

# Ways to integrate self-management skills into Higher Education teaching

Effective self-management is a crucial skill in every sphere of life. Better self-management skills predict a host of positive outcomes ranging from stronger academic performance<sup>1</sup> to lower unemployment rates<sup>2</sup> and more financial security in adulthood.<sup>3</sup>

Self-management is broadly defined as the ability to intentionally and strategically manage one’s emotions, behavior, effort, and environment in the pursuit of goals. There are a variety of different terms that are used, both in education and colloquially, to refer to self-management or its component skills, including grit, self-control, self-regulated learning, self-discipline, and willpower.

Most academic activities require some amount of self-management. Below are some examples to give you inspiration for how students can develop and practice self-management skills in the classroom.

Learning activity	Skills involved
<p><b>Completion of a long-term, multiple-step classroom project.</b></p>	<p>Projects that learners complete over several weeks or months require self-management skills, as learners need to organize and coordinate their time, effort, and resources. Self-management skills can be explicitly elicited in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal-setting activities allow learners to practice planning by identifying long-term goals for the project as well as specific, short-term achievements that need to be met.</li> <li>• Learners can also be prompted to self-assess their progress against their goals to determine whether they are on track to successfully complete the project and/or what changes they need to make in order to be successful.</li> <li>• After completing the task, learners can explore their experience persisting through frustration or difficulties during the project. If students felt successful in this area, they can reflect on the strategies they used; if they felt that persisting was a struggle, learners can brainstorm strategies that would be helpful to try during future projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Encouraging focus and timely completion of assignments.</b></p>	<p>Many learners struggle with maintaining focus on their school assignments. An effective way to support learners in this area is to help them anticipate when and where procrastination is likely to be a problem, and then make changes to the physical environment or social situation that makes procrastination more difficult. Learners could explore what things they find distracting when trying to complete schoolwork and then actively plan to remove those distractions. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing your phone from your study space.</li> <li>• Installing apps to block distracting and non-work-related websites during study time.</li> <li>• Identifying when studying with peers is distracting, and making plans to study alone during those times.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Have learners self-assess their knowledge before a quiz or other examination.</b></p>	<p>One aspect of self-management involves accurately monitoring one’s knowledge or progress during a learning activity. Learners can practice this skill by self-assessing their own knowledge before quizzes or tests. Since many learners do not do this naturally, it is important to explicitly prompt the use of this strategy. They can then receive feedback on this skill by comparing their self-assessment to their actual performance.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Poropat, A. E. (2009). *A meta-analysis of the five-factor model of personality and academic performance*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 135(2), 322–338.

<sup>2</sup> Daly, M., Delaney, L., Egan, M., & Baumeister, R. F. (2015). *Childhood self-control and unemployment throughout the life span: Evidence from two British cohort studies*. *Psychological Science*, 26(6), 709–723.

<sup>3</sup> Moffitt, T. E., Arseneault, L., Belsky, D., Dickson, N., Hancox, R. J., Harrington, H. L., & Caspi, A. (2011). *A gradient of childhood self control predicts health, wealth, and public safety*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108(7), 2693–2698.

These are the big ideas behind the learning activities overleaf. Use these to adapt the examples for your students, or as guidance to devise your own learning tasks.

### Self-management skills should be explicitly taught

Because self-management skills are needed for many academic tasks, it is easy to assume learners will develop these skills on their own as they progress through their educational journey. This, however, is not the case; rather, self-management skills should be explicitly taught.

- 1 Teach learners what good self-management looks like in terms of desirable behaviors and useful strategies. (See the big idea below for examples of specific self-management strategies.)
- 2 Provide learners with opportunities to practice their self-management skills, making expectations clear.
- 3 Give learners feedback on their self-management skills.

### Provide opportunities to practice self-management strategies

Many learners will be unfamiliar with these strategies, so instructors need to explicitly describe and teach them. Fortunately, opportunities for self-management come up often in learning environments, so these strategies can be taught in meaningful contexts.

- 1 In order to improve planning and time management skills, learners can practice setting useful and effective goals (i.e. SMART goals - Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) or planning around obstacles by mapping out how to respond to specific behavioral challenges.
- 2 Learners can develop checklists around common organizational challenges including getting materials ready before completing an assignment or steps for reviewing work before turning it in.
- 3 Physical relaxation strategies such as deep breathing or learning to use self-talk to challenge unhelpful thoughts can help learners manage their emotions.

### Support learners' development of a "growth mindset"

Having a growth mindset means that students view intelligence or ability as something that is malleable or changeable. This mindset normalizes difficulty and struggle and frames these as areas for improvement rather than discouragement, which can help learners maintain effort and persist through frustration.

- 1 Model a positive attitude about mistakes, discussing how they are challenges that allow for better learning, not reasons to quit.
- 2 Teach students directly about growth mindset. Consider using analogies that students are likely to understand, such as how practice is necessary for success in other areas, like athletics. Point out how success at school similarly requires practice.
- 3 Focus feedback on the process, not the person. Emphasize behaviors and strategies, which are clearly under student control.

### Scaffold the development of self-management skills by gradually reducing external support

During activities that require self-management, it is important to consider the support level. Providing less support means that a task requires greater self-management skill.

- 1 For learners that struggle with self-management, considerable support can be provided by clearly and explicitly prompting when to use self-management and providing recommendations for specific strategies.
- 2 At a lower level of support, learners may receive basic reminders about self-management but no suggestions or strategies.
- 3 At the lowest level of support, self-management skills would be entirely unprompted and left up to the learner. This stage is particularly important for learners transitioning to the workplace, as the workplace differs from education settings in the type and level of self-management skills required. In the workplace, individuals typically take more responsibility for managing their behavior and performance.

Are you already incorporating self-management skills in your teaching? Tell us how. [efficacy@pearson.com](mailto:efficacy@pearson.com)