

Transcript: Visual Strategies for Organization and Planning

[SLIDE – Visual Strategies for Organization and Planning]

[Image of Ottawa-Carleton District School board logo, LD@school logo and TA@l'école logo

Text on slide:

Michelle MacIsaac, Speech-Language Pathologist
Janet Manhire, Learning Support Consultant]

[Speaker 1:] Students who have learning disabilities and difficulties in executive functioning skill frequently struggle to keep track of the things they need for schoolwork. For many of these students, explicit teaching of strategies for organization and planning – especially VISUAL strategies – is essential to the learning process. This online professional learning video is a joint venture between the Ottawa Carleton District School Board and the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario's LD@school Project. Our goal is to teach educators and parents how using visual structure and supports can improve organization and planning in our students.

[SLIDE – Learning Questions]

[Text on slide:

In this video, you will learn the answers to the following questions:

1. Why should I invest time in teaching organizational skills?
2. How do I explicitly teach organizational skills to students with learning disabilities?
3. How can we help students with LDs transfer strategies from one situation to another?]

[Speaker 1:] In this video, you will learn the answers to the following questions: Why should I invest time in teaching organizational skills? How do I explicitly teach organizational skills to students with learning disabilities? And how can we help students with LDs transfer strategies from one situation to another?

[SLIDE – Organization is Key]

[Text on slide:

Organization and time management are related.]

[Speaker 1:] Students with learning disabilities, including those diagnosed with ADHD, often struggle with organization. Since organization is a key element of both learning skills and executive functioning skills, there can be a widespread impact for students who demonstrate lagging skills in this area. For example, a student struggling with organization may also have time management issues.

[SLIDE – Two Types of Organization]

[Text on slide:

1. Cognitive (Thought) Organization



2. Physical Organization (Person, Materials, and Space]

[Speaker 1:] There are two main types of organization that are important for student success, both in school, and in students' lives outside of school: cognitive, or thought organization, which is required when students are asked to generate ideas, tell events in a logical sequence, or write sentences, paragraphs or longer compositions; and, physical organization, that is, organization of person, materials and space. Organization is the foundation of all of the learning skills and work habits on the provincial report card. If a student is able to manage their belongings and space around them, they are more likely to be able to set goals, formulate a plan, and use the plan to reach their goal.

[SLIDE – Keeping track of time, things and information]

[Text on slide:

Preschool

School-Aged

Middle School

High School]

[Speaker 2:] As Amanda Morin describes on the website Understood.org, the signs of organization and time management issues vary with age. What you see in preschoolers or grade-schoolers may not be the same symptoms you see in middle-schoolers or high-schoolers. But at any age, kids commonly have difficulty keeping track of time, things, and information. For example, you may notice that a student struggles to start and finish tasks on time. Or that she never has the items she needs, including basics like her textbook, notes, or phone.

[SLIDE – Remembering when assignments are due]

[Image of a calendar with the 28th day of the month circled as the due date; stamp of the word 'overdue' to the right of the calendar]

[Speaker 2:] Students with organization issues may also struggle with: remembering when school assignments are due;

[SLIDE – Keeping track of and storing materials]

[Image of a Minion with the words 'When I find it, I don't need it', and 'When I need it, I can't find it'. There is also a picture of a school bus with the words 'school to home'.]

[Speaker 2:] Keeping track of materials needed to do a project or task; remembering to take necessary materials between school and home; or designating and using a specific place to store things.

[SLIDE]

[Text on slide:



Setting goals
Making decisions]

[Speaker 2:] They may struggle with: setting goals and making decisions;

[SLIDE – Being on time]

[Image of a girl in bed looking at her alarm clock with a shocked expression on her face.]

[Speaker 2:] Getting to school or other activities on time;

[SLIDE]

[Text on slide:

Estimating time

Resuming tasks after interruptions]

[Speaker 2:] Estimating how much time is needed to do something; or going back to something after they've been interrupted.

