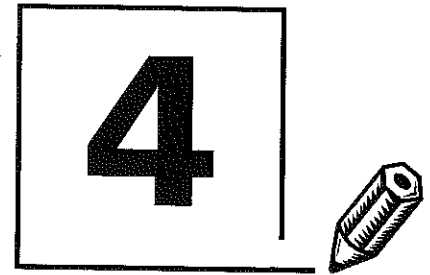


Organization and Time Management Strategies



Phyllis Coyne

ORGANIZATION AND SEQUENCING DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH AUTISM

Most young people have significant difficulties with organization, regardless of their intelligence or age. The purpose of this chapter is (1) to provide insight into the particular organizational challenges of autism and (2) to provide practical strategies to assist the young person with autism in organizing and developing their own self-management systems.

Organization may be complicated for all of us, but it is particularly challenging for young people with autism. Organization requires an understanding of what needs to be done and a plan for implementation. The interrelated and abstract nature of these requirements presents major barriers for young people with autism. They often become immobilized or unable to begin a task when there are organizational demands (Mesibov, 1990-91). Their difficulties with organization often interfere with their ability to use their other capabilities to complete a task. This is often mistakenly interpreted by people unfamiliar with autism as noncompliance or other behavior problems.

Jeremy provides an example of how this might appear. Jeremy is a 17-year-old student with autism who sat drawing a dot in the middle of the paper and talked to himself when he was instructed to create a word and picture map of what he was doing in his life now and what he wanted to do in five years. The instruc-

tor gave clear, step-by-step instructions and provided samples of completed maps, but Jeremy continued making the dot and talking to himself. He was able to start and complete the map only after the instructor made four dots on the page. This provided a structure so that he could start the map by drawing a rectangular box. Although writing and drawing a map of one's life is cognitively a difficult task for anyone, Jeremy's completion of his map indicated that he had the capacity to do the map. His problems were in organizing it and getting started.

Most young people with autism have difficulty doing organizational tasks without specific training. For instance, some bright students with autism may not be able to remember to bring their notebooks to class. Frequently these young people are carried organizationally by their parents and teachers throughout their school years. They are often unaware that others are taking care of an important aspect of life for them by providing organizational structure and time management. They may not know the importance of organization and may falsely believe that they are as ready for independent adult living as anyone else.

Figure 4.1 shows a young man with outstanding academic achievement in high school. He and his family have aspirations for him to attend an Ivy League School. However, he is dependent on his mother's organization of his assignments and materials to complete school work. His father has to remind him what and

