

WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING...

Mitch Weathers' book is the perfect combination of school-site anecdotes, research-based practices, and personal reflections. As an author of time-management books for teachers (and the mom of four kids myself!), I was quite literally riveted learning about the differences between agendas and planners, and I found myself reconsidering some of my former teaching routines. This text is a valuable resource of ideas, activities, and templates you can put into practice the very next day.

—**Maia Heyck-Merlin**, Author of *The Together Teacher*, *The Together Leader*, and *The Together Teammate*, and CEO and Founder of The Together Group

In Executive Functions for Every Classroom, Mitch Weathers makes the case for universal classroom routines that free up students' mental bandwidth to focus on learning. Rather than struggle through the day trying to navigate different expectations in every classroom, students can rely on predictable structures for starting and ending every class, organizing their work, and keeping track of their progress. Today's students are struggling with motivation and self-discipline. Ignoring fads and hype, this book outlines simple processes every school can put in place to get students to believe in themselves and develop the habits they'll need for success in school and in life. It will become an instant classic and will transform the learning and trajectory of generations of students.

—**Justin Baeder**, Director of the Principal Center

Full of simple, doable actions and clear, engaging examples to bring ideas to life, this book is an essential friend that will bring clarity and organization into your classroom.

—**Becky Carlzon**, Author of *Powering Up Children* and Designer of Learning Pioneers and PressPlay

I'm not exaggerating when I say that this is a must-read for every single teacher on the planet! Weathers provides actionable yet realistic steps for teachers to take to consistently create more predictable learning spaces for

all students. This work has a profound impact on all students, but chaos navigators, in particular, benefit. Chaos navigators are our young people who are giving everything they have just to survive the lack of predictability they experience every moment outside of school. When teachers commit to the strategies outlined in this book, they create havens for students, moments in their day that are safer, and that makes all the difference. Our chaos navigators are more likely to lean into their education and take the risks inherent to learning if they are in classrooms like those described in this book. Thank you for this absolute gift, Mitch!

—Jaz Ampaw-Farr, Human-First CEO,
Keynote Speaker, and Resilience Ninja, Be
Human First Ltd

Classroom teachers know they are teaching content and they do it well. Yet, more importantly, they are teaching their students how to learn and that takes executive functioning. Weathers' book provides research-backed, immediately applicable strategies to support the development of executive functioning in one's classroom context. It's beyond helpful whether you finish feeling validated, gain good reminders, or experience new learning. It's worth the read.

—Jennifer Abrams, Author of *Stretching Your Learning Edges: Growing (Up) at Work and Having Hard Conversations*

This book is a masterclass on how to create a predictable learning routine that guarantees your students' success. Mitch Weathers is my go-to executive functions expert, and he's shared what works with you here.

—Danny Bauer, Founder of Better
Leaders Better Schools

Executive Functions for Every Classroom is an indispensable and powerful guide that addresses the critical issue of disengagement and dysfunction and offers practical solutions to foster self-regulation and academic success in students. Weathers systematically breaks down the challenges students face each day while providing insightful strategies, real-life examples, and actionable advice to help educators and parents empower students with essential executive functioning skills. With a deep understanding of the hurdles students encounter and a wealth of resources for improvement, this book equips readers with the tools necessary to cultivate executive functions in students, ultimately transforming their

educational experience and setting them on a path to outstanding achievement.

—**Joshua Stamper**, Author, Podcaster,
and Training and Development Specialist
for the Teach Better Team

Executive functions are the invisible gears that we all need to be successful. When we neglect to teach them explicitly and with modeling, our students suffer disengagement and inequity. This book is the essential guide for teachers hoping to make learning more equitable, engaging, and enlightening!

—**Ariel Curry**, Author of *Hungry Authors: A Simple Guide to Planning, Creating, and Publishing a Nonfiction Book*

Executive functioning has been shown to be one of the characteristics that helps young people grow into great leaders, and this world needs more effective leaders in every arena. Through clear language and powerful stories, Mitch Weathers shares strategies and simple solutions to help teach this critical skill in every classroom.

—**Jethro Jones**, Founder, Transformative
Principal

In Executive Functions for Every Classroom, Mitch Weathers brilliantly breaks down what executive functions are, why they are critical to our students' success, and how to teach them in any setting. With this book, our students will achieve in school and in life. There is wisdom on every page!

—**Alex Kajitani**, Speaker, Author, and
California Teacher of the Year; Top-4 Finalist,
National Teacher of the Year

We've needed a book like this for a long time. If students are without executive functioning skills, almost nothing else that we do matters. I recommend that this book becomes a prerequisite in every teacher and school leader prep program.