[SLIDE – Visual Strategies for Organization and Planning]

[Image of 360 Thinking Cognitive Connections logo

Text on slide:

www.efpractice.com

1. Match the Picture
2. Block and Box
3. Same but different]

[Speaker 2:] Fortunately, there are some effective strategies that can be used to address the organization, planning, and problem-solving issues our students with learning disabilities have, and they will help develop the foundational skills needed for time management too. The strategies presented here are based on the work of Sarah Ward and Kristen Jacobsen of Cognitive Connections Therapy. This video will focus on 2 visual support strategies for getting organized, staying organized, initiating tasks, following through, and managing time. These are Match the Picture, and Block and Box. The third strategy, which we are calling Same but Different, is both verbal and visual. It is used to help students make connections, and transfer the use of strategies to new situations. All of these strategies can be used as accommodations that we implement for students, but over time, students can be taught to use and implement the strategies themselves in new situations. The importance of gradually transferring responsibility from adult to child or student will also be highlighted.



[SLIDE – The Class A Teacher Talks To]

[Image developed by Richard Wells that represents responses categories students fall under when teachers explain things orally to them. Ten of the twenty graphic pieces are coloured red and labelled 'Actively Disengaged'; ten of the twenty graphic pieces are coloured orange and labelled 'Passively Disengaged'; five of the twenty graphic pieces are coloured yellow and labelled 'Trying to listen/Keep up', three of the twenty pieces are coloured blue and labelled 'Listening'; two of the twenty pieces are coloured green and labelled 'Confident, calm and keeping up with the teacher'; and one of the twenty pieces is coloured charcoal grey and labelled 'Already knows'. The green pieces have a green circle around them.]

[Speaker 2:] When students have difficulty remembering the materials they need to bring to class, or steps of instructions they need to follow, teachers often try to support them by orally repeating these items. This will prompt some students, but the responsibility for remembering and organizing remains with the teacher. This graphic from educator, author, and speaker Richard Wells, represents responses from 2200 students as to which category they felt they were in when their teachers were explaining things to them orally. As this graphic shows, in any given class, 50 % of students are actively or passively disengaged, another 35 % are trying to keep up and listen, but are only understanding part of what is being said, and may be afraid to ask for clarification. A further 5% of students feel they already know what is being presented. Only 10 % are confidently processing and understanding everything being presented. This is why even though everyone has been told what to bring to class, many still arrive without needed items. Both students and teachers end up frustrated.

[SLIDE – Lists and Checklists]

[Image of a clipboard with the title 'Backpack Checklist: Going to School' with the following check boxes below: agenda; homework; lunch; indoor shoes; library books; forms for teacher; notes to teacher; snack; other. There is another image of a box with the title 'Job 1' and the following prompts 'Do: math papers. You need: pencil, calculator, crayons. Put your papers in the finished box'.

[Speaker 2:] Other teachers create lists and checklists as reminders for students. Sometimes these lists have pictures of the items to be remembered. This is a great first step, and will be sufficient for some of our students. Others, however, need to see themselves and/or their environment in the picture. This leads us to our first strategy: MATCH THE PICTURE. Match the picture uses a photograph of the student to support organization of body and materials, or a photo of an environment, to support organization of space and materials.

[SLIDE – Strategy 1: Match the Picture]

[Image of a girl with the thought bubble 'What will I look like?' that leads to another thought bubble of herself wearing a backpack and carrying school books.]



[Speaker 2:] Using a picture of the student doing the task helps them see the future picture; they visualize themselves arriving completely prepared with everything they need for class. By using “visual language” and teaching our students to think, “What will I look like if...?” or “What will I look like when...?” we encourage future picture thinking which is necessary for independence in organization and planning. This strategy helps them to mentally rehearse what they need to do in one setting so they can do it in another. It makes what they have to remember and organize concrete and more personally relevant. They see one whole picture, rather than a list of discrete items, because all the items they have to remember are now anchored to them. Some students may be able to start with mental imagery; others may require a concrete picture to start, and then work toward using mental imagery.

[SLIDE – Take photos of the student... then store or print]

[Image of a luggage tag with a picture of a child as a hockey goalie; image of a smart phone with a child dressed for soccer; image of a front door with a child dressed in a school uniform with a backpack on and carrying school books.]

[Speaker 2:] The idea is to take a picture of the student with everything they need for a particular activity. For example, if the student has hockey or soccer practice, you would take a picture of them wearing all of their equipment. If the student needs help getting ready to leave for school, or getting to class with needed materials, you would take a picture of them with all these materials. These pictures can be stored on smart phones and other devices, printed and posted where they do the activity, or inserted into luggage tags and attached to backpacks. The student uses the picture to match him or herself to it, item by item. When the student has all the items that they have in the picture, they know they are ready to go, prepared with everything they need. Initially students are likely to need prompting or guidance to notice everything in the picture, or develop a systematic way to scan the picture.