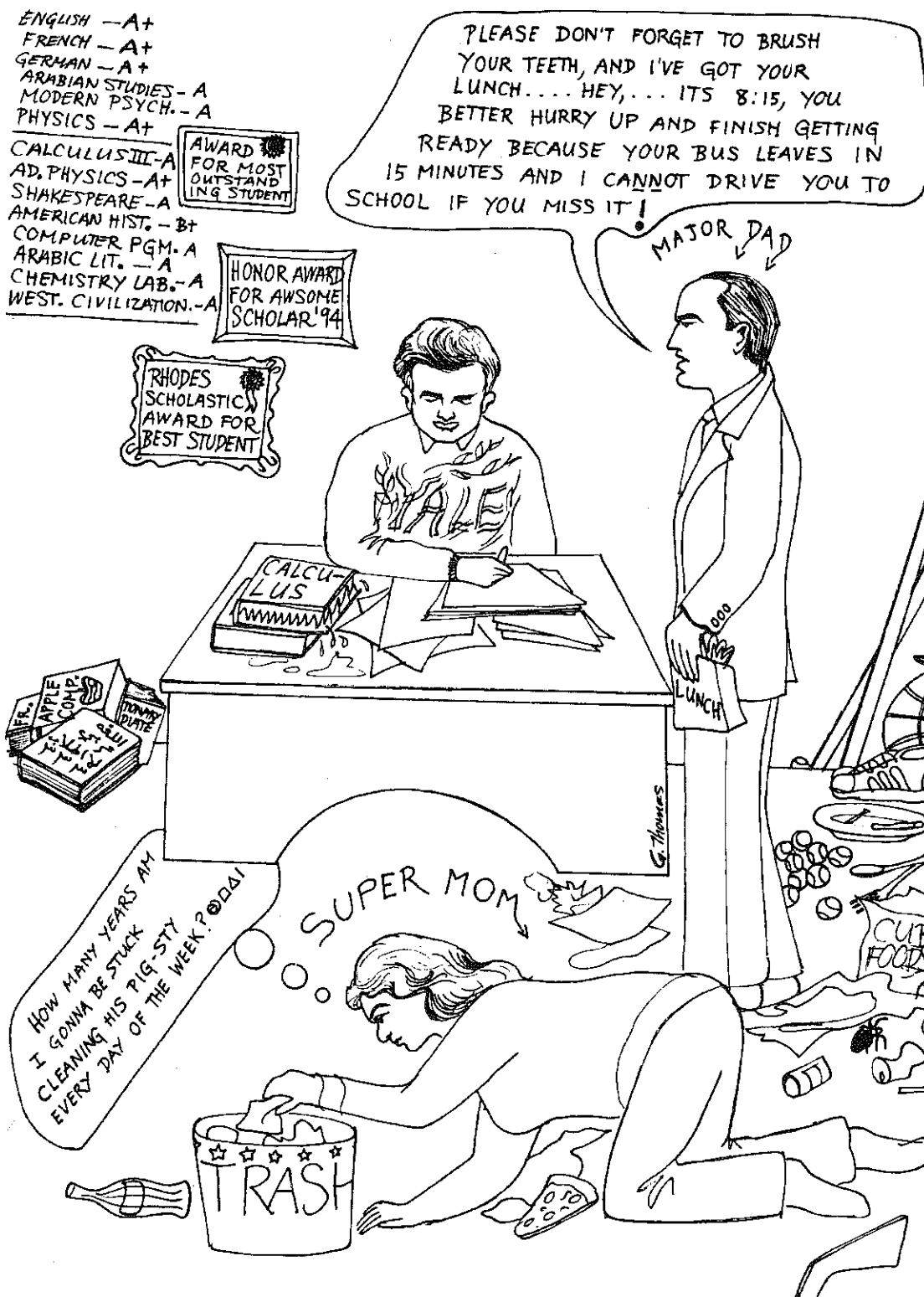


FIGURE 4.1. Many persons with autism are dependent on others for organization.

when things need to be done. Without this assistance, this young man would not be able to maintain a schedule, let alone be successful in school. Unfortunately, the focus on academics is not enough to prepare him to meet his and his family's goal of attending Harvard. To be successful in any college setting, he must be able to organize and manage his life more independently.

This chapter introduces strategies for increased self-management of time, tasks, and materials in life. However, it is important for the reader to first understand the underlying reasons for these difficulties. The cognitive characteristics of autism in the areas of information processing, understanding time, sequencing, and compulsiveness significantly impact the organization and time management of persons with autism.

Information Processing

Organization is very conceptual. One must be able to see the whole picture and break it down into its component parts to organize. The manner in which young people with autism process information significantly affects their ability to organize. Although people without autism generally recognize the importance and benefits of being personally organized, many young people with autism lack an understanding of the value and importance of organization.

Organization requires an assignment of importance or priorities to activities. Young persons with autism have difficulty both knowing what to focus on and sorting out what is relevant (Frith, 1989). They may believe that any written information on paper, such as a handout, an assignment, a completed report, a note to parents, the lunch menu, or a school newspaper, has equal importance and put it all down in a haphazard manner. This often results in their having the messiest desks or lockers in the school. It sometimes, also, results in completed reports not being turned in to the teacher or notes not going home to parents.

Young people with autism often fail to realize that information or materials can be rearranged to produce an organized structure. If they are asked to put their papers in a notebook, they might insert them "as is" from their disorganized pile or only put in the papers that are of specific interest to them. They may collect every document related to an area of interest but have no basis for choosing what is important or ordering them.

These organizational difficulties lead to problems beyond high school. They can significantly affect job performance and household tasks. Chapter 1 cites Carpenter's statement that her organizational difficulty led to the loss of a job where she was well liked.

Understanding Time

Difficulty in understanding time also causes organization to be difficult for these young people. One young person with autism summed this up by saying, "I don't know what time is, but I know it's important." Even basic concepts such as "a minute," "later," and "wait" are abstract and difficult for them to understand. This problem understanding time concepts negatively impacts their ability to do temporal sequencing. They have difficulty with time management because it requires an analysis to predict, prepare, or anticipate the duration of an activity.

Sequencing

Difficulty in sequencing is another obstacle to organization for young people with autism. Sometimes they do not understand the importance of sequences. They have difficulty perceiving organization in a set of materials such as notes, texts, and assignments. This results in not only trouble dealing with multiple-step tasks such as assignments in an organized fashion, but also trouble dealing even with an isolated task in an organized fashion. Their concrete focus on specific details and poor

ability to see relationships between them often causes difficulty remembering the precise order of tasks that have been outlined. Their distractibility adds to their difficulty keeping the order of events together in the proper sequence (Grandin, 1992).

A student with autism may complete homework and then not turn it in, because it is not perceived as part of the sequence. Another student may sit tapping her pencil, because she does not know where to start writing on a math paper. This same student may only need a red x in the upper-left-hand corner to start and complete the paper.

Routines and Rituals

Some young people with autism may compensate for their disorganization by developing rigid routines and rituals to make life more ordered. Sometimes they become obsessive or compulsive with self-management and appear to be superorganized. This may result in their having the neatest desks or lockers in the school. These young people often insist on sameness and become very upset if someone disturbs the order they have created (Moreno, 1991).

Unfortunately, these organizational attempts are seldom functional. For instance, one student always had to complete the paper he was working on before going to the next activity. This was a problem in classes that had assignments that took several classes to complete. Before beginning a task, another student had to sharpen all his pencils regardless of their sharpness. This was a problem when there was no pencil sharpener in the room or when his pencils were already short.

STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM ORGANIZE AND SELF-MANAGE

Many times the young person with autism relies on others to organize information and

the environment. To function more effectively and independently, these young people need to be taught concrete ways to organize their own tasks, time, and materials. This section describes several strategies to improve organizational and time management skills of young people with autism. To be able to more independently manage time, tasks, and materials, young persons with autism need to

- understand the meaning and importance of organization,
- have an awareness of what organizational components are necessary for them, and
- have an individualized organization system that they can help create and self-manage.