—**T.J. Vari**, Co-Founder of The
Schoolhouse 302, Author, School Leader,
and Book Nerd

We often hear about goals to foster students who are lifelong learners, and Weathers has outlined a systematic, logical, and easy-to-implement structure for maximizing students' executive function. His Daily Routine teaches students how

to be organized, avoids overtaxing their cognitive loads, and reduces the time and effort required for teachers to plan. Every educator who wants their students to be actively engaged in the process of learning, focus their attention on academic goals, and have the skills to be successful should read Executive Functions for Every Classroom.

—**Connie Hamilton**, Author, Educator,
Speaker, and Presenter

Written with empathy for both teachers and students, this book is a must-read for all educators! Practical strategies based on solid research equip teachers with exactly what they need to help students boost their executive functioning, which is perhaps the most important life skill today.

—**Julie Stern**, Four-Time Best-Selling
Author and Founder of
www.edtochangetheworld.com

Drawing upon a plethora of research and rich practical experiences, Mitch Weathers reveals a unique and proven framework to improve student learning. Executive Functions for Every Classroom is replete with the tools and strategies students and teachers need to experience daily success. Ideal for both new and experienced teachers, Executive Functions for Every Classroom offers a proven pathway to a calm, purposeful, and joyful learning environment.

—**Aubrey Patterson**, CEO Warm
Demanders Inc, Superintendent (retired)
Alberta, Canada

Executive Functions for Every Classroom, Grades 3-12

Creating Safe and Predictable
Learning Environments

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Do not copy, post, or distribute

For Amber. Thank you for your unwavering belief in me.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Executive Functions for Every Classroom, Grades 3-12

Creating Safe and Predictable
Learning Environments

Mitch Weathers



Copyright © 2024 by Corwin Press, Inc.

This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

For information:

Corwin
A SAGE Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
(800) 233-9936
www.corwin.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
Unit No 323-333, Third Floor, F-Block
International Trade Tower Nehru Place
New Delhi 110 019
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12
China Square Central
Singapore 048423

Vice President and Editorial Director:
Monica Eckman
Publisher: Jessica Allan
Content Development Editor:
Mia Rodriguez
Production Editor: Vijayakumar
Copy Editor: Ritika Sharma
Typesetter: TNQ Technologies Pvt. Ltd.
Proofreader: Girish Kumar Sharma
Indexer: TNQ Technologies Pvt. Ltd.
Cover Designer: Scott Van Atta
Marketing Manager: Olivia Bartlett

Copyright © 2024 by Mitch Weathers

All rights reserved. Except as permitted by U.S. copyright law, no part of this work may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

When forms and sample documents appearing in this work are intended for reproduction, they will be marked as such. Reproduction of their use is authorized for educational use by educators, local school sites, and/or noncommercial or nonprofit entities that have purchased the book.

All third-party trademarks referenced or depicted herein are included solely for the purpose of illustration and are the property of their respective owners. Reference to these trademarks in no way indicates any relationship with, or endorsement by, the trademark owner.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Weathers, Mitch, author.

Title: Executive functions for every classroom, grades 3-12 : creating safe and predictable learning environments / Mitch Weathers.

Description: Thousand Oaks, California : Corwin Press, [2024] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023054644 | ISBN 9781071919453 (paperback) | ISBN 9781071919484 (ebook) | ISBN 9781071919460 (epub) | ISBN 9781071919477 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Effective teaching. | Student-centered learning. | Classroom management. | Motivation in education. | Classroom environment.

Classification: LCC LB1025.3 .W387 2024 | DDC 371.102-dc23/eng/20231212

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023054644>

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

24 25 26 27 28 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DISCLAIMER: This book may direct you to access third-party content via web links, QR codes, or other scannable technologies, which are provided for your reference by the author(s). Corwin makes no guarantee that such third-party content will be available for your use and encourages you to review the terms and conditions of such third-party content. Corwin takes no responsibility and assumes no liability for your use of any third-party content, nor does Corwin approve, sponsor, endorse, verify, or certify such third-party content.