[SLIDE – Use to organize workspaces and materials]

[Speaker 2:] The Match the Picture strategy can also be used to help students organize their workspaces and materials. In these cases, students may not be physically in the picture, but their desks, or lockers and personal belongings are. In this way, the picture is still anchored to the student.

[SLIDE]

[Image of a work space with a computer, paper, calculator and mathematical tools.

Text on slide:

Does your desk match the picture? Are you ready?]

[Speaker 2:] Encouraging students to “think in pictures” has the benefit of reducing demand on auditory and working memory. It does this by reducing the load on verbal memory and processing. When we show students a picture of the things they should have on their desks to do a graphing activity, and ask them “Does your desk match the picture? Are you ready?” We are prompting students to notice what is



going on in their surroundings, and to use this information to solve a problem. Responsibility for organizing and planning is shifting from teacher to student. And because the picture is permanent, allowing students to refer to it as often as they need, the demand on working memory is reduced.

[SLIDE]

[Image of a frustrated student with a speech bubble coming from the top right corner of the screen that says 'Get out some graph paper, your ruler, a pencil, your compass, and a protractor. You may also want to get out your eraser.']

[Speaker 2:] When we tell students "Get out some graph paper, your ruler, a pencil, your compass and a protractor. You may also want to get out your eraser", we use a lot of spoken words to accomplish the same thing a picture does. In contrast to the picture, spoken words disappear immediately. For students to be able carry out the instructions, they have to be able to hold onto all of these words in memory and assemble the materials at the same time. Many students struggle to do this, and feel an increasing amount of stress. When we find ourselves repeating the list, again and again, this added verbal input just adds to the student's stress. Or, they simply tune out because they can't process all this verbal information.

[SLIDE – Take a picture of the finished product]

[Image on the left side of the screen is a clean kitchen; image on the right side of the screen is of a clean washroom.

Text on slide:

See the big picture!]

[Speaker 2:] "Match the Picture" is a strategy that is useful in many settings and situations. Taking a picture of the finished product or the desired setting can provide students with a visual representation of the goal, thereby reducing the directions needed to complete a task. In addition, it encourages the student to "see the big picture" and see the space as a whole rather than focusing on details in the space. For instance, a picture of a clean kitchen or bathroom at home can give a child the future picture of how the space -- or the big picture -- should look when it's tidy. This will help them to organize their thinking and help them plan what needs to be done when they are asked to clean up.

[SLIDE – Label to clarify expectations]

[Image of a notebook with an arrow pointing to the top right hand corner of the page with the label 'date', an arrow pointing to the top middle of the page with the label 'title', and an arrow pointing to the middle of the page with the label 'sticky notes'.]

[Speaker 2:] As part of shared practice, teachers can also have students help them label a picture or concrete visual to draw attention to important expectations, or as shown here, steps in a series of instructions. This helps move toward mental rehearsal.



[SLIDE – Match the Picture and How to Use it: Supporting Transfer of Strategy Use]

[Image of a folder, ruler, pen, and highlighter. On the bottom of the screen there is a sequential process with arrows showing the following steps: modelled, shared, guided, independent.]

Text on slide:

1. I look at the picture so I can see what my desk will look like when I am ready for Math.
I put everything else out of sight.]

[Speaker 2:] To help students transfer the use of Match the Picture to new situations, consider using a familiar example of a Match the Picture visual, and working with students to develop an annotated graphic that explains both the purpose of the Match the Picture strategy, and how to use it. For example, if you have used a picture of a student’s desk to show what it will look like when they are ready for Math, ask students to write a caption for the picture that explains how they use it. This student explains “First, I look at the picture to see what my desk will look like when I am ready for Math. Then I put everything else out of sight.” In the beginning, teachers can model the process for generating the caption using a think aloud. Over time, students can partner with the teacher to generate captions for pictures, then progress to generating captions for selected pictures with their peers, and finally, generate captions independently, or verbally explain how they use the visual support. We are applying the concept of gradual release of responsibility to this activity. The student is gradually taking on a greater degree of responsibility for explaining how they use the strategy until they are able to carry it out independently. Some students will be able to move through the progression of modelled, shared, guided, and independent activity more quickly than others, or may not need to go through all of the stages to achieve independence. Gradual release of responsibility supports differentiated instruction by providing multiple access points for students, and allowing them to proceed at their own pace.

