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ORGANIZATION – A GENERAL DESCRIPTION, COMMON PROBLEMS, AND SMART STRATEGIES

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The two main types of organization are simultaneous and successive. Simultaneous organization is the process our brains use to organize information visually in space. Having a good "sense of direction" and being able to "see" how puzzle pieces fit together are two examples of simultaneous organization. Successive organization is the process our brains use to organize information in time and sequence. Concepts of time, dates, and order are examples of successive skills (yesterday, tomorrow; before, after; months of the year; word order in sentences).

While many of us may have a preference for one type of organization or the other, being good at one does not necessarily mean being bad at the other. Some people may be excellent at both types of organization, while others may be terrible at both!

NOTE: The following sections have been written for the viewpoint of the child. Our recommendation is that parents read and discuss them with their children, and teachers read and discuss them with their students. Please keep in mind that children and adolescents love to hear an adult (parent and/or teacher) describing his/her profile, both strengths and weaknesses. So talking about your own organizational strengths and challenges would be a great way to open communication for your children/your students to talk about theirs.

Organization Vocabulary Terms

Here are a few vocabulary words that will appear in the following sections. It is not important to "memorize" the definitions; rather, it is important to grasp their general meaning so you will not stumble over them when you see them.

- Analyze** To separate into parts or basic principles so as to determine the nature of the whole; examine methodically. For example, labeling the parts of a sentence (subject, verb, adjective, adverb, prepositional phrase, direct object, predicate nominative, etc.), breaking an assignment down into steps, dissecting a frog in biology class, breaking a long word into syllables, etc.
- Order** Every part or piece in the right place. For example, an organized room, a completed jigsaw puzzle, a story told in the order in which the events happened, etc.
- Successive** The order in which things happen; one thing coming after another in exact order; organization of information in steps or in a series. For example, the steps in tying a bow, the steps in a recipe, the events in history arranged in the order in which they happened, the steps in a chemistry experiment, etc.
- Simultaneous** The arrangement of something in space. For example, how the furniture is arranged in your bedroom or how the buildings are arranged in a city.
- Spatial ordering** A process where information is presented in a spatial arrangement. For example, maps, graphs, charts.
- Synthesize** To combine items or parts to form a new, complex product. For example, combining the nose, eyes, mouth, forehead, chin, and cheeks to form a face.
- Temporal** Organization of information in time; related to or limited to time. For example, the daily schedule at school, when a TV program comes on, how long you can hold your breath, etc.
- Visual** Received through the sense of sight. For example, the color of the sunset, a movie, a book you read.
- Visual learner** A person who learns best by seeing things. A visual learner can remember things she sees better than things she hears.
- Visual-spatial** Visual information that allows us to see the positions of things in space, such as where the baseball is heading that was just thrown, how shapes are alike or different, such as a square and a cube, and the size of objects.

SIMULTANEOUS ORGANIZATION

Quick Facts About Simultaneous Organization

- Simultaneous organization is the process your brain uses to organize information visually in space.
- Having a good sense of direction and the ability to "see" how puzzle pieces fit together are two simultaneous skills.
- Mind mapping is usually better than outlining for people with good simultaneous skills.
- Good simultaneous skills help people get organized.
- Simultaneous information allows the learner to see the "whole picture." Sometimes this is called "top down" processing. The learner needs to see the big picture first, and then the details fall into place.
- Most of the simultaneous functions take place in the right half of the brain.
- People who are good with simultaneous skills are sometimes called "right-brained."
- People with good simultaneous skills often benefit from making charts, graphs and diagrams of information they need to learn.

What Are Simultaneous Skills?

Simultaneous skills help us find out about things in the space around us (size, shape, location). Simultaneous organization is the way your brain organizes information it receives through your eyes. When you see something, you see it in space in relation to other things.

When a friend tosses a pencil to you, your simultaneous skills help you judge where that pencil is and where your hands should go to catch it. Faces, graphs and maps are things presented in a spatial manner. For example, a face is made up of several different features such as the eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks, chin, and forehead.

