# Technology and Organization

Organizational skills plague many students in --- and out – of special education. Students have problems keeping track of assignments and long-term projects; finding and storing papers; keeping their desks, lockers, and backpacks organized; making their work readable and organized; prioritizing the importance of competing tasks; and remembering the sequence of steps in order to complete a task. The problems we have helping our students deal with organizational tasks and strategies lie in the fact that we haven't comprehensively looked at the needs and skill sets associated with organization. When we can categorize the problems, we have a starting point that allows us to more accurately find specific tools that would help remediate and/or compensate for the difficulty.

In addition to identifying the kind of organization problem(s) a student has, I've also found that it is vital to determine how a student learns, remembers, thinks and organizes most easily and naturally. To do this, I first employ a technique that shows the student's primary, inborn learning style preference. This can be done through examination of eye movement through recall questions. Use the eye below to take notes on this process during the presentation:
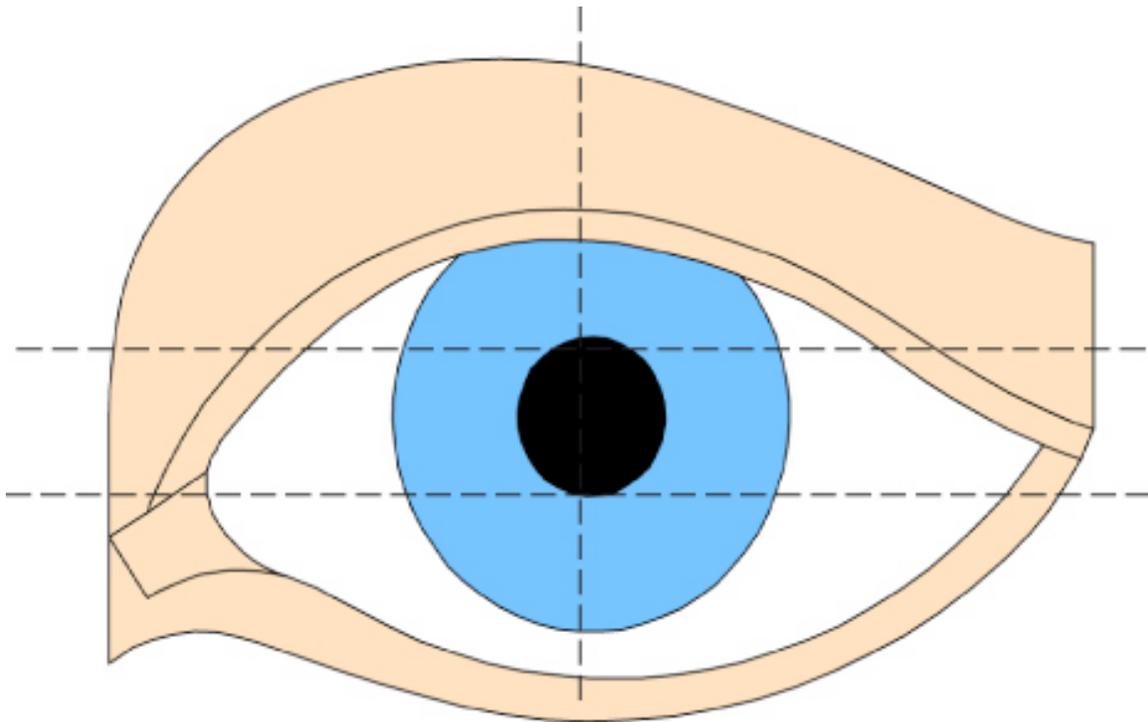
Recall questions relate to something you are asking the person to remember. As you ask the question, watch the person's eyes for the first movement. This direction (from your viewpoint) indicates the inborn or hard-wired learning style preference.

After determining the person's typical first eye movement direction when asked a recall question, you can use that information to help choose the best AT tools and teaching strategies for the individual student:

People who tend to look up first are **visual learner**s. Looking up and to the left (from the observer's perspective) indicates a visual learner who prefers symbols, pictures, maps, etc. Looking up and to the right indicates a visual learner who prefers to learn with words.

People who tend to look sideways are **auditory learners**. Looking straight right (from the observer's perspective) indicates an auditory learner who learns best by listening to words. Looking straight left is an indicator of an auditory symbolic learner who learns best when sound (music often) is tied to what he is learning. Many auditory symbolic learners prefer to listen to music while studying and do best on their tests with the same music.

People who tend to look down are **kinesthetic or tactile learners**. Looking down and to the right indicates that the person needs to work in 2 dimensions -- writing, painting or drawing to learn. Looking down and to the left is typical for students who need to actually move their bodies in order to learn.

About half of us are "hard-wired" to be visual learners. Auditory learners fall at about 20%; kinesthetic at 30%.

Thinking Styles

Once I have determined the inborn or primary learning style preference of the student, I also look for his or her preferences for thought organization (See the Global – Linear Thinker Inventory). I look for test results or teacher observations which suggest that the student is either much more comfortable with linear (outline and sequences) organization or with multivariate or global organization (webs and ideas first, then the links).

Global thinkers tend to miss details and do not put as much emphasis on doing all the steps in sequence. Visual, global thinkers often have a lot of "stuff" in view so that they can keep track of it.

Sequential or linear thinkers are great for details and often need uncluttered spaces. However, finding and labeling categories for sorting may be more difficult.

Based on over 20 years work in AT, I have found the following categories of organizational problems and the have tried the following low to high tech tools. Please note that for each tool suggested, I have used a color-coding system corresponding to the learning style and organization style I have found for the student. So my tool choices are determined not only by the organization problem but also by the learning style and thought organization preferences of the student.

