

Education researchers at Pearson are conducting a series of summaries around Pearson's Personal and Social Capabilities (PSC), the “soft” skills that are crucial for employability. This review focuses on teaching and assessing the skill of self-management in K-12 and college classrooms. What follows is a summary of the most significant findings.

Why Is Self-Management Important?

Self-management is identified as an important skill that can lead to success in college and in the workforce and that supports physical and psychological health. Research suggests that a focus on developing self-management skills is important for several reasons:

- Self-management predicts academic success, even after controlling for other relevant factors such as IQ, standardized test scores, and high school GPA.
- Employers identify several aspects of self-management as important for occupational success. These aspects include time and workload management, work ethic, and attention to detail.
- Higher levels of self-management in childhood are associated with lower rates of unemployment, higher income, and more financial security across the lifespan.
- Individuals with better self-management skills report better relationships, increased physical health, and less substance use.

What Does Good Self-Management Look Like?

Self-management is broadly defined as the ability to intentionally and strategically manage one's emotions, behavior, effort, and environment in the pursuit of goals. The terminology used to refer to self-management or its component skills (e.g., self-control, self-discipline, self-regulation, self-regulated learning, effortful control, and willpower) varies across disciplines. Through careful evaluation of discipline-specific terms and definitions across several different fields, Pearson has defined self-management as consisting of six core skills:

1. **Planning:** Sets realistic yet challenging goals and plans activities ahead of time; manages time according to plans.
2. **Organization:** Keeps work artifacts in an organized fashion to improve efficiency.
3. **Persistence:** Applies appropriate levels of effort to tasks, in spite of obstacles or difficulty.
4. **Progress monitoring:** Accurately tracks and assesses one's knowledge, skills, and progress; chooses appropriate strategies to evaluate and improve knowledge, skills, and progress.
5. **Control:** Effectively regulates behaviors and emotions, typically to support goal pursuit.
6. **Attention to detail:** Pays attention to detail and has careful and precise work habits.

How Can I Teach Students Self-Management?

Like any skill, self-management must be taught explicitly. For many self-management skills, instructors can provide direct instruction regarding useful strategies. For example, students can learn characteristics of effective goals, tools to support time management, and progress-monitoring strategies.

One particularly useful tool for supporting goal pursuit is the development of implementation intentions. Implementation intentions are “if-then plans” that help students identify good opportunities to act on their goals and then coordinate these opportunities with the specific behaviors that are effective in accomplishing goals.

Strategy instruction also supports effective emotional control. The most useful strategies are typically behavioral (e.g., to avoid situations that are likely to cause anger) and cognitive (e.g., to reframe one’s thinking about a situation to decrease anxiety), with mindfulness meditation also supporting emotional management and concentration.

How Should I Design Self-Management Activities for My Classroom?

Self-management skills help students organize their learning and behavior, and, as such, self-management activities should both supplement specific class assignments and function broadly across classes. For example, including a planning activity can be a useful addition to course assignments such as writing a paper or completing a science project. Planning activities should also target academic behavior more broadly. It is useful for students to learn how to schedule their time so that they can balance priorities in different courses and ensure all their work is completed.

Research suggests that several factors contribute to designing effective social and emotional learning activities. In particular, these activities should involve active forms of learning and should be aligned to specific social and emotional learning skills. Additionally, instructor feedback in any academic activity can support the development of self-management skills, particularly persistence. Avoid labeling students as “smart” or “good.” Instead, praise students’ effort, hard work, and behavior. This type of feedback will support a “growth mindset” which will help students work harder when they experience difficulty. Additionally, when students are struggling, it can be helpful to emphasize the control they do have as they can work harder or try something different next time.

When designing self-management classroom activities, it is important that activities be accessible to students with a range of skill levels. Scaffolding can be useful to help students with underdeveloped self-management skills to successfully participate in these activities. For example, students who have no experience with planning will probably struggle with an open-ended goal-setting activity. Students need guidance and structure around how to set goals. As students develop greater competence in these skills, the scaffolding can be gradually phased out.

How Should I Evaluate Students' Self-Management Skill?

Measures of self-management are typically self- and teacher-report questionnaires, which ask individuals to report on their own or others' characteristics and behavior. Teacher-report questionnaires in particular allow instructors to systematically report on their observations of student behavior.

Recent advances in technology have also allowed the assessment of self-management skills through real-time performance data from game and simulations. Specific behaviors captured in these games and simulations can provide direct evidence of different self-management skills. For example, revisiting unsolved problems multiple times suggests greater levels of persistence; taking longer between action corresponds to more attention to detail; and spending more time on task indicates better behavioral control.

The main conclusions and implications of the research for classroom practice are shown in the table below.

CONCLUSION	RECOMMENDATION
Self-management skills are important for academic and occupational success and are associated with other positive life outcomes.	Educators should integrate self-management skills instruction in their teaching.
Self-management involves the skills of planning, organization, persistence, progress monitoring, control, and attention to detail.	Educators should address each of these specific self-management skills in their instruction.
Improving self-management often involves strategy instruction and structured practice implementing these strategies. Specific strategies include: goal-setting, time management, organization, emotion regulation, and metacognitive monitoring.	When teaching self-management, educators should include instruction in the following strategies: goal-setting, time management, organization, emotion regulation, and metacognitive monitoring. Educators should explain these strategies and then provide students with structured opportunities to practice them.
Implementation intentions are a particularly useful tool for supporting goal-setting and goal pursuit.	When setting goals, students should be encouraged to identify times or settings where they can act on their goals as well as the specific behaviors they can complete that will support their goals.
Control can be supported through instruction and practice in cognitive restructuring and mindfulness meditation.	Educators should consider teaching students to rethink situations that cause unhelpful and distressing emotions. Educators may also wish to incorporate brief mindfulness practice into their classrooms.
How instructors provide feedback can influence students' capacity for self-management in general, and for the skill of persistence more specifically. Feedback should focus on the student's effort and behavior, as opposed to ability.	When providing feedback to students, educators should avoid labeling students as "smart" or a "good student." Instead praise students' effort, hard work, and behavior. This type of feedback will support a "growth mindset" which will help students work harder when they experience difficulty.
There are many self- and informant-report questionnaires that assess skills in self-management. These questionnaires allow students to rate their own self-management skills and allow teachers to rate students' self-management skills.	Educators may consider self- and informant-report questionnaires to measure students' self-management skills.
Evidence-centered design (ECD) provides a useful framework for developing new assessments, particularly those that focus on self-management behaviors.	Consider utilizing evidence-centered design (ECD) to develop new assessments of self-management skills.
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Table 1 Conclusions and recommendations.