When we look at someone, we see all of the facial features (eyes, nose, mouth, chin, cheeks, forehead) at one time as one unit: the face. This is how you know that you are looking at a face and not a ball or globe. The order in which you process the individual features is not important because you see them together as one. All the various parts are important details that add to the "whole picture." Once we perceive the whole face, we may then focus on the particular features in order to remember them better.

Simultaneous skills such as these take place mostly on the right side of the brain. People who are good with these skills are sometimes called "right brained." This is the side of the brain that deals with figures in space. The right side of the brain has been called the synthesizer because it takes pieces of information and puts them into a whole.

Information about the position of things in space, the shape and size of objects and how they differ from each other is processed by your brain in a visual image or picture. Simultaneous information is processed and understood as a whole all at the same time or simultaneously. This is what it means to picture things in your mind. Your mind makes a "snapshot" of everything together as a whole.

You understand and remember information from maps, graphs, diagrams and charts in the same way. You process them simultaneously. Because you can usually see a face or other object for more than a few seconds, how fast your mind processes information is not usually important.

Academic activities that require Simultaneous skills call on the learner to see the whole picture first, then zero in on specific details. For example, a chart or graph presents a lot of information at one time. We see the entire chart and get an idea of what it represents before we look closely at the pieces of information being given.

People who are good with simultaneous organization can easily understand complicated things that they see. They are described as visual learners and learn things better by seeing them than by being told about them. Visual learners easily picture things in their minds and use this talent to help them learn. They might learn how to solve math problems by seeing a problem that is correctly solved than by having someone explain to them how to solve the problem. They are able to take what they read and make a diagram or chart of it to help them comprehend the material.

People with strong simultaneous skills can see how puzzle pieces fit together or how a detailed drawing is made of circles and rectangles. They are often good at building things and understanding how things work. They may be good at fixing things and drawing because they can "see" the finished product in their minds. They see things in three dimensions. They may become artists, designers, mechanics, engineers or architects when they are grown.

What Are Some Problems with Simultaneous Organization?

Not everyone a good visual learner. People with simultaneous organizational problems may have trouble knowing left from right. They may be clumsy because they do not have a good sense of where they are in relation to the objects around them. They may trip over things or bump into things. They can also have trouble finding their way around school or a shopping mall. They have a poor sense of direction and easily get lost. They may have trouble understanding directions that use words like north, south, east, west, behind, in front of or next to.

In school, students with weak simultaneous skills might have trouble arranging their work on paper, like lining up columns of numbers to do math problems. They may also have trouble understanding spatial concepts in math such as fractions, triangles and perimeter. They often have problems with geometry. It is hard for students with Simultaneous problems to understand maps, charts, graphs and diagrams. They are often not good at geography.

Students with weak Simultaneous recall may make mistakes in spelling that sound right but do not look like the word that they want to spell. They can't picture or recall how the word "looked". For example, they might write brite for bright. If they have strong language skills, reading and writing may not be as hard for them. People who have problems with spatial ordering can also have trouble fixing things that break, playing computer and video games, and remembering where they put their things.

Because no two people are exactly alike, one person might not have all of these problems but have one or more of them. For example, a person may be a great athlete - he understands where his body is in relation to space (like Shaquille O'Neal) - but be terrible at reading charts and graphs, drawing or remembering how a word looks when it is spelled right. Or a person may be a great artist, but he may get "turned around" and lost at the shopping mall.

What Can I Do to Increase My Simultaneous Skills?