Visual symbolic (maps, charts, pictures)
Visual text (words)
Auditory symbolic (music, especially in background)
Auditory text (listening to words)
Kinesthetic 2 dimensions (writing drawing, etc.)
Kinesthetic 3 dimensions (hands on learning or moving while learning)

Linear (outlines or sequential steps)
Multivariate (webs or ideas first and then the links)

- **Temporal** – Students have problems keeping track of time and estimating correctly the amount of time it will take to complete a task. Students with temporal organizational problems have trouble with keeping track of assignments, estimating the amount of time needed to complete a task, and taking care of long-term, multi-step assignments. They tend to transition poorly between activities, have problems estimating time needed or time left, and may have poor clock reading or elapsed time figuring skills. Temporal issues are a hallmark of ADD and ADHD.

    o **Tools To Try**
        ▪ Time Timer
        ▪ PocketMod (www.pocketmod.com)
        ▪ Mark-my-Time
        ▪ Visual Schedules
        ▪ Print Schedules
        ▪ Vibrating Light & Sound Timer
        ▪ PDAs with alarm features
        ▪ Calendar programs
            • Importance of choosing easy to use and non-cluttered calendar styles
            • Importance of multi view (day / week / month calendars)
        ▪ I Did My Homework; I Did My Chores

- **Spatial** – Students have problems organizing their physical spaces. Students with spatial organizational problems have trouble with organizing their notebooks, keeping their lockers, desks, and backpacks "neat", and/or organizing their papers. They tend to need more space when working yet even when the tool they need is in sight, they often can't "find" it. Be careful that the student really has a spatial problem and you

just aren't reacting to their "clutter" because of your needs. Spatial issues become a problem when the student can't find or loses important things.

- o **Tools To Try**
  - Binders and Folders - Subject Specific, Transparency, Window Notes
  - Use of color-coding (highlighters, highlighter tapes, book covers, etc.)
  - Color filter use for copying, color papers for writing
  - Reading Helpers or Reading Guides for lining up math columns
  - Transparency files
  - Hefty Tabs
  - Plan books, digital recorders and PDAs
  - Math Grids and Raised Line Papers
  - Filing systems (in notebooks)
  - Filing systems (for lockers)
  - Filing systems (at home or in resource) – Fold 'n Hold Cubes
  - Magnifier bars or pocket magnifiers for map searches
  - LightWedge Mini
  - Free Hand Desk Clamp

- **Categorical** – Students have problems knowing how to sort and categorize data with which they have to work. Students with categorical organizational problems seem never to know which folder work goes in, and they can't identify the different folders they actually need. They are overwhelmed when they have to take a group of "things" and find a method to sort and organize them. Interestingly, some of these students create very "unique" categories when you make them sort a "pile of stuff" into two to three different groupings.

  - o **Tools to Try**
    - Using Inspiration to create student designed categories
    - Teaching sorting techniques (Fold 'n Hold Cubes)
    - Using multiple colors of highlighters / highlighter tapes while reading to categorize different kinds of information
    - Color coding of file folders and book covers (Subject Specific Folders)
    - Pouches for filing items, pictures, etc.
    - Teaching computer filing hierarchies (messy desktops)
    - Note-taking with Inspiration templates (headings are topics / subtopics)
    - Magna Ribbons
    - Talking Photo Album
    - Colored Notebook Paper

- **Attentional** – Students have problems attending to tasks long enough to finish and/or organize them. Students with attention and organizational problems often hear just part of the instructions, get part of the assignment, or have only some of the tools they need in class. They frequently require recueing or repetition of tasks or they find themselves midstream in a task with no idea of where they were heading. Correcting

or remediating attention problems should be tackled first because of the effect attention has on all other categories.

- o **Tools To Try**
    - Using color / lights to increase attention
    - Non-verbal cueing (notes, picture cards, rubrics, etc.)
    - Background "noise" aids for auditory students
        - Hemi-Sync CDs
    - Having the dictionary right at hand (PageMark Dictionary)
    - Talking Calculators or Talking Dictionary Spell Checkers for multi-modal presentations of information
    - Highlighters or Highlighter Tape
    - Portabook / Page Up for changing orientation of text

- **Prioritization** – Students have problems knowing what is most important and vital. Students with prioritization organization problems don't know what they should study for the test, which papers should be kept and which thrown out, and which assignments they should start first. They have never developed a set of internal or even external questions to ask when deciding the importance of some task or thing. These students often also have categorical organizational problems.

    - o **Tools To Try**
        - "Anxiety" categorization (What makes you most nervous? – do it first)
        - Color coding from "hot/red" to "cool/blue"
        - Using orientation as a cue to importance (Page Up or Portabook)
        - Putting important info on a 3-in-one Easel (orientation change)
        - Arrow Tabs and Page Markers on pages in the book to denote most important information that must be learned.

- **Sequential –** Students have problems remembering and carrying out the steps in a task or process in the correct order. Students with sequential organization problems tend to skip steps and/or to lose track in the middle of the process and need to start at the beginning. They are often overwhelmed by tasks with too many steps, and they often exhibit memory problems.

    - o **Tools to Try**
        - To do lists (paper and PDAs)
        - Rubrics
        - Visual cue reminders
        - Inspiration check lists
        - Step Pad (Attainment)
        - Step by Step Communicator (Ablenet)
        - Talking Photo Album
        - Multi Channel Digital Recorder
        - Use of Templates for Repeated Tasks (e.g. lab reports)
        - Peg Word Schema "cards"