know the meaning of a term (note the problem by writing down the unknown term), or do not understand the teacher's assignment (note the problem by writing a comment on the assignment worksheet). By recording the reason(s) that you are unable successfully to complete a homework item, you demonstrate to your teacher both that you made a good-faith effort to do the work and that you are able to clearly explain where you encountered the problem and why.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>CHECK HOMEWORK QUALITY.</b> Students can improve homework performance by adopting quality self-checks. For example, before turning in any homework writing task, you might apply the SCOPE revision tool: check your composition for Spelling-Capitalization-Order of words-Punctuation-Expression of complete thoughts. If your teacher has given you rubrics or other rating forms to evaluate the quality of your work, these also may be useful for evaluating your homework.</p>		



## ACADEMIC SURVIVAL SKILLS CHECKLIST: NOTE TAKING

This form includes (1) your selected Academic Survival Skill Checklist items, (2) a column to verify whether the student possesses each survival skill (Y/N), and (3) a column to list the information used to verify each skill (Observation/Interview/Work Product).

Academic Survival-Skill Checklist	Student Displays Skill? (Y/N)	Data Source? (Observation/Interview/Work Product)
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>SELECT AN OPTIMAL CLASSROOM LOCATION FOR NOTE-TAKING</b> . Sit at a location in the classroom where you can hear the teacher clearly, see the board or overheads easily, and have few distractions.		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>ORGANIZE NOTES USING A LOGICAL FORMAT</b> . Find an organizational format for your notes that works for you. Consider using visual cues such as indenting and text-based cues such as number or letter outline format to indicate the sequence and interrelationship of ideas.		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>MONITOR INSTRUCTOR CUES ABOUT IMPORTANT MATERIAL</b> . When taking notes, pay attention to cues given by your instructor about what lecture content is important and should be included in your course notes. Cues signifying important lecture material include (1) information written on the blackboard or whiteboard; (2) instructor labeling of specific ideas or facts as important (e.g., "One crucial factor leading to the Civil War was..."); (3) instructor repetition of key points; (4) significant time devoted during lecture to particular points or concepts; (5) reviews of previously covered material given at the start of class; and (6) summaries of material given at the end of class.		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>BE PRECISE WHERE IT MATTERS</b> . Much of your notes will be paraphrased in your own words. If you want to remember the exact wording of a key statement from your instructor, though, put the statement into quotation marks. Use abbreviations to save time--and be consistent in their use. Be careful and correct in writing down specific formulas, definitions, and important facts shared by the instructor.		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>KEEP NOTES BRIEF</b> . Notes should be brief and to the point. During lecture, record notes in		





<p>the form of key terms and phrases, rather than wordy sentences, to allow you both to keep up with the instructor and to have time to reflect on the content.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> LABEL YOUR NOTES. Use a uniform header each day to label your notes, including the date, speaker, class, and topic. (Such a header is especially useful if you are taking notes on loose sheets of paper that will later be added to the appropriate notes-binder.) Number the pages for easy retrieval and referencing.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> REVIEW YOUR NOTES FOR CONTENT. Leave space after each entry in your notes. Soon after class, review your notes and add additional comments or expand descriptions as needed to make your notes more intelligible.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO FILL IN MISSING CONTENT. All note-takers occasionally miss important content and must find ways to fill in those information gaps. If the instructor is moving so fast that you cannot fully capture the ideas presented, jot down key terms or phrases and then approach the teacher later to ask for help in filling in the missing content. Also, consider making an agreement with other students in the class to share notes with each other as needed to fill in gaps--and to borrow copies of each other's notes on days when one of you is absent.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> USE INSTRUCTOR-SUPPLIED NOTES AS A HELP-NOT AS A CRUTCH. The act of note-taking requires that the student actively engage with and learn challenging course content. Therefore, if the course instructor supplies the class with copies of lecture notes, do not simply accept these notes passively. Instead, take your own notes during lecture and use the instructor's notes after class to fill in any gaps in your notes.</p>		



## ACADEMIC SURVIVAL SKILLS CHECKLIST: ORGANIZATION

This form includes (1) your selected Academic Survival Skill Checklist items, (2) a column to verify whether the student possesses each survival skill (Y/N), and (3) a column to list the information used to verify each skill (Observation/Interview/Work Product).

Academic Survival-Skill Checklist	Student Displays Skill? (Y/N)	Data Source? (Observation/Interview/Work Product)
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>MAINTAIN AN ORDERLY WORKSPACE.</b> Organize your home workspace so that you have a place for all of your materials and can quickly find what you need. (Organized does not mean super-neat. The goal is that you can locate an item when you need it.) Group similar items (e.g., reference books, writing materials) together for rapid access. Make a point of picking up after each work session.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>MANAGE THE PAPERFLOW.</b> Have a system for handling paper documents. For most students, this simple organizing system can effectively manage paper documents: (1) Work in Progress: Maintain a folder for current work-in-progress, including any pending assignments and related materials; (2) Reference Materials: For each course, reserve a section of your notebook to store those documents that you are saving for reference, including the course syllabus, past tests, and other review materials; (3) Trash/Recycle: Throw out any papers that you no longer need for pending work or future reference. Also, consider the OHIO rule for most paper documents: Only Handle It Once!</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>MAINTAIN A CURRENT 'TO DO' LIST.</b> In paper or electronic format, maintain a running list of errands to complete or upcoming tasks to be accomplished. Place time in your schedule to carry out these miscellaneous jobs and check off each task as you complete it. Label those tasks that are high-priority to ensure that you accomplish the most urgent items first.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>BACKPACKS AND LOCKERS: SCHEDULE REGULAR CLEANOUTS.</b> Stuff accumulates. Make a point at the end of each week to clean out and straighten your backpack and school locker. Toss out documents that you no longer need. Put away in their rightful storage place clothing, food containers, electronics, and other objects that otherwise start to collect and</p>		