1. First, it is important to understand how well you can accomplish simultaneous activities. Are they easy or difficult for you? If you are good with them, use them to help you learn. If you are not so good with them, plan how you will approach tasks that require these skills.
2. Get help from teachers. When you can explain how you need help, they are usually willing to help. You may need a verbal explanation to help you understand pictures and diagrams. Ask the teacher to give shorter or more specific directions. Sit close to the teacher so you can listen better. Get help from your parents. Sometimes they had the same problems you have, and they have developed great strategies for dealing with them.
3. Written explanations/descriptions of maps, charts, graphs and/or diagrams may help you understand what they mean.
4. Students who get "lost" around the school should try to identify specific landmarks that will help them remember where things are. For example, perhaps your math class is just down the hall from the principal's office or under the clock.
5. Assign a specific place for your things if locating your things is a problem. Arrange your books by class period on the shelf in your locker. You can color-code books and notebooks to make them easy to identify. For example, you might wrap your math book with a green book cover and get a green notebook for that class. English could be wrapped in blue, science in red, and so on. You may want help from a teacher or your parents to decide where these places are.
6. If spelling is a problem, study the words using as many of your senses as possible. You can say the word aloud as you write it on a chalkboard or dry erase board. Practice spelling words in rhythm while bouncing a basketball, jumping rope, or walking. Close your eyes and "see" the word with your mind's eye while you write it in the air with your finger.
7. Organize your assignments by using an agenda or assignment notebook. Label three sections as "Work to be done", "Finished work", and "Work to save." Color-code your assignments as you color-coded your books in suggestion number five on the preceding page. Then you can find your assignments in one of only three places.
8. Use graph paper for lining up math problems. Or turn your regular notebook paper sideways and put your numbers in the columns that the paper makes.
9. Use your strengths to get around weaknesses. Art may help you visualize and understand or express yourself better. When taking notes, add a picture to help you understand the idea.
10. Think about each task before you attempt to do it. What materials will you need? What steps are involved? How do you want it to look when you are finished?
11. When taking notes or organizing ideas, use mind maps rather than formal outlines.
12. Try using a software program like *Inspiration* that organizes concepts and information in visual maps.

SUCCESSIVE ORGANIZATION

Quick Facts About Successive Organization

- Successive organization is the process your brain uses to organize information in time and sequence.
- People with temporal problems are often late getting everywhere they need to go.
- People with successive problems often seem disorganized.
- People with strong successive skills often need to have all the details before they form the "big picture." This is called "bottom up" processing.
- Concepts of time, dates, and order are sequencing skills (yesterday, tomorrow; before, after; months of the year; word order in sentences).
- A six year old is usually able to repeat four or five random numbers in order. A fourteen year old can usually repeat six or seven in order.
- The ability to sequence helps us remember and follow complex directions.
- Most of the successive functions take place in the left half of the brain.
- People who have good successive skills are sometimes called "Left- Brained."

"What Is Successive Organization?"

Sequence allows us to understand and remember a series of things in order. For example, the teacher tells you to put all English books in your desk, take out a pencil and sheet of paper, put your name on the paper, and number the paper from 1 to 25. It is important that every step in these simple directions be completed. If you don't put your books away, the teacher may think you are going to cheat. If you don't put your name on the paper, he will not know that it is yours. Some of these steps must also be done in a specific order. After all, it is impossible to put your name on the paper if you don't first take out the paper!

Temporal information helps us understand things as they occur in time. For example, the order of what happens first, second, or third in a story is usually important to our understanding the story.

In the last section, we talked about simultaneous organization, which is one of the two main ways your brain organizes information. Simultaneous ordering organizes information simultaneously as a whole. In this section, we will talk about successive organization. This is the way your brain organizes the pieces of information that come through your senses in a time and sequence order. Successive ordering is particularly important for making sense of what people tell you to do and organizing your time and activities.

Successive organization is the way we process information that comes to us over time, one piece at a time, or in a series or sequence. This type of processing takes place chiefly in the left side of your brain. The left side of the brain handles verbal information and has been called the analyzer because it looks at each piece of information as it comes.

Timing is important for successive ordering because the position of each piece of information in relation to the others is critical. Each piece of information builds on the one that comes before it. Therefore, the correct order or sequence of the pieces is needed to understand the meaning of all of the information. For example, when your teacher gives you directions on how to do an algebra problem, you have to do the steps in the right order to get

the right answer. Also when someone is speaking to you, you must keep the order of the words in mind to understand what she is saying.