Understanding the Purpose and Meaning of Organization

Young people with autism need a concrete explanation of the purpose and meaning of organization. This should include an explanation of how and why people organize their time and tasks in life. Since young people with autism often miss information that appears to be common knowledge, it is important to consider details that they may have missed. Using the word "sometimes" or providing multiple examples of a concept will help to avoid rigid thinking and misinterpretation.

Two concrete methods to present this type of information are (1) through the semantic organizer approach introduced in Chapter 3 and (2) through the social story format presented in detail in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.2 is an example of a semantic organizer about organization for a student who is not organizing to get her assignments done. This format is also sometimes referred to as clustering, webbing, or mapping. It is effective because it organizes and presents information in a visual/spatial mode that highlights relationships, sequences, and outcomes (Pefiesson & Denner, 1989). It additionally provides a permanent frame of reference. These organizers need to be individualized for the individual's

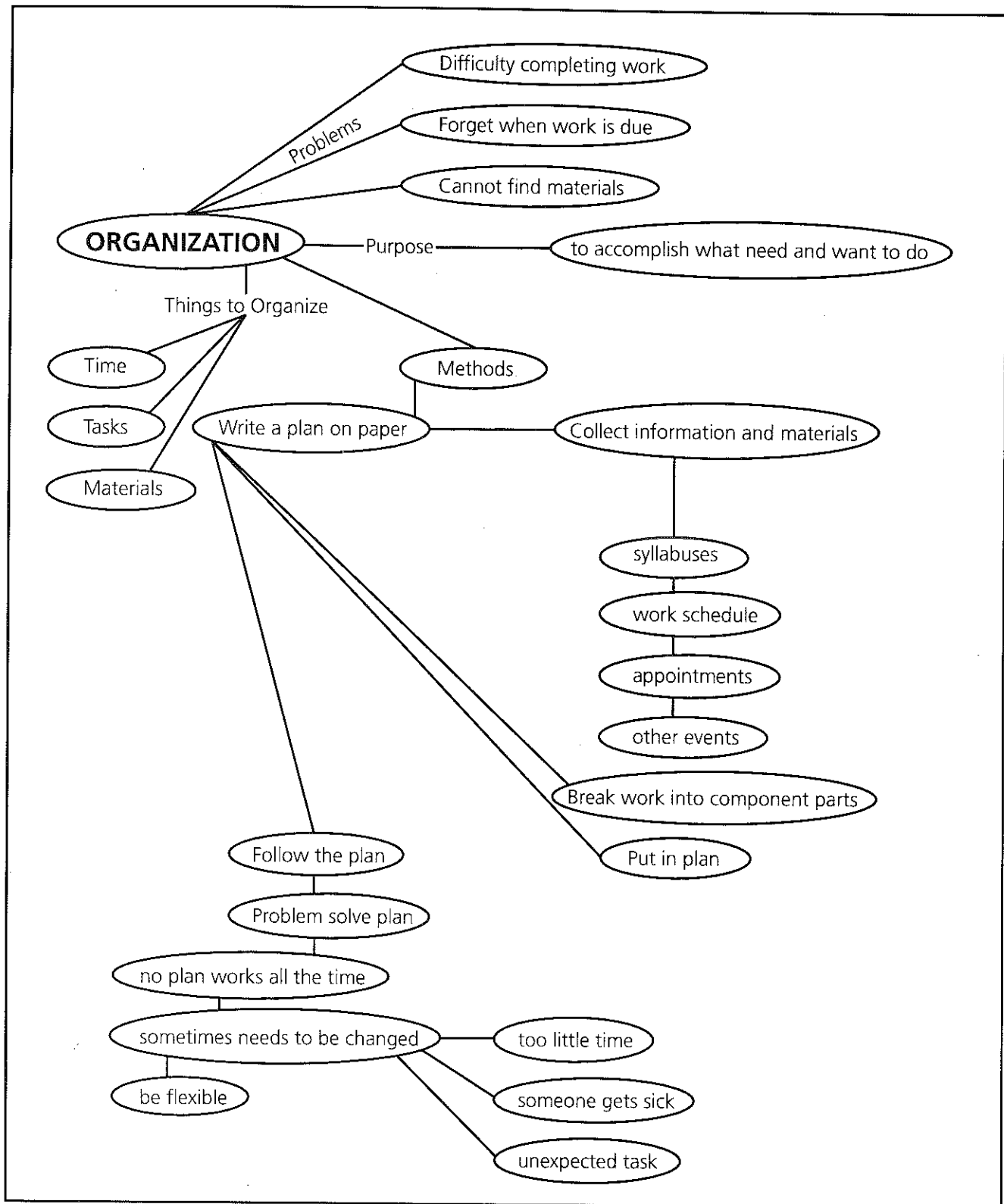


FIGURE 4.2. Semantic organizer about organization.

schemata or background knowledge and, whenever possible, created along with the young person with autism.

