

Planning, Organising & Sequencing

To begin, plan and organise tasks and activities in the right order at the right time, you need to be able to think ahead, concentrate, remember things, gather and sort information, and set priorities. These thinking processes require a lot of brain power.

Following a brain injury, it is normal to have difficulty planning, organising and sequencing things. You may also find:

- You have a hard time starting or finishing things
- You have a hard time with tasks that used to be easy, such as cooking a meal or finishing a work assignment
- You may stop doing favorite activities such meeting with friends, watching a movie, reading a book, or practicing a sport
- You have a hard time trying new ways to do things
- You can only do one thing at a time, where before injury you may have been able to do several things at once

Certain things can make planning and organisation more difficult, including:

- Being under pressure, not allowing enough time
- Trying to do too many things at one time
- Fatigue, lack of sleep or rest
- Distractions in your environment, e.g. people talking, TV in the background
- Having too much information to process at once
- Doing new tasks which have not been well planned

Initiation is the ability to start doing something.

It requires seeing what needs to be done. For example, to do grocery shopping, the person must first realise that they need food in the house.

Tools and strategies to help with initiation difficulties:

- Weekly or daily planners
- Diaries (for appointments, meetings, important dates)
- To do lists
- Phone alarms, Apps, Personal Assistants like Alexa
- Charts or white boards

By using these strategies it becomes clearer what needs to be done daily. They can be used as a prompt to start tasks or activities.

Planning means thinking about activities or steps required to reach a goal.

For example, once the person has recognised the need to have food in the house, they then need to figure out the steps required to achieve 'having food in the house' goal.

In other words...

- Decide what you want to eat
- Check what items you already have at home
- Make a list of ingredients missing
- Make sure you have enough money to purchase required items
- Check supermarket opening times
- Check your schedule to see at what time you can go to the supermarket
- Bring your list to the supermarket
- Bring shopping bags

Planning also requires estimating how long an activity will take to complete. For example: I'm going to do my shopping today. I need to leave the house at 10am, because the shopping will take me 2 hours. That way, I can be back at home at 12.30pm to make my lunch.

Organising is the ability to schedule a number of activities during the day or week.

It also involves the ability to change plans when required. For example, if the post office is closed on Sunday, I will go to the supermarket instead, and leave the post office for Monday.

Tools and strategies to help with organising difficulties:

- **Prioritise**: decide what cannot be left for another day, e.g. medical appointment requires attendance
- **Be realistic**: based on current limitations, decide the number of tasks that can be completed in a given period time and if the task is do-able (e.g. Can I organise a dinner at home for 10 people when I am having problems organising dinner for one person?)
- **One thing at a time**: have separate periods of time for each task/activity
- **Everything in its place**: It will avoid spending additional time looking for items if they are always in the same place. E.g. house keys always in the first drawer on sitting room cabinet
- **Routine**: having your daily activities noted in a daily or weekly calendar avoids needing to organise your tasks every day. E.g. walking the dog at 6pm, taking children to swimming on Tuesdays at 6.30pm, etc.

Tools and strategies to help with organising difficulties:

- **Minimise distractions:** organise your tasks in a quiet environment where you can think and plan more clearly. E.g. avoid doing your daily/weekly planner while you are having a conversation on the phone or watching TV
- **Breaks:** rest is very important after a brain injury, especially to combat fatigue. Breaks need to be part of your routine. Mark them in your planners.
- **Energy levels:** consider your energy levels when organising tasks. The most complex or energy consuming tasks should be scheduled when you are more alert. Plan to complete easier tasks when you are likely to have less energy.

By using these strategies it becomes clearer what needs to be done daily. They can be used as a prompt to start tasks or activities.

Sequencing is the ability to put all the steps of a task in the correct order.

It also includes changing the order of the steps as needed, so the task can be completed. For example, when working on your 'having food in the house goal', you will need to decide what you want to cook before making your shopping list.

Tools and strategies to help with sequencing difficulties:

- Activity Planner: divide the activity into smaller steps
- Appointment/meeting record: have a template to use when attending meetings or appointments. Prepare and write down the questions you want to ask in advance, and take note of the information you have been given during the meeting/appointment