[SLIDE – Applying the Concept of Same but Different to Match the Picture]

[Text on slide:

Generalization and transfer

How is THIS task the SAME BUT DIFFERENT from THAT task?

Image of an arrow pointing down to the following words: non-verbal working memory, reduces stress, increases motivation and self-confidence.]

[Speaker 2:] The concept of “Same but different” is used to help make connections in order to transfer the use of a strategy to other settings, situations, and people. In this case, it is used with the Match the Picture strategy in order to generalize or transfer the thinking process from a familiar task to a novel or problematic one. By teaching our students to think, “I’ve done this before...how is THIS task the same as THAT task?” “How is it different from THAT task?” we are tapping into their nonverbal working memory and the use of mental imagery to organize, initiate, persevere and self-monitor the completion of a task. At the same time, making these connections helps to reduce stress, increase motivation and boost self-



confidence. When students remember that they were successful with something similar on another occasion, they gain the confidence that they can successfully apply what they already know to this new or challenging situation.

[SLIDE – Applying the Concept of Same but Different to Match the Picture]

[Image of a student carrying school books with an arrow pointing to the same student dressed in swimwear.]

[Speaker 2:] For example, if a student knows how to scan a picture to know what they need to be prepared for school or class, they can use the same process to scan a different picture to ensure they are prepared for swim team practice. Having students make explicit connections between similar situations or settings may help them use the strategy independently in a shorter timeframe – the connections may serve the same purpose as modelled or shared implementation, allowing for guided or independent use in the new setting.

[SLIDE – Strategy 2: Block and Box]

[Text on slide:

Big Picture/Gestalt with arrow pointing to the word Features/Categories, with arrow pointing to the word Details.]

[Speaker 1:] The “match the picture” strategy encourages the growth of independence, planning, and problem-solving by teaching students to see the big picture of a space or task. However, it’s important for students to move quickly from seeing the whole, to identifying the features or categories of a space before focusing on the smaller details. Hidden within the smaller parts of the space, is meaning that gives us clues for how to organize, plan, set goals, act, and self-monitor. Extracting the meaning hidden in a space leads to a greater ability to initiate and adapt to changing, dynamic situations. The “Block and Box” strategy focuses on identifying the features of the big picture and supports the development of both cognitive and physical organization skills.

[SLIDE – Block and Box for Space and Body]

[Image of a purple box representing Gestalt in the upper left hand corner of the screen; purple box representing Gestalt to the right of the screen with smaller blue boxes inside with the labels ‘Parts/Features/Categories’; purple box representing Gestalt to the bottom left hand corner the screen with smaller blue boxes inside with the labels ‘Parts/Features/Categories and with smaller white boxes inside the blue boxes with the labels ‘Details’ in each white box.]

[Speaker 1:] Block and Box can be used as a tool for organization of space, materials and body. It simply involves superimposing an organizer over a picture of a main topic or big picture in order to identify the features and details in that picture. For example, if this purple box represents the gestalt, or big picture, of a space, that space can be further broken down into smaller components or features. You could think



of these features as categories, or parts of the whole. Every space and task can be broken down into smaller features. Features of a space are composed of details, as represented here. The details of a space are the items you might include in a checklist.

[SLIDE – Block and Box: Physical Space]

[Image of a messy kitchen]

[Speaker 1:] But what does this look like in the real world? Looking at space from a big picture point of view helps students to process what is in that space more quickly. Do you have a space that needs to be tidied but the task is overwhelming for your student? Sometimes it can be hard to know how to even start to clean up a messy space. Block and Box can help to break down a space into smaller, more manageable parts.

[SLIDE – Block and Box: Physical Space]

[Image of a clean kitchen with boxes within the picture around the spaces: coffee nook, fridge, cooking appliances, floors. There is also a checklist in the picture of the clean kitchen with the following points: wipe counters and cupboard doors; wipe down fridge; clean stove; wipe down inside/outside of microwave; sweep floors; put away garbage.]