Awareness of Own Organizational Needs

Young people with autism are very compliant and will try to follow an organization system once it is taught to them. However, to begin to make decisions about how to organize and self-manage, all young people need an awareness of themselves and what is necessary or useful for them to accomplish a task. For instance, organization to learn and study at school and at home requires an awareness of factors that will enhance studying (Fry, 1991). Because many young people with autism lack insight regarding how they function and what their environmental and organizational needs are, they need careful assistance to gain awareness.

Figure 4.3 offers a sample format to help the young person with autism consider components of an ideal learning environment. Since answering open-ended questions is often difficult for the young person with autism, it utilizes a forced-choice approach.

Many young people with autism need help and further information to answer the types of questions listed in Figure 4.3. Both the characteristics of autism and the uniqueness of the individual need to be considered in providing guidance for self-awareness. Following are some key points to consider when providing assistance in answering these questions.

Type of Information. Generally, individuals with autism learn best from visual information. As they become more aware, some higher functioning individuals with autism express that they become overwhelmed and shut down when they get too much auditory information and not enough visual information. Since many individuals also have visual/spatial strengths, having hands-on experience may enhance learning.

Lecture Activity. Young people with autism generally do best when supported with visual infor-

mation. Since organizing note taking may be difficult, a note-taking guide or structured outline of the topic may be necessary. Sometimes teachers provide this structure; however, young persons with autism will be more independent if they recognize the need for this structure and are able to request it.

Classroom Placement. Consideration needs to be given to visual and auditory sensitivities, distractions, and optimum proximity of instructors, peers, or materials. Often young people with autism do best sitting in front and to the side, away from windows and doors. This offers minimum distraction and maximum closeness to a relevant source of information, the teacher.

Study Location. Young people with autism benefit from having a designated place to do assignments. In general, this should be in as quiet a location as is possible.

Study Time. It is important to set a regular time for studying and organizing. Young people with autism tend to have times of day when they are most alert and productive. Effectiveness often decreases in late afternoon and early evening.

Study Helpers. Although most young people with autism study best alone, it is also important for them to recognize sources of assistance while studying.

Sensory Input. Most young people with autism benefit the most from being in a quiet room. However, sometimes listening to acoustic music through headphones is helpful to block out auditory distractions and increase concentration.

Work Space. Young people with autism need a designated area for materials.

Breaks. Realistic scheduling of activities requires breaks. Young persons with autism need to know how long they can study before taking a break. This will be different for preferred and nonpreferred activities, as well as easy and

My Ideal Learning Environment		
How I receive information best:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Orally	<input type="checkbox"/> Visually	<input type="checkbox"/> Manually
In the classroom, I should:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Concentrate on taking notes	<input type="checkbox"/> Concentrate on listening	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ask for structured outline of topic		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sit in front	<input type="checkbox"/> Sit in back	<input type="checkbox"/> Sit near window or door
Where I study best:		
<input type="checkbox"/> At home	<input type="checkbox"/> In the library	<input type="checkbox"/> In study hall
<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhere else: _____		
<input type="checkbox"/> At desk	<input type="checkbox"/> At table	<input type="checkbox"/> At study carrel
Other: _____		
When I study best:		
<input type="checkbox"/> In the morning	<input type="checkbox"/> In the evening	<input type="checkbox"/> In the afternoon
<input type="checkbox"/> Before dinner	<input type="checkbox"/> After dinner	
How I study best:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Alone	<input type="checkbox"/> With a friend	<input type="checkbox"/> With parent or teacher help
<input type="checkbox"/> With music	<input type="checkbox"/> In front of TV	<input type="checkbox"/> In a quiet room
How I find work materials best:		
<input type="checkbox"/> In desk	<input type="checkbox"/> In box by desk	<input type="checkbox"/> On bookshelf
Other: _____		
When I need to take a break:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Every 30 minutes or so	<input type="checkbox"/> Every hour	<input type="checkbox"/> Every 2 hours
<input type="checkbox"/> Every _____ hours		

FIGURE 4.3. Format for learning environment form.

hard activities. For instance, a person may be able to do a difficult task for less than half an hour, but be able to do an easy task for two hours.

Individualized Organization System

Organizational demands increase for everyone in adolescence and adulthood. The young person with autism needs an individualized organization system to visually represent tasks that need to be accomplished and the time frame in which they need to be accomplished. Visual aids provide ongoing organization and structure as well as a built-in way for teachers, parents, and the young person with autism to recognize when a particular sequence of assignments has been accomplished. Three basic components are necessary for the organization system:

- individualized visual organizers for management of tasks,
- a visually coded work area for organization of materials and completion of tasks, and
- other visual supports to complete tasks.

Individualized Visual Organizers. Individualized visual organizers are valuable tools in time management for young persons with autism. Several methods that can be used with young persons with autism to create time management plans are (1) assignment folders, (2) planning charts, (3) time management calendar systems, and (4) monthly planning calendars.

Assignment Folders. An assignment folder offers an example of a system that keeps necessary papers and instructions in one place and can be incorporated into the type of looseleaf notebook used by many high school students (Figure 4.4). It can be made out of a standard two-pocket folder or two-pocket portfolio. The front pocket is labeled "To Be Completed" and holds papers to be completed. The back pocket is labeled "Completed Work" and holds completed assignments until they are turned in. An

assignment sheet is in the middle of the folder (Shields & Heron, 1989).

