

# What Are OTMP Skills and Why Are They Important?

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Sam arrives home with only one assignment written in his planner, and it is missing the page numbers. “I remember what I have to do, Mom,” he says. But when Sam’s teacher collects homework the next day, Sam realizes he forgot an important assignment.

Ellie’s teacher takes a look inside her backpack and finds last week’s missing homework crumpled in the bottom. “I don’t know how it got there,” she says. Marco stays after school the day before a big project is due to beg his teacher for an extension. “Please!” he says, after listing all the reasons he didn’t have time to complete it. “I just need one more day!”

Sam, Ellie, and Marco are all struggling with a skill set known as OTMP: organization, time management, and planning skills. While many may see these students as lazy, scatterbrained, or unmotivated, research shows that they are in fact no different than students who have trouble with math or reading. Like understanding fractions or decoding words, OTMP skills are a set of learned competencies that come more easily to some students than others. Many students require direct instruction and support to master them.

Recent research conducted by New York University Langone Medical Center’s Child Study Center shows that the skills involved in OTMP competency fall into four broad categories:

- **Assignment management:** systematically and accurately recording and tracking assignments
- **Materials management:** using an efficient system to store and organize papers and other necessary school supplies
- **Time management:** knowing how to use time tracking instruments, such as clocks and calendars, accurately understanding the amount of time needed to complete tasks and managing tasks so that they are all completed on time without rushing
- **Planning:** breaking projects into steps, charting the steps to an end goal and scheduling time to complete tasks

Developing an adequate base in these skills is a prerequisite for academic success. No matter how bright or talented a student, if she does not know what her homework is, can not find it to turn it in, or fails to complete it because she runs out of time, she can not earn grades that reflect her potential. In fact, research shows that difficulties

with OTMP skills are one of the primary causes of underachievement among gifted students. For students who are already struggling academically, OTMP problems add an extra barrier to success that these students can ill-afford.

For students who fail to establish a good set of OTMP skills early on, the effects can reverberate throughout their lives. As students grow older and the demands for self-management increase, deficits in OTMP functioning can become more and more problematic. Studies show that students lacking in OTMP skills are more likely to do poorly in college and have increased odds of college dropout. Surveys of employers find that organizational skills are among the most important factors they consider when hiring, making OTMP competency a critical component of employability.

The good news is that the research also shows that OTMP skills are teachable. Teachers can help build students' skills by offering students the chance to learn and practice specific strategies for meeting OTMP demands, such as using a planner to track assignments and mapping out an afternoon schedule for homework completion. Students who receive quality instruction in organization, time management, and planning show significant skill improvement, and these skill gains translate into improved academic functioning, fewer problems with homework, and reduced family conflict around OTMP issues.\* Investing the time to impart students with a solid foundation in OTMP skills gives students a critical set of tools that will help them succeed in school, navigate the transition to college, and become productive members of the workforce. By offering OTMP instruction, schools can arm students with essential competencies that will serve them throughout their lives.

\*This statement is based on research findings on the Organizational Skills Training (OST) Program, a comprehensive OTMP training program that included individual clinic-based meetings with students as well as parent and teacher components. The InCommand program is based on the instructional elements of the OST Program.