Text on slide:

1. Take a picture of the finished product.
2. Block off the categories/features (“box it”).
3. Look at the details. Add a checklist?]

[Speaker 1:] First, take a picture of the finished product. This is the future picture, the “how will it look when it’s done” picture. Remember that we want to use “visual language...”. Next, block off -- or identify -- the categories or features within the space by drawing a box around each area – in this case, each of the areas that need attention. Blocking off each category helps to zoom in on the parts of the whole space. Finally, look at the details within each feature or category to focus in on the tasks that need to be completed. Adding a checklist to a picture helps to break down a space into smaller features and details. The student can refer to the checklist to ensure that all elements have been completed. By actively involving the student in creating the checklist you can help to optimize understanding and facilitate moving toward independence in task completion.

[SLIDE – Block and Box: Physical Space]

[Image of a messy washroom to the left of the screen. Image of a clean washroom to the right of the screen with boxes within the picture around the spaces: Vanity Area: Daily Care products with the check boxes: counter; sink; mirror; toothbrushes and toothpaste; Toilet, Tub and Shower with the check boxes: toilet; shower and tub. And finally there is a box labelled ‘Floor’ with the following check box: sweep and mop.]



[Speaker 1:] Here is another example using the same process applied to a different space. Encourage future picture thinking by breaking the space down from whole...to parts or features...to details.

[SLIDE]

[Image of a student's cubby to the left of the screen, in the center of the screen there is the same picture of the cubby but with boxes highlighting parts in the cubby: Lunch Kit, Spare Clothes, Clothes and Footwear; Materials. There is an image to the right of the screen that is a close up of the Lunch Kit and Spare Clothes parts of the cubby with the following checklist: Lunch box; Thermos; Plastic Bag; Spare Pants; Underwear; Socks; Shirt.

Image at the bottom of the screen of a sequential process with the word 'modelled' with an arrow pointing to the word 'shared'.]

[Speaker 1:] Here, Block and Box is applied to a kindergarten student's cubby... Whole...to parts...to details... When we use Block and Box, we are applying the concept of chunking – it gives the student a structure to focus on one category, or manageable piece, at a time. Always keep in mind the importance of transferring responsibility and ownership from adult to child. In the early years, the adult may model what block and box looks like in a student's space but share in the process of maintaining the organization.

[SLIDE]

[Image of the inside of a student's desk with boxes highlighting parts inside the desk: Books, Notes, Writing Tools, Tool.

Image at the bottom of the screen of a sequential process with the word 'shared' with an arrow pointing to the word 'guided'.]

[Speaker 1:] The student must understand what features need to be included in the organization of the space, and then understand which individual details must be included, and which ones can be omitted. What is necessary? What is not necessary? As kids get older, responsibility and ownership continues to transfer by sharing and guiding the development and implementation of the organizational strategy. This can be achieved by involving the student in the sorting of the items to determine the categories in the space. For example, crayons, markers, pencils and erasers might go in the "Writing Tools" category. Textbooks, reference books and novels belong in the "books" category. And notebooks, agendas, and binders (if they have them), belong in the "notes" category. If scissors, tape, rulers and other miscellaneous school supplies are to be kept in the student's desk, a category called "Tools" could be added as well.

[SLIDE]

[Image of a locker with boxes highlighting parts inside the locker: Lunch, Materials, Footwear, Personal.



Image at the bottom of the screen of a sequential process with the word 'guided' with an arrow pointing to the word 'independent'.]

[Speaker 1:] As kids get older, the storage system for the items they need on a day-to-day basis evolves from a desk to a locker. However, keeping a vertical locker organized is a different task from keeping a horizontal desk organized. To help a student move from a locker that looks like this... to one that looks like this... they need to be prompted to develop a system for organizing their locker so that it will work for them. If someone does the organization for them, they will not be able to maintain it because they haven't been involved in the development of the plan. Once the plan has been developed, the space can be blocked into categories that are functional for the student such as...lunch, materials, footwear and personal. As students get older, the materials they need for school will vary, so the home that they need to create to store these materials will also vary. For example, in high school, the features or categories of items may remain the same from one semester to the next, but the details, or individual items within each feature will change. For example, the student won't need some of the items in the materials box such as books for specific courses, but may need materials for gym instead. The student's locker can be organized in such a way as to reflect the features that will remain features while allowing for the changing details. It's the visual picture of the blocked space in the locker that will allow the student to figure out what details (or individual items) must be included in which feature.