Many high school programs utilize assignment sheets for young people to track assignments. In addition, many of the commercially available student day planners and academic planners include assignment sheets. Although it is important for young people with autism to look as much like other students as possible, sometimes the existing system does not provide enough specific information or organization for them. They need the following information on each assignment: when due, what to do, materials needed, where to do it, and where to turn it in. In many cases the existing forms can be adapted for these young people (Figure 4.5).

Upon receiving an assignment the young person with autism fills in the next available line on the assignment sheet, listing the specifics of the assignment, materials needed, due date, place to do it, and where to turn it in. The assignment sheet can also serve as a guide to the information that the young person needs to get before beginning the assignment and a prompt to request missing information.

Initially, a teacher or assigned peer needs to monitor and offer assistance to ensure that all assignments are listed accurately, all papers are in the "To Be Completed" pocket, and all materials for completion are marked. Each night at a designated time, peers could make phone calls to their chosen "buddies" to ensure that their assignment sheets are accurate and that the assignments have been completed.

This system may need to be further individualized by using a color-coding system. For instance, a young person who forgets to gather materials may need to have the materials list highlighted in yellow. "Sticky notes" can be used to mark materials that are needed to complete the assignment.

Planning Charts. Young people with autism have trouble dealing with tasks that must be completed over time in an organized manner. Planning charts can provide the overall scope and sequence for projects that require completion over a long period of time and serve as a

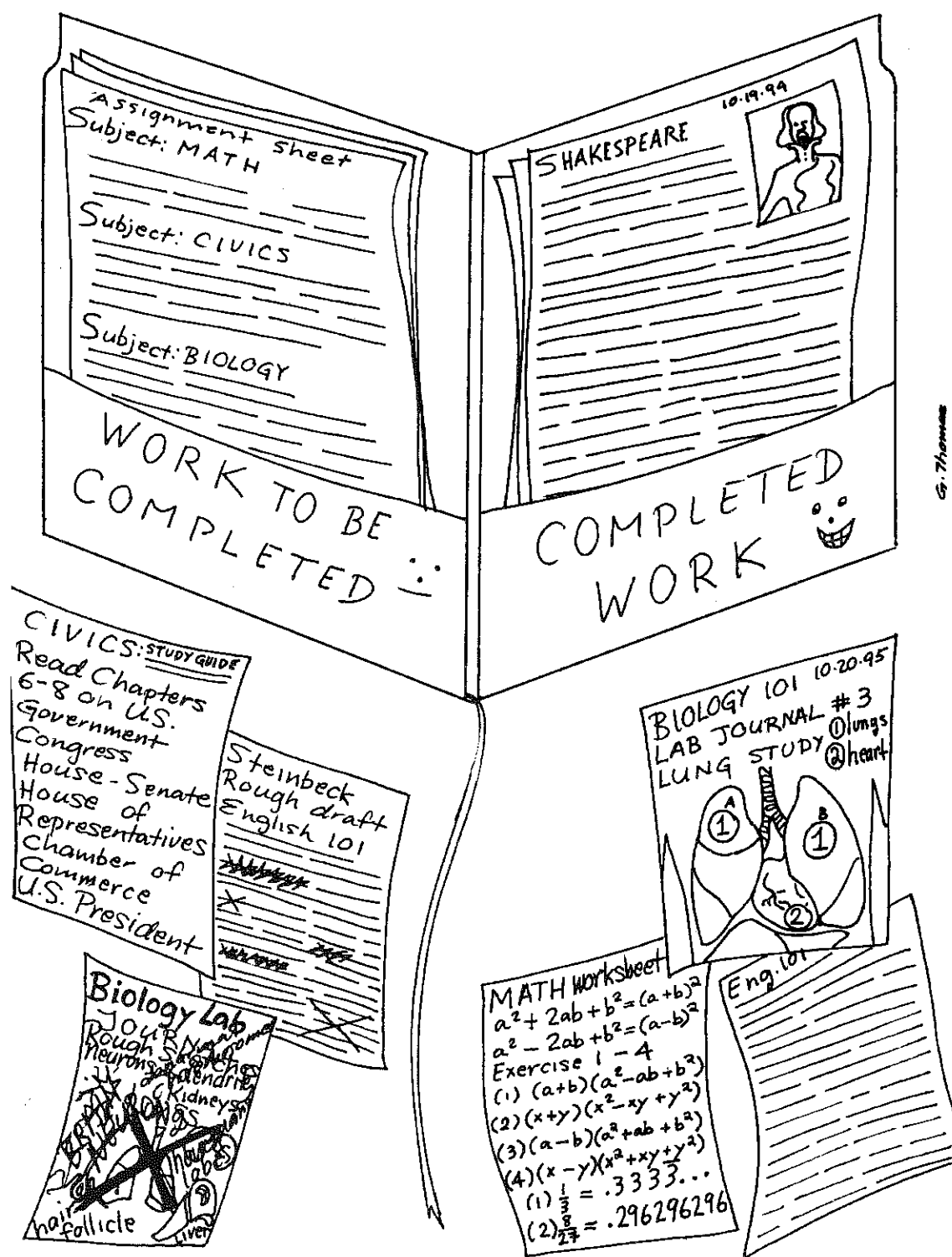


FIGURE 4.4. Assignment folder.

