

# Teacher Tip



**Executive Function Deficits**

**Focused Interventions for  
Initiation Deficits**

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As teachers, we know students avoid work for a wide variety of reasons. However, sometimes there are students who — not of their own volition — simply *can't* get started. When this occurs, it may be due to problems associated with one of their executive functions — initiation.

Sometimes referred to as task initiation, initiation is a metacognitive executive skill that involves a student's ability to initiate and independently start a task or activity. In addition, this skill allows students to independently generate ideas, responses, or problem-solving strategies.

Students who have problems initiating tasks frequently experience trouble attending to their plan and focusing on what needs to be done so that the task is followed through to completion.



For students with this initiation deficit, it is not enough for them to simply “will” themselves to focus and concentrate. Rather, they need to be taught how to turn that spotlight on their attention so that they can remain focused and motivated, from beginning to end.

Out of all the content areas, writing is perhaps the hardest to initiate, especially if a student has executive function deficits. The sheer number of steps involved can make it seem like an insurmountable task for students with initiation deficits.

To combat this, teachers can support students during the writing process by using a prewriting strategy that is tied to personal goal-setting. Before asking students to even think of what to write about or to organize their thoughts, consider asking them a series of questions that are designed to focus their attention on the upcoming task. Doing so gives them the “jump start” they so desperately need.

# Primary Grade Prewriting Strategy to Help Students with Initiation Deficits Get Started

## THINK ABOUT

- What do I need to do?

*Example:* Write a sentence about volcanoes.

- When do I need to finish?

*Example:* By the end of ELA today.

- What should I do first?

*Example:* Take out a pencil and begin filling in my graphic organizer.

- Start writing.

# Upper Grade Prewriting Strategy to Help Students with Initiation Deficits Get Started

## THINK ABOUT

- What is the goal of this writing assignment?
- How long do I have to complete it?
- What are the steps that I need to follow?
- What do I need to do first?
- Start writing.



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For more tips and strategies for helping students with seven specific executive function deficits, check out PDI's graduate-level, professional development course **Focused Interventions to Improve Executive Function Skills** for teachers of grades K-12.

PDI offers over 100 graduate-level, professional development courses. Visit our website at [www.webteaching.com](http://www.webteaching.com) for details.