[SLIDE – Block and Box: Body]

[Image of a student with boxes highlighting different parts of her body: Body, Materials, Clothes.]

[Speaker 1:] Block and Box is also a valuable strategy to help students organize their body and how they should look if they are ready for a task or activity. For example, for students who require more visual structure and support for organization for getting ready for school, block and box can be used to visually categorize materials and clothing required, as shown here. While memorizing a list of items required places a heavy demand on memory, teach students instead to organize items into categories such as materials, body and clothes.

[SLIDE – Block and Box and How to Use it: Supporting Transfer of Strategy Use]

[Image of a student with boxes highlighting different parts of her body: Body, Materials, Clothes.]

Text on slide:

Purpose of Block and Box:

The boxes reduce the number of things I have to hold in my memory from 10 items to 3 categories.

How To Use Block and Box:

1. The Purple Box shows me ready – The Big Picture.
2. Each Blue Box shows a group of things I need.
3. I can look at the BODY Box and think about what I should look like when I'm ready for school.
4. I can look at the MATERIALS Box and remember all the items (books and tech) that go into the MATERIALS category.



5. I do this again for the CLOTHES Box.]

[Speaker 1:] Having students do a consolidation activity, such as creating an annotated graphic that explains the purpose of Block and Box and how they use it will help them to develop an explicit awareness of how the strategy helps them, and possibly increase motivation to use it again in the future. This student has described the purpose of Block and Box by saying “The boxes reduce the number of things I have to hold in my memory from 10 items to 3 categories,” and has gone on to describe how looking at each box or category draws her attention to the things she needs to have within that category.

[SLIDE – Applying the Concept Same but Different to Block and Box]

[Image of a student with boxes highlighting different parts of her body: Body, Materials, Clothes to the left of the screen with an arrow pointing to the same student dressed in swim wear highlighting different parts of her body: Body, Materials, Clothes with the checklist: bathing suit; bathing cap; goggles; towel; deodorant; shampoo; conditioner; underwear; t-shirt; shoes; socks.]

[Speaker 1:] While teaching this strategy, it’s important to emphasize how it can be transferred and generalized to other activities, settings, or challenging situations. Teach students to think about these two questions: “What will I look like?” and “How is THIS task the same but different from THAT task?” Then ask students to think about, “How can the process of blocking and boxing categories be used in the new situation? Will the categories be the same? Or will they be different?” Which is easier? Remembering 3 categories of items? Or memorizing a list of 11 items?

[SLIDE – Benefits of Match the Picture and Block and Box Strategies]

[Image of forest as well as a sequential process with the word ‘Big Picture/Gestalt’ with an arrow pointing to the word ‘Features/Categories’ with an arrow pointing to the word ‘Details’.]

[Speaker 1:] Why should you use match the picture and block and box? What are the benefits? Have you ever heard the expression, “They can’t see the forest for the trees?” Some of our students pay attention to minor details, but fail to see how these details fit into a bigger picture. But it’s the ability to see the big picture – or, the forest! – that allows us to process information quickly and to see how all the parts fit together as a whole. The match the picture and block and box strategies teach students to view space and tasks from a big picture or gestalt point of view before focusing on categories and details. When we teach this whole-to-part thinking, or top-down processing, we are helping to improve their speed of processing, and reduce the load on working memory.

[SLIDE – The Take-Home Message]

[Text on slide:

How is THIS task the SAME BUT DIFFERENT from THAT task?



“Match the Picture” and “Block and Box” are versatile strategies that can help students to organize their thinking and plan tasks in order to improve organization and independence in novel settings and challenging situations.]

[Speaker 1:] So the take-home message in this video might be that Match the Picture and Block and Box are versatile strategies that can be used at home, at school and in the community. Teaching students with learning disabilities to see the big picture and to group by feature and category helps them to organize their thinking, plan out tasks and improve independence. And always encouraging them to think, “How is this the same, but different?” facilitates transfer and generalization to novel settings, people or situations.

[SLIDE]

[Image of Ottawa-Carleton District School board logo, LD@school logo and TA@l'école logo

Text on slide:

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