Subject: <u>Math</u> Assignment: <u>Chapter 4 & 5</u> 	Due Date: <u>3/28</u> Materials Needed: <u>Math Book</u> <u>Worksheet</u> <u>Pencil</u> <u>Eraser</u>
Type: <input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input type="checkbox"/> Test/Quiz Prep <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Worksheet <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Work Location: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Study hall <input type="checkbox"/> Library <input type="checkbox"/> Class <input type="checkbox"/> Home <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Place to Put Completed Assignment: <u>Folder on Mrs. Ali's desk</u>	
Subject: <u>Civics</u> Assignment: <u>Test Chapter 6 - 8</u> 	Due Date: <u>4/1</u> Materials Needed: <u>Civics Book</u> <u>Notes</u> <u>Highlighter</u>
Type: <input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Test/Quiz Prep <input type="checkbox"/> Worksheet <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Work Location: <input type="checkbox"/> Study hall <input type="checkbox"/> Library <input type="checkbox"/> Class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Home <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Place to Put Completed Assignment: <u>Wire basket on Mr. Smith's desk</u>	
Subject: <u>Biology</u> Assignment: <u>Lab Journal</u> 	Due Date: <u>4/5</u> Materials Needed: <u>Journal</u> <u>Pencil</u> <u>Calculator</u> <u>Worksheets</u>
Type: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input type="checkbox"/> Test/Quiz Prep <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Worksheet <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Place to Put Completed Assignment: <u>Box by door</u>	

FIGURE 4.5. Sample assignment sheet.

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practical means for the young person with autism to determine the amount of time needed for each task. Tasks are broken down into smaller, more manageable segments, and the expected amount of time to complete each seg-

ment is written down. The chart can be left on the wall at home and completed steps in the process can be checked off as a self-monitoring system. Ready-made planning charts or calendars can be purchased from art supply, sta-

tionery, office supply, or book stores. An example of a usable format is shown in Figure 4.6.

The planning chart needs to be individualized for the types and amounts of information needed by the young persons with autism. In some cases, they may need more detailed information than in the sample planning chart.

Since young people with autism have problems identifying and sequencing parts, they need a structure and guidance to help them with the process of developing and using a planning chart. The semantic organizer approach presented in this chapter and the social story format described in Chapter 5 offer effective strategies for explaining how to break tasks into their component parts. A fill-in-the-blank guide or a checklist for the process can also be useful. Pairing the young person with a peer who is good at listing the steps in an assignment and at estimating how long each should take can be helpful in conjunction with one or more of the strategies above.

Time Management Calendar Systems. As our lives become more complex, most of us use a written schedule to organize ourselves and to accomplish tasks. Well-designed schedules can organize information regarding what to do, when to do it, how much to do, how long to do it, and what will happen next. Organized people make lists and tailor a personal organizer to fit their unique situations. The need for such time management and organization usually increases during the high school and adult years.

A variety of useful time management calendar systems are commercially available to combine school, work, and personal commitments in one place. The Trapper Keeper Binder and other binder organizers provide systems to keep schedules, assignments, notes, papers, and personal information together in one place.

Most of the commercially available personal organizers or time management calendar systems advocate the following steps:

	Month/Week	Project: Civics Paper	Review/Exam Schedule
Month 1	Week 1	Finalize topic (1 hr.)	Review civics notes (3 hr.)
	Week 2	Initial library research (2 hr.) General outline (1 hr.)	
	Week 3	Detailed library research (3 hr.) Detailed outline (1 hr.)	Review biology notes (4 hr.)
	Week 4	First draft (4 hr.)	Review math notes (4 hr.)
Month 2	Week 1	Second draft, spellcheck, proof (6 hr.) Independent proof (1 hr.)	Review civics notes (3 hr.)
	Week 2	Type final draft, proof (3 hr.)	Review biology notes (4 hr.)
	Week 3	Turn in project	Review math notes (4 hr.)

FIGURE 4.6. Sample planning chart.

- Write in school schedule, work schedule, appointments, and events.
- Create a "To Do List" of what you want to accomplish during the week.
- Prioritize in order of importance.
- Plan each day by moving items to be done to available spaces in the daily boxes.

Key guidelines in assigning time blocks for tasks are:

- Allow enough time.
- Devote most productive study times to most difficult tasks.
- Schedule study time in reasonable blocks of time with short leisure breaks in between.

Although these commercially available personal organizers or time management calendar systems can be used with young people with autism, they need to be adapted for individual needs. In some cases, additional steps or categories may be necessary. Visual coding can be used to call attention to specific categories. For instance, appointment times can be underlined so that they stand out. A highlighter can be used to make important items stand out. Color coding can further help organize. "Red" assignments might signal tasks that have an immediate deadline, whereas "green" assignments might not be due for a week. Different colors can indicate various items—e.g., red = work, blue = personal tasks, green = appointments, and orange = tasks.

Prioritizing tasks is one area in which young persons with autism are likely to need guidance. They have difficulty identifying what is relevant or most important. They might assign more importance to brushing the dog than studying for a final exam. They also may feel compelled to fit everything on their "To Do List" on their weekly calendar. They need to be taught that everything listed does not need to be accomplished that week. They also need a means to prioritize tasks in order of importance to ensure that assignments of the most importance get done. One question to ask is, "If I want to pass

all my courses, what do I need to get done this week?"