<p>clutter.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>SCHOOL SUPPLIES: CREATE A GO BAG.</b> Obtain a 'go bag' (zippable pouch or other container) large enough to hold a basic supply of school supplies, including pens, pencils, paper, a calculator, and other essential work materials. Keep the go bag in your backpack as a handy way to find work materials for any course. Check the go bag daily and restock as needed.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>CREATE ROUTINES FOR RECURRING MULTI-STEP TASKS.</b> Routines convert open-ended tasks into a structured, predictable, easy-to-follow sequence. The value of routines is that they allow us to complete tasks efficiently and almost without conscious thought--through force of habit. Examples of recurring tasks that could be turned into predictable routines are preparation for school, homework sessions, and exercise. To convert a task to a routine, (1) select a time in your schedule when you will carry out this recurring task, (2) write down the steps that make up the task, and (3) list any materials that you will need to carry out the task. For the first few times that you carry out a newly-scripted routine, make a point to monitor your performance (Did you do the task at the scheduled time, follow the steps, have all materials ready?). With practice, that task quickly turns into a comfortable routine.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>REDUCE YOUR MEMORY LOAD: CREATE CHECKLISTS.</b> For any recurring situation in which you are in danger of forgetting to bring materials or carry out important tasks, create and use checklists. For example, a student's checklist may list items often forgotten in the rush to leave for school in the morning: "Lunch, homework, sports clothes, calculator." Or a student may consult this simple checklist at the end of class : "Write down homework assignment, collect work materials for homework, make sure today's homework is turned in before leaving class."</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>CREATE MEETING LOGS FOR TEACHER CONFERENCES AND STUDENT WORK GROUPS.</b> As a student, you may not attend many meetings. However, whenever you conference with a teacher or attend a student study or work group session, it is a good idea to write a brief 'log' entry summarizing the outcome. It is particularly helpful to write down meeting notes when you have committed to the</p>		



<p>teacher or your peers to do something: e.g., to email your summary of a research article to members of your study group or to turn in a missing assignment to your teacher by the end of the week. Jotting down a brief entry right after the meeting helps you to remember your obligations and encourages you to put those obligations into your schedule or onto your 'to do' list--where you know they will not be overlooked.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>USE ELECTRONIC REMINDERS AND PROMPTS.</b> As smartphones and other personal digital devices become more common, you can take advantage of their features to better organize your life. For example, set your cell phone alarm to remember important appointments or daily tasks. Or send yourself an email with a reminder of a task to be completed before you go to sleep.</p>		



## ACADEMIC SURVIVAL SKILLS CHECKLIST: TIME MANAGEMENT

This form includes (1) your selected Academic Survival Skill Checklist items, (2) a column to verify whether the student possesses each survival skill (Y/N), and (3) a column to list the information used to verify each skill (Observation/Interview/Work Product).

Academic Survival-Skill Checklist	Student Displays Skill? (Y/N)	Data Source? (Observation/Interview/Work Product)
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>CREATE A MASTER SCHEDULE.</b> Develop a Sunday-through-Saturday weekly master schedule for the quarter, semester, or school year. In that schedule, (1) fill in school classes and study periods, (2) include any regularly scheduled activities such as commuting, sports, clubs, lessons, or part-time jobs, (3) block out time for essential activities such as eating and sleeping, and (4) include adequate time for recreation. In the remaining blocks of open time in the schedule, reserve a minimum amount of time each day for study. Update this schedule whenever a significant schedule change occurs. TIP: Consider labeling several time-blocks as 'open' in the master schedule to accommodate occasional unforeseen study or other time requirements.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>KEEP A DAILY CALENDAR.</b> Whether you use a paper or electronic version, keep a calendar to track your changing daily schedule. When constructing each daily calendar schedule, it is most efficient to start with the structure of the master schedule and then add any additional events scheduled to occur on that day.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>SCHEDULE PREVIEW AND REVIEW TIME FOR DEMANDING COURSES.</b> When possible, reserve time before a challenging class to preview material to be covered and time soon after the class session to review lecture notes. Write these preview and review slots into your master schedule.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>WHEN SCHEDULING, START WITH OUTCOME GOALS.</b> When developing a daily or weekly schedule, first list any important goals to be accomplished by the end of that scheduled time-period (e.g., to produce a 5-paragraph essay; to complete a college application; to transcribe a set of paper notes into electronic format). After developing the schedule, double-check to ensure that you have incorporated sufficient time and the</p>		



<p>correct sequencing of activities into that schedule to attain those key goals.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>USE UNEXPECTED POCKETS OF FREE TIME EFFICIENTLY.</b> Have a plan to make efficient use of small amounts of unscheduled time that become available. Tasks suitable for brief pockets of open time could include reviewing and revising lecture notes, starting a homework assignment, studying note-cards to prepare for an upcoming test, and updating your study schedule for the following day.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>ALLOCATE DOUBLE TIME FOR SIGNIFICANT ACADEMIC TASKS.</b> When deciding how much time to schedule for a substantial academic task, predict the time required--and then double that estimate. People often reserve too little time for demanding tasks--so doubling your time estimates can correct for this over-optimistic bias.</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>TIME MANAGEMENT: REFLECT AND REVISE.</b> At the end of each week, review your time-management planning efforts with a critical eye and note areas needing improvement. For example, investigate whether the amount of time that you typically set aside for study or other activities is sufficient, whether you are actually sticking to your general schedule, and whether there are important but overlooked activities or tasks that need to be added to your schedule.</p>		