CONTENTS

Preface	xv
Foreword	xix
Acknowledgments	xxiii
About the Author	xxv
INTRODUCTION	1
Lost in the Wilderness	4
Navigating With Executive Functioning Skills	6
The Two Challenges With Teaching Executive Functions	7
Why Predictable Learning Routines?	8
Three Keys to Teaching Executive Functions	11
CHAPTER 1. EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION AND DISENGAGEMENT	13
Struggling With “Studentness”	15
We Can’t Afford Executive Dysfunction Any Longer	26
Chapter 1 Reflection Questions	28
CHAPTER 2. TEACHING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS	29
What Are Executive Functioning Skills?	30
The Benefits	31
Clarity, Routine, and Modeling	35
Self-Regulation Through a Daily Routine	45

Conclusion	48
Chapter 2 Reflection Questions	48
CHAPTER 3. WORKING MEMORY: BEGINNING ROUTINE	51
Designing a Beginning Routine	52
Why the Old Beginning Routine Does Not Work	55
Strategies to Make Your Beginning Routine Better	57
Beginning Routine Example	68
Adjustments and Considerations	69
Self-Regulation Through the Beginning Routine	71
Conclusion	72
Chapter 3 Reflection Questions	73
CHAPTER 4. WORKING MEMORY: THE CONCLUDING ROUTINE	75
How to Receive Authentic Formative Feedback	77
Designing Your Concluding Routine	78
Why the Old Concluding Routine Doesn't Work	81
Strategies to Make Your Concluding Routine Better	82
Concluding Routine Example	86
Adjustments and Considerations	87
I Dare You to Try It	90
Self-Regulation Through the Concluding Routine	90
Conclusion	91
Chapter 4 Reflection Questions	93
CHAPTER 5. TIME AND TASK MANAGEMENT: THE AGENDA	95
Developing Time and Task Management Skills	96
Why the Old Agenda Doesn't Work	98
Strategies to Make Your Agenda Better	99
Agenda Example	101
Adjustments and Considerations	103
Self-Regulation Through Agendas	104
Conclusion	104
Chapter 5 Reflection Questions	105
CHAPTER 6. ORGANIZATION: TABLES OF CONTENTS AND ACADEMIC TOOLKITS	107
What Is a Table of Contents?	109
Why the Old Table of Contents Doesn't Work	111
Strategies to Make Your Table of Contents Better	112
Table of Contents Example	117
Adjustments and Considerations	118

Academic Toolkits	119
Academic Toolkit Example	121
Self-Regulation Through a Table of Contents and Academic Toolkit	122
Conclusion	122
Chapter 6 Reflection Questions	123
CHAPTER 7. ACCOUNTABILITY: PORTFOLIO CHECKS	125
Accountability Starts With Expectations	126
Accountability Through Portfolio Checks	129
Designing Your Portfolio Check	131
Portfolio Check Example	134
Adjustments and Considerations	135
Peer Check Example	135
Self-Regulation Through Portfolio Checks	136
Conclusion	138
Chapter 7 Reflection Questions	139
CHAPTER 8. GOAL SETTING	141
Why the Old Goal Setting Doesn't Work	142
Strategies to Make Goal Setting Better	144
Goal-Setting Example	151
Adjustments and Considerations	152
Self-Regulation Through Goal-Setting	153
Conclusion	154
Chapter 8 Reflection Questions	155
CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION	157
Self-Regulation	158
Self-Efficacy and Internal Motivation	159
Tenacity (Formerly Known as Grit)	160
Executive Functions as Transferable Skills	162
Content Area Gains	163
Family Engagement	164
Signing Off	166
<i>Appendix: Effect Size</i>	169
<i>Glossary</i>	177
<i>References</i>	181
<i>Index</i>	185

Do not copy, post, or distribute

PREFACE

I'd like to share what I have learned from the past two decades of working with students. The truth is, I am a teacher, not a researcher, but ever since my early years in the classroom, I have been obsessed with translating the theory I was learning in books and research articles into concrete, actionable steps for teachers and students in the modern classroom. Too often, following professional development that I attended as a teacher, I was left with what felt like even more work to do to incorporate the ideas into my practice. To solve this problem, you will find an emphasis on practice, or action, in this book. My goal is to equip teachers with a proven method for teaching their students executive functioning skills within the context of their grade level or subject matter while engaging families in a unique fashion.

To that end, the word I encourage you to keep in mind as you read these pages is *coherency*. If you are like me, you have read a lot of books and articles that detail strategies for teachers. And although most, if not all, of those strategies are effective and help teachers and students experience more success, it can be difficult to see how those strategies are connected, let alone apply them together. And although teachers can pick a single strategy to try with their students, my hope is that you see the cohesion of these strategies, and that when implemented together as a routine, they serve to amplify their impact.

More than anything, this book is a call to action for all educators, parents, and even students. We can no longer leave the development of executive functioning skills up to chance. These skills and habits literally lay the foundation for learning. I have never met a teacher, school leader, or parent who does not want their students to hone executive functions, yet historically these skills have not been taught. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, before we go any further, let's begin by defining these skills. **Executive functions** are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. What you will discover in the coming pages are three keys to teaching executive functioning skills: **clarity**, **routine**, and **modeling**.