A code system can be added to the "To Do List" to prioritize tasks. High priority or "must do" tasks can be marked with an *H* for high, tasks that are not urgent or can wait until next week can be marked with an *L* for low, and all other items can be marked with an *M* for medium. Tasks can be transferred to the daily or weekly schedule beginning with the ones identified as *H*. Nonurgent *L* tasks sometimes clutter up the schedule and can be put on a separate note page.

Figure 4.7 is one example of a time management calendar system. This weekly calendar shows school tasks to be completed as well as jobs to be performed inside or outside the home. "Materials" and "Comments" sections allow students to note any special assistance that might be needed. To allow persons with autism to manage their calendars more independently, watches are available that can be set to remind them of appointments via a little print-out display (e.g., "cookies for party").

Initially, young persons with autism are apt to need parents and teachers to help them plan the calendar and to support following the plan. The more that these young people are physically and cognitively involved in making some choices for their system, such as colors or symbols to organize the components, the more likely they are to understand and use the system. For any organization system to work, it has to be used and updated frequently. These young people will probably need some type of check-up system and varying degrees of ongoing support for the continued use of the personal organizer. It is important to establish a time with the young person with autism to sit down and plan for the following week. For instance, planning time on Sunday night could become part of the routine and be part of the weekly schedule. In adult life, some may need a personal manager to oversee issues and assist with planning.

Monthly Planning Calendars. Young people with autism may become anxious if there is no place to record something that needs to be done.

Long-term projects, appointments, and events can be recorded in a monthly calendar. All the necessary information and materials for making a quality plan need to be collected. These include syllabuses, final exam schedule, work schedule, weekly class schedule, work schedule, family celebrations, trips, and other personal commitments (e.g., doctor appointments, club meetings, and extracurricular activities). All the information, including the steps of projects from the planning chart and the approximate time each is expected to take, go on the monthly calendar. Color coding could highlight which steps on the calendar go with which projects. Other important projects are added, and the calendar is revised as needed.

Organization of Personal Space and Materials

Young persons with autism need to monitor personal behavior by making certain that materials are organized in a way that ensures that all assignments will be completed and turned in on time. The young person with the messiest desk at school obviously needs frequent help with organization. However, all young people with autism can benefit from:

- a designated work area,
- labeled areas for materials,
- a visually coded organization system that utilizes containers,

- checklists or reminder cards that are posted in the work area, and
- an established work routine.

Containers for the organization system may include notebooks, folders, boxes, a card system, envelopes, baggies, jars, and/or paper clips. Checklists can help with the maintainance of organization. For some individuals a simple reminder card, rather than a checklist posted in the work area, may be enough (Figure 4.8).

It is important to establish a work routine so that the young person does not need to stop in order to plan where to begin and how to proceed.

Paper Management

Young people with autism have difficulty handling the infinite variety of written information. Part of the difficulty comes from not discriminating between valuable and valueless papers. For instance, some young people with autism save all the mail and think that they need to respond to everything, including solicitations. These young people can be taught that there are three things that can be done with a piece of paper:

- throw it away,
- act on it, or
- file it for future reference.

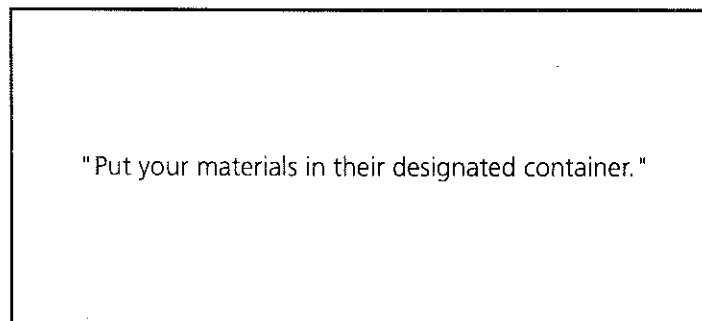


FIGURE 4.8. Reminder card.

A system to sort papers can be useful. This could include:

- a wastebasket;
- two file folders—one marked, “Things To Do” and the other marked, “To File”;
- a file drawer or stand-up desk organizer.

Some young people may prefer pretty baskets, boxes, or other containers instead of file folders. In general, folders are the most practical. Tasks in the “Things To Do” folder can be transferred to the monthly calendar or appropriate place on the personal organizer. Papers in the “To File” folder need to be filed. The following basic filing principles can be taught to the young person with autism and posted as a checklist:

- Examine each piece of paper.
- Establish its reason for being in a file.
- Make file with broad categories.
- Place each paper in the labeled file folder that matches its category.
- File every folder in strict alphabetical order by its heading.
- Avoid any subgrouping.

Other Supports

Young people with autism may need additional visual information to help them organize and complete tasks. Many need written or picture directions or sequence lists that highlight the series of events and proper order to follow. This includes what to do and when, where, and how to do it. Examples of this type of support are provided in Chapter 3. Some may need materials in a container with the task made intrinsically clear through visual directions, a template, or the finished product as a model. Others may need visual definers, such as a line to show where to begin or end a paper or a kitchen timer to signal the beginning or end of an activity.