With successive ordering, how fast you understand the information is important because it is there only for a short time. For example, when your elementary teacher was explaining the steps in long division, and you missed that you must subtract after you multiply, you probably did not solve the problem correctly.

Successive ordering is important to help you understand how time works. It helps you manage your time well. Knowing the right order in which to do things helps you do them faster. Having good Successive skills helps you get organized and stay on time. You can do your homework much faster if you have a plan of what to do first, second and third. Otherwise, it may take you forever to do your homework and make you late for baseball practice. Sequential ordering is also important for coordinating motor movements in sports. For example, in baseball you must hold your bat up, keep your eye on the ball, and then swing the bat at exactly the right time and place. This can be pretty hard to do!

Sequential skills are needed in many areas of schoolwork. In kindergarten, you learned the alphabet, which is a series of letters in a specific order. Later you learned to use the alphabet to arrange words or ideas in order, such as using the dictionary or listing words in order. In your early school years you learned words that help organize events in order, such as *yesterday*, *tomorrow*, *later*, *before*, *after*, and *next*. You learned to tell time, and that helped you to organize the day. Knowing days of the week and months of the year helps you sequence longer time periods into chunks that you can remember.

In elementary school, you found out that stories have a beginning, middle and end that happen in a specific order. Sequential skills are used to memorize addition and multiplication facts. In social studies and history, you learn about the order of events that affected the world in past times. Writing stories also calls on sequencing skills as you put ideas into a logical order so you can relate a message to others. Most sports require successive skills - a series of steps taken in order to achieve certain results such as a basket, touchdown, catch, or throw.

Normally, sequencing skills improve as we grow older. Young children can only remember one or two directions at a time. "*Close the door and sit down*" can be followed quite easily by most young children. As a teen or young adult, we can usually remember five or six simple directions given at one time. A student with normal sequencing skills should have little trouble following this set of directions: "*Choose a group leader who will come up to my desk and collect the materials needed for this experiment. After you have finished the experiment, write a one-paragraph group report to be turned in tomorrow. If there is time remaining when you finish, you may work on the questions at the end of chapter 4.*"

With good sequencing skills and a little practice, it is possible for adults to remember and follow directions that appear to be quite complex and impossible for younger minds. But not all people are good with sequential skills. Those who have difficulty with these skills can experience a lot of problems as they move through their school years and into the adult world.

People with good sequential skills are usually well organized. They arrive at class on time with the proper books and materials. They can follow directions easily and give themselves enough time to get things done. These people often use calendars or planning books to help them remember important events or assignments. Strong sequential skills make it easier to learn math facts and solve problems in algebra and geometry. These skills can also be used to overcome some language problems. For example, if students do not understand the teacher's explanation of how to find the area of a rectangle, they may call on their sequential skills by reading the step-by-step explanation that is provided in the textbook.

Sequential skills make it easier to remember and follow complex directions. Sequencing also makes it easier to understand and remember large chunks of information at a time. Having good sequential skills is useful in sports as well. Most sports are based on actions that require a series of steps being done in a specific order. Athletes who can remember those steps and perform the actions become better players than those who cannot.

What Are Some Successive Problems?

Problems with sequencing can show up in the early years of school. Children who have a hard time learning to tie their shoelaces may have motor sequencing problems. Learning to use the alphabet without singing the song may be tricky. They may have difficulty learning to tell time and sometimes mix up words such as yesterday and tomorrow or before and after. Memorizing things that come in order like the days of the week or months of the year may also present problems.

Without a good understanding of time, it is difficult to follow a schedule or finish work when it is due. It is not unusual for a person with poor sequencing skills to be late for class, miss appointments, and forget when long term assignments are due.

Addition and multiplication facts in math are based on sequencing skills. There are patterns to the numbers that occur in order, each answer building on the one before it, that happen in a sequence. Without good sequencing skills it is difficult to recognize and remember the math facts. Later in math it may be difficult to follow the steps for solving an algebraic equation or a geometry proof.

As we get older, sequencing problems make it hard to arrange ideas or information in a logical order for papers and reports. The message just seems to get lost when the story has no particular order and bounces from one topic to another.

