Get Organized with Technology

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There are two times during the year when we take a look at our lives and vow to become organized. This typically happens on New Year's Eve as we consider new possibilities and as we begin a new school year with freshly sharpened pencils and empty notebooks. Today's tech savvy students can use technology to help them become more organized. Children, parents, and adult students can benefit from basic technology to manage time, materials, and workspace.

As an assistive technology (AT) specialist working with students of all ages, I am often asked to suggest ways to help with organization. To this request, I always have to ask questions about the person's particular organization needs. Some people think "organization" means easily finding what you want, when you want it. To others, it means handing in homework, complete and on time. And to others, it means keeping desks, backpacks and lockers neat. Before considering the type of tool you need, it helps to think about *what* you want to organize: time, study or work space, information, paperwork, or all of the above?

In addition to thinking about what you want to organize, I also like to consider the simple tools that everyone seems to have available today. This includes cell phones and computers. So, let's look at *how* these simple technology tools can help.

People who struggle with time management may have difficulty predicting how long a task will take, when to start it in order to finish on time, and keeping on track. Cell phones have calendar features and alarms that can be used for this purpose. Even if your school doesn't allow use of phones during the day, the built-in calendar and alarms available in most phones can help your student learn to keep track of time and work at home. When beginning a task, such as writing a paragraph describing your summer vacation, set a pre-determined amount of time that you want to spend on the first paragraph. Set the alarm to go off in 10 minutes. The timer serves as a prompt to remain on task and move on to the next phase of your project. A cell phone's built-in calendar features allow you to add the due date of an item. iDevice users (iPod Touch, iPhone, iPad) have several visual timer apps available to make the passage of time more visible. Two of my favorites are *Time Timer* and *VisuoTimer*.

Another great way to organize due dates and timelines is to use an online calendar like *Microsoft Outlook* or *Google Calendars*. These calendars save information online so that you can review and edit them from any computer. Alarms, texts, or emails can be set to remind you of an

upcoming assignment. With the online storage feature, parents can review the calendar from any Internet device (computer, iPhone, iPad) and the student can add to the calendar at school.

Online storage for documents can be a way to organize papers. *Google Docs* allows you to save documents you've created online so that they can be accessed from any computer. Create something at school and access it at home. *Evernote* is another free and easy site that lets you create documents, save notes, pictures, and web pages in an online account that you can access from a computer or Internet device. Check to see if your school has online storage for students that would allow you to access work from home. Another option for tracking documents includes taking a photo of the completed work with your phone and then emailing it to yourself, parent, or teacher. For iDevice users, there is a great app call *Cam Scanner* that produces high quality .pdf files of documents from photos by essentially turning your device into a portable scanner. By creating folders, you can keep scans of documents organized in different files. Need to print one out? Just email it and print.

Often students use an assignment notebook to write down the assignment specifics and due dates. This information can be added to the notes section of a cell phone for later review. Those with spelling challenges can use the voice recorder feature of a cell phone or iDevice to record information and listen to it later. Or, take a photo of the teacher's written directions on the board using one of these mobile devices. Always check with the school and teacher to determine their mobile device policy first!

By using the tools that we have in our day-to-day lives, we become more empowered. Learning to use cell phones, iDevices, and computers to help with organization of time, materials, and workspace is a life-long skill that benefits children and adults at school, home and work.