Although there is an emphasis on practice, the ideas outlined in this book are rooted in research and data. When I first developed these strategies to teach executive functions in my classroom, there was a spark. Students who were mired in academic struggle began to experience success, and those who had not struggled experienced even more success. Since that time, I have had the honor of supporting schools around the United States and internationally to implement these strategies with their students, with the same results. I have spent the last 20 years immersing myself in educational research to discover why this approach has such a profound impact on students and teachers. As such, this body of knowledge is “research-backed” as opposed to “research-based.”

Another conviction of mine is that I believe deeply that content and curricula, what we teach students, is secondary. What is primary, or foundational, is developing the capacity for learning in students and that is accomplished through teaching executive functioning skills. That is not to suggest that what we are teaching is not important—it is, of course—but without the bedrock upon which we can build knowledge, standards, and objectives fall flat.

That is why this approach to teaching executive functions is for *all* students; it is a true Universal Tier 1 RTI/MTSS intervention or resource for schools. Therefore, the intended setting for implementation is in the general education classroom to be sure all students have access.

This approach to teaching executive functions is for all students; it is a true Universal Tier 1 RTI/MTSS intervention or resource for schools.

I would like to introduce you to a few other terms before we jump in. First, I will refer to portfolios throughout each chapter. With that said, if you know me, you know I have an affinity for 3-ring binders. If students have access to a binder, this is the portfolio I recommend. The Child Mind Institute agrees, “Binders beat notebooks when it comes to making sure papers stay put. Kids with EF issues should have a dedicated binder for each subject, so they won’t have to rifle madly through everything to find their math homework (Jacobson, 2023).” **Portfolios** can be a notebook, a composition book, a three-ring binder, anything a teacher and their students have access to. I will also reference the **class sample portfolio**, a tool that teachers can use to model these skills and habits. The class sample is basically exactly what students will use each day as they participate in the daily routine. Teachers simply update the class sample to model for students how their portfolio should look. This is particularly helpful for students who are absent and need to update their portfolio.

As we ease out of the pandemic and back to regular schooling, there has never been a more critical time to teach executive functions. My hope is that the pages in this book not only articulate these strategies well, that they inspire and challenge you, but also that they bring you hope as an educator.

Your partner in bettering education,
Mitch

Do not copy, post, or distribute

FOREWORD

In this important book, teachers are urged to ask students to think about their learning according to the following Likert scale. However, I would like you to ponder the Likert scale and ask yourself this question: Executive Functions: Where are you on the scale of “Getting It?”

Where Are You on the Scale of “Getting It”?				
1	2	3	4	5
I am totally confused	I am somewhat confused	I am close to “getting it” but not there yet	I am somewhat sure I “get it”	I am confident I “get it”

The good news, whether you are a 1 or a 5 or in between, is that this book will take you from definitions of executive functions to critical thinking to being able to incorporate the strategies for the necessary daily routines that allow our students to soar. Let’s begin our dive.

I like to think my executive function skills have assisted me in navigating life. My working memory is adequate, my

organizational skills keep me from missing deadlines, and my self-control, to be honest, could use more work. Most of my skills have been learned through trial and error. What if, as a young student, my lessons had included the clarity, modeling, and routines of the practical skills needed for life? How might I have navigated life more easily? Looking forward, how might today's students benefit?

As a veteran middle school teacher, it is easy for me to conjure up images of lockers that won't close because contents are spilling out into the hallway. Add to the picture the students who literally run into class late because they had been searching for an assignment in an overstuffed binder which was of no use. In my teachers' education classes and training, this topic of organization (including executive functions) was never covered. Instead, our on-the-job training consisted of working with the students over lunch or after school to clean out lockers and reorganize binders. We did this on a regular basis, rarely seeing progress. The organization problems followed these students throughout their middle school years and beyond. After reading this book, I realized that becoming organized was not just for the disorganized. As a teacher, I was intentional and purposeful, but on a regular basis? Every single one of my students would have benefited by my being clear, modeling tasks, and having established routines, daily.

Teaching is an intense profession. Teachers are leaving the field in record numbers. However, *this* is the very time I wish I could have started my career. Research is our friend, and we now know so much more about learning. Previously prevalent myths (left brain/right brain, learning styles, studying by re-reading notes or the chapter) have been debunked in favor of methods based upon robust research that we *know* increase learning and knowledge retention. Evidence-informed strategies help replace those "professional development fads" with skills and strategies on how best to help our students learn.

