

STEVE RUBIN COACHING

The Executive Function Guide

Practical Strategies for Getting Organized,
Getting Started & Getting Things Done

**A practical guide for adults who want less overwhelm and more control over
everyday life.**

Steve Rubin Coaching

Practical coaching systems designed for the way your brain works.

How to Use This Guide

Executive function challenges are not a character flaw. You can know exactly what you need to do and still have trouble starting, organizing, remembering, prioritizing, or finishing it.

This guide focuses on practical systems that **externalize the work** your brain is being asked to do. You do not need to use every strategy. Pick one that solves a problem you are experiencing right now, try it for a week, and adjust.

A useful rule: **make the next step smaller, clearer, and easier to begin.**

Important note

This guide is educational and is not a diagnosis or medical treatment. Executive-function difficulties can have many causes. If they significantly interfere with your life, consider discussing them with an appropriately qualified professional.

1. What Are Executive Functions?

Executive functions are the mental skills we use to manage ourselves and our behavior in pursuit of a goal. They help us decide what matters, get started, stay on track, adapt when circumstances change, and finish what we begin.

Skill	What it helps you do
Planning	Figure out the steps needed to reach a goal.
Organization	Keep information, belongings, and tasks arranged so you can find and use them.
Working memory	Hold information in mind while you use it.
Task initiation	Move from intending to do something to actually starting.
Time management	Estimate, track, and allocate time.
Prioritization	Decide what needs attention first.
Emotional regulation	Manage feelings so they do not completely derail the task.
Cognitive flexibility	Shift plans, perspectives, or strategies when circumstances change.

2. Why Executive Functions Can Be Difficult

One of the most frustrating experiences is the gap between **knowing** and **doing**. You may understand a task, care about the outcome, and still feel stuck.

Common friction points include:

- Too many tasks competing for attention.
- A task is vague or has too many steps.
- The task feels boring, stressful, or emotionally loaded.
- You underestimate how long something will take.
- Important information is stored only in your head.
- A change in plans requires rapid mental switching.
- Perfectionism makes starting feel risky.

The goal is not to force yourself to have perfect executive function. The goal is to **build an environment and a set of systems that reduce how much executive function each task requires.**

Try this reframe

Instead of: *“Why can’t I just do this?”*

Try: *“What part of this task is creating friction, and what system could remove some of it?”*

3. The Executive Function Toolkit

The 5-Minute Start

Commit to working for only five minutes. The goal is starting—not finishing. Once started, continuing often becomes easier.

Shrink the Task

Turn “clean the kitchen” into “put five things away.” Turn “do taxes” into “open the tax folder.”

Externalize Your Memory

Use calendars, alarms, checklists, notes, labels, and visible reminders instead of relying on memory alone.

Visualize the Next Step

Put the exact next action where you will see it. “Call dentist” is clearer than “deal with health stuff.”

Time Blocking

Give important tasks a specific place on your calendar rather than hoping you will find time later.

Use Timers

A timer creates a visible beginning and ending. Try 10, 15, or 25 minutes.

One Thing at a Time

When overwhelmed, choose one priority. Keep a parking-lot list for everything else.

Body Doubling

Work alongside another person—physically or virtually—to add structure and accountability.

4. The Anti-Overwhelm System

When everything feels urgent, your first job is not to finish everything. Your first job is to reduce the number of decisions your brain has to make.

1. Brain dump

Write down everything competing for your attention. Do not organize it yet.

2. Sort

Separate items into: Now, Soon, Later, and Maybe/Not Necessary.

3. Prioritize

Choose the one or two items that matter most today.

4. Define the next action

Write a physical, observable action—not a vague goal.

5. Start small

Set a timer for 5–15 minutes and begin.

6. Reset

When the timer ends, decide whether to continue, stop, or schedule the next session.

Example

Vague: “Get organized.”

Better: “Put the papers on my desk into three piles.”

Next: “Set a 10-minute timer and sort the first pile.”

5. A Simple Daily Executive Function Routine

Morning

- Check your calendar.
- Identify your top 1–3 priorities.
- Choose the first physical action for priority #1.
- Put time-sensitive tasks on a visible schedule.

During the Day

- Use a timer for focused work.
- Capture new tasks immediately instead of holding them in your head.
- When stuck, make the task smaller.
- Take short breaks before your attention completely crashes.
- Review your priorities after interruptions or schedule changes.

Evening

- Check what was completed.
- Move unfinished tasks to a specific future time or list.
- Prepare anything you will need tomorrow.
- Write down anything you are worried you will forget.

The goal is consistency, not perfection. A routine that works 70% of the time is more useful than a perfect routine you abandon after three days.

6. When You Can't Get Started

Task initiation is often the hardest part. When you are stuck, try changing the question from “*How do I finish this?*” to “*What would make starting easier?*”

- Identify the smallest possible action.
- Set a five-minute timer.
- Remove one source of friction—open the document, put the supplies on the desk, or move the phone away.
- Use a countdown: 5–4–3–2–1, then move.
- Ask someone to sit with you or check in with you.
- Give yourself permission to do an imperfect first version.
- Pair a difficult task with something pleasant, such as music or a favorite drink.
- Schedule a specific start time instead of saying “later.”

If you repeatedly avoid a task, ask what the avoidance is protecting you from: boredom, uncertainty, fear of failure, overwhelm, conflict, or an unclear next step. The answer can tell you which strategy to try.

7. Executive Function Quick-Reference Checklist

When you feel stuck or overwhelmed, run through this list:

- What is the single most important thing right now?
- What is the smallest next action?
- Can I make the task more specific?
- Can I put the information somewhere outside my head?
- Can I set a timer?
- Can I schedule it instead of keeping it on a vague to-do list?
- Can I remove one source of friction?
- Would body doubling or accountability help?
- Am I trying to do too many things at once?
- What would an imperfect version look like?
- If I cannot do it now, when exactly will I do the next step?

My One Next Action: _____
Start Time: _____ Timer: _____
What might get in the way? _____

8. When Coaching May Help

Sometimes the problem is not a lack of information. You may already know dozens of productivity strategies but struggle to consistently put them into practice.

Coaching can provide a structured space to identify what is getting in the way, choose practical strategies, test them in real life, and adjust them based on what actually works for you.

A coaching approach may focus on:

- Clarifying goals and priorities.
- Creating personalized routines and systems.
- Breaking large goals into manageable actions.
- Building accountability.
- Identifying friction points in everyday life.
- Developing strategies that are realistic rather than idealized.
- Reviewing what worked, what didn't, and what to change next.

Coaching is not about forcing you to become someone you're not. It is about finding practical systems that fit the way you function.

Ready for Practical Support?

If executive-function challenges are making everyday life harder than it needs to be, you don't have to figure out every system by yourself.

Steve Rubin Coaching helps neurodivergent adults build confidence, daily-life organization, and greater independence through practical coaching systems designed for the way their brain works.

LEARN MORE & GET THE FREE RESOURCE

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Steve Rubin Coaching

Practical coaching. Real-life systems. Greater independence.