People who have problems with Successive ordering may have had trouble learning how to tell time. They can also get mixed up about time-related words, such as before, after, yesterday and tomorrow. They are often late for class or appointments. When several directions are given at one time, they may become confused and end up doing only part of what needs to be done. They may seem to have no concept of time and do not manage their time well. They often do not meet deadlines, and they may forget dates and times.

It takes students with successive problems longer than most students to get their homework done because they do not know where to begin, what to study first or how long to study for a test. They are pretty unorganized, and usually put off doing projects until the last minute because they do not know how long it will take, or how to break the project down into smaller tasks so they can do a little at a time.

Writing assignments can be very hard for these students because they have trouble organizing their thoughts in a logical sequence. They can also have trouble remembering the correct order of letters when they spell words.

Students with sequencing problems can also get confused about the order of their classes and the combination to their locker at the beginning of a new school year.

How Can I Improve My Successive Skills?

1. If you have trouble remembering sequences of information but are good at visual--spatial organization, make visual aids like charts and/or diagrams to help you learn things such as the different wars through history.
2. If you have trouble managing your time, you may need extra time to take tests and complete your assignments. You will probably need help from your parents or teacher to plan and complete long-term projects such as a science project. You may need to turn in parts of the project in stages to keep you on track.
3. Keeping a calendar in your room will help you know when projects and assignments are due. Write the names and due dates of all reports or projects on the calendar so that you can see how much time you have to complete the work. Mark off each day that passes and do not let yourself get behind.
4. If you have trouble understanding directions that have a number of steps, ask your parents and teachers to break the directions down into simpler, shorter steps. A comic book or "cookbook" showing the order of the steps will help you complete the task more easily.
5. For writing assignments, it should be very helpful for you to make an outline before you begin writing. Key words, such as who, what, where, when and why, can help you organize your outline and paper.
6. If you have trouble making traditional outlines, you may want to make a mind map of what you are trying to write about or learn. To make a mind map, make a visual or diagram of pictures and words of what you want to say. The map connects pieces of information that are related to each other and helps you connect your ideas in a logical way.
7. If you have trouble remembering the steps in a math process, such as long division, it may help you to write the steps on a Post-It note and move the Post-It down the page as you solve the problem. Also, using the first letter of each word to make up a saying that you can remember, such as Dirty Myrna Smells Bad, for the steps in long division (divide, multiply, subtract and bring down) will help you remember the steps in a process.
8. If you have trouble completing your homework in a reasonable amount of time, it might help you to estimate how long it will take you to do it before you start. After you finish, write down how long it took to do your homework and compare the actual time to your estimate. This can help in two ways. First, you may learn that you are/are not very good at estimating time. Second, you may figure out how long different tasks really take you.
9. If you have trouble learning spelling words, you should study in ways that use more than one of your senses to learn how to spell a word. Using your eyes, ears and touch at the same time can help you learn more easily. For example, you could write the spelling word using a colored marker while you say the word out loud. You could then close your eyes and picture what the word looks like. Then you would write the word and check the spelling. Making a picture of the word in your mind can also help you learn to spell it.
10. Use a plan book or agenda to remember important dates, events, and assignments. Keep a copy of your daily schedule and your locker combination taped inside your plan book so they are easy to find when you need them.
11. When writing papers or reports, write one piece of information on each note card. When all the information is on cards, categorize the cards into similar groups and write a paragraph for each group.
12. When reading novels, summarize each chapter on a Post-it note. At the end of the book, review the Post-its for main ideas and sequencing events in the story.
13. Ask the teacher for help. Some ways your teacher might help you include giving you a homework sheet at the beginning of week that helps keep you prepared and on track, breaking directions into smaller, simpler chunks, and giving you extra time for completing tests or assignments if you are not good with monitoring your time.
14. Ask your parents for help. Parents can often help you come up with some great strategies.
15. Use tools to get around weaknesses. A calculator will make multiplication faster so you can solve more difficult problems. A tape recorder can be used to review directions, steps, and sequenced materials.



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