Every teacher needs to have in their powerful toolbox not only how best to help our students learn, but also how best to help organize that learning. Understanding executive functioning and the role it plays in organization is key. Enter Mitch Weathers. Mitch not only explains the concept but shows us the strategies that lead to success. Valuable vignettes bring the stories of success home with the experiences of real stories, real students, and real teachers. In addition, I appreciate the

reflections at the conclusion of each chapter. These are not only advantageous for book studies, but they also help me retrieve the information and link it to memory.

Clarity. Modeling. Routine. These are three keys for helping our students achieve success. As Weathers states, “Executive functions, which promote a sense of agency and dexterity in students, should be addressed daily, in every classroom. They create the foundation upon which learning occurs. Yet, historically, developing these skills has been left up to chance.” Thanks to this book, we are given the tools and strategies that enable us to leave nothing to chance, but rather show us the roadmap for organization and student success.

Imagine with me a school where every teacher clearly communicates their set expectations, models the skills needed for success, and establishes routines common to all. As Mitch states, “it is critical that this work around executive functions is made available for all students, a true Tier 1 initiative that a school undertakes.” Think of how growing up with this type of knowledge and experience would be advantageous to vocational, college, and future employment. The information is at our fingertips.

On the other hand, the author made a statement that stopped me in my tracks: “As teachers, if we are aware that our students are partially organized, and we do nothing about it, then we are complicit in their failure.” Ponder that for a moment. This information *is* now available and it is our duty to fill our toolboxes with the knowledge and strategies that enable student success. Maya Angelou said, “When we know better, we do better.” I thank Mitch Weathers, who has enlightened us and showed us how to do better.

Patrice M. Bain, Ed.S.

Co-Author: Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning

Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning

Author: A Parent’s Guide to Powerful Teaching

Do not copy, post, or distribute

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my parents for their steadfast support. One will never find more giving and selfless humans. I am fortunate to be your son. Please don't take offense to the story I share at the beginning of Chapter 5.

I want to thank all the teachers and schools around the US and internationally who see the value in teaching executive functions and have embraced me and this work over the past 20 years. It truly has been an honor to collaborate with you.

In particular, I want to thank my mentor, friend, and guide in life and work, Dick Davis, the former principal of the school that coined the term "studentness" while implementing Organized Binder. Thank you for your belief in my work and for always modeling for me what it means to be husband and dad of two daughters while remaining passionate about trying to make the world a better and more just place through education.

Bert Bower, thank you! There is no question that this book would have never been written, nor would Organized Binder be thriving and working with schools around the world, without your consistent mentorship over the past decade. You are a gracious human, Bert, always giving and offering to help. Thanks for putting the bug in my ear all those years ago to write a book!

To my dear friend, Danny Bauer, of Better Leaders Better School, who believes we can do education better and is doing something about it. Thank you for always pushing me, supporting me, and believing in my mission to bring executive functions to every classroom, and continuing to nag me to write a book all these years.

Peter Thomsen, the most creative person I know, thank you for being my comrade in all things Organized Binder since the beginning. Everything that teachers and students use each day in classrooms around the globe is a manifestation of your creative genius.

Nick Muys, thank you for stopping by my classroom nearly 20 years ago to learn about this *binder* that students were talking about. Had you not stopped by that day, I am not sure Organized Binder would have ever moved beyond the walls of my classroom.

Finally, my deepest gratitude and appreciation for my friend and guide on this writing journey, Ariel Curry. Thank you for the countless hours (literally) helping map out this book, write, and submit proposals, and your willingness to edit the manuscript, many times, along the way. There is absolutely no way possible I would have finally got these ideas out of my head and down on paper without you!

Publisher's Acknowledgments

Corwin gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following reviewers:

Dayna Achilli

Seventh-Grade ELA Teacher

Bristol Warren Regional School District

Bristol, Rhode Island

D. Allan Bruner

Former Science/Math Teacher

Colton, Oregon

Terri Serey

Middle School Teacher

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District

Hacienda Heights, California

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mitch Weathers is a teacher and founder of Organized Binder, Inc. Together with the Organized Binder team, Mitch works with K-12 schools and colleges in the United States and internationally to equip students with executive functioning skills. When he is not working with schools, you can find him running trails training for his next ultramarathon. He and his wife, Amber, live in Northern California with their two daughters, Vivienne and Olive. Mitch invites you to visit organizedbinder.com to access additional resources for teaching executive functions and to learn more about the strategies outlined in this book.

Do not copy, post, or distribute