Some may need reminder cards. For instance, a young person may need a picture of a pencil on the cover of a notebook to remember to bring it to class. Another young person may need a checklist to get materials for assignments to be completed at home (Figure 4.9).

To move successfully from math to art and then to history class, one high school student needed a written schedule in his notebook, a map of the school with the location of his classes highlighted, and an individual work folder with class assignments and directions for each class, as well as an individualized reminder sheet regarding when and how to get assistance. Figure 4.10 is an example of a direction sheet for him for one art class.

Self-Management

The young person with autism needs to monitor personal behavior by making certain that materials are organized in a way that ensures that all assignments will be completed and turned in on time. Initially, parents and staff may need to develop organizational aids for the young persons with autism and teach them to use them. In the beginning, weekly desk and locker checks are likely to be necessary. If the organization system is used across all classrooms, it is likely that organizational skills will develop more quickly as well as more efficiently. The changing of classrooms and teachers in high school provides opportunities for generalization. Although young people with autism who have been taught an individualized organization system generally need less assistance in organization and time management over time, many will continue to need some degree of support or a check-in system throughout adulthood.

From the onset, it is important to involve the individuals in making choices about the systems that they want. Since young persons with autism may have a limited view of how and what can be done, these choices need to be structured. One way is to provide a forced-choice written format as in Figure 4.11.

Check your assignment sheet.
Get materials for homework.
Ask for help if you cannot find materials.

FIGURE 4.9. Example of checklist.

Art Activity: SILK SCREEN PAINTING—ST. PATRICK DAY CARDS

Amount: 5 St. Patrick's Day cards

Needed Materials: 5 sheets of paper, screen with frame, roller, ink, drying rack.

Directions:

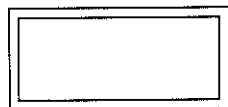
1. Get materials from silk screen shelf.
Choose color of paper.
Choose different color of ink.
Choose screen pattern with frame.
2. Put materials on your work area.



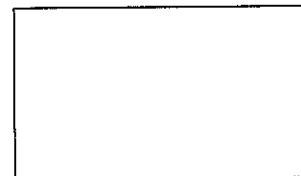
Paper



Ink & roller



Screen & frame

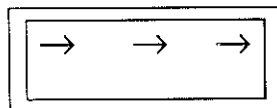
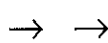


Rack

3. Insert paper in frame after teacher demonstration.
4. Roll roller in ink and then over screen from left to right.



Roller



Screen with frame

5. Remove paper from screen and put on drying rack.
6. Repeat #3–5 until you have 5 cards.
7. Wash roller, screen, and your hands.
8. Put materials back on silk screen shelf.
9. Get ready for next class. You can talk with friends now.

FIGURE 4.10. Direction sheet.

My Organization Plan

Materials or activity that need to be organized:

Possible solutions: Some ways that I could organize these materials or activity:

Materials

Organize in notebook and label sections ☐ yes ☐ no

Organize in box and label ☐ yes ☐ no

Sort by topic and color code ☐ yes ☐ no

Sort by topic and file ☐ yes ☐ no

Other _____

Other _____

Activity

Write down steps ☐ yes ☐ no

Make list with steps and target dates ☐ yes ☐ no

Put dates on calendar when to do steps ☐ yes ☐ no

Make a chart to monitor progress ☐ yes ☐ no

Other _____

Other _____

Action Plan: The way I will organize these materials or this activity is:

<i>Action Steps</i>	<i>Target Date</i>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Resources: People I can ask to assist me in organizing these materials or this activity:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Maintaining Organization: I will keep these materials organized by:

FIGURE 4.11. Sample organization plan.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Organization is particularly difficult for young people with autism because of their unusual ways of processing information, understanding time, sequencing, and developing rigid routines. As a result, young persons with autism often rely on others to organize information and their environment. To function more effectively and independently, these young people need to be taught concrete ways to organize their tasks, time, and materials. This includes both helping the student to understand the importance of organization and basic organizational concepts, as well as assistance in establishing a usable organization system that the student can self-manage.

This chapter introduced strategies to assist young people with autism in understanding the importance of organization in their lives, in becoming aware of their own organizational needs, and in using an individualized organization system for increased self-management of time, tasks, and materials in life. Visual aids are utilized throughout to provide ongoing organization and structure, as well as a built-in way for teachers, parents, and the young person with autism to recognize when a particular sequence of assignments has been accomplished. The three major components of the organization system include individualized visual organizers for management of tasks, a visually coded work area for organization of materials and completion of tasks, and other visual supports to complete tasks.

Several methods presented that can be used with the young person with autism to create a time management plan are (1) assignment folders, (2) planning charts, (3) time management

calendar systems, and (4) monthly calendars. It is vital that the young persons with autism be actively involved in the selection and development of their organizational structure so that they will like it and understand it. The more that these young people are physically and cognitively involved in making some choices for their system, such as colors or symbols to organize the components, the more likely they are to understand and use the system.

Although the goal is for young people with autism to organize and manage their time as independently as possible, they will probably need some type of check-up system and varying degrees of ongoing support for the continued use of the personal organizers.

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