

## ESQ-R: Short User's Manual

### Overview

**Background.** The ESQ-R is a self-report assessment instruments that students complete to help them (and their teachers or coaches) understand their executive skill strengths and challenges. It is a modified version of the ESQ developed by Dawson and Guare and described in a number of their books on executive skills (e.g., *Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents*, *Smart but Scattered*, *Smart but Scattered Teens*).

We do not have large-scale normative data on this instrument, but the ESQ-R has been employed with a sample of college students for the purpose of determining the instrument's psychometric properties. Statistical analysis yielded strong reliability and validity correlations and, through factor analysis, identified **five Skill Areas** (described in more detail below) that appear to represent discrete and independent executive skill domains. We've labelled the five skill areas Plan Management, Time Management, Organization, Emotional Regulation, and Behavioral Regulation. See Straight, Dawson, Walther, Strait, and Barton (2019) for more detailed information. We also have some evidence that the ESQ-R is sensitive to intervention effects.

**Instructions for completing the ESQ-R online are in the Appendix.**

**Intended Audience.** This rating scale should appeal to professionals within both education and mental health. These include school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and teachers, both general education and special education teachers. Increasingly, we have found that both speech pathologists and occupational therapists address executive skills in their work with students, and they, too, would be a potential audience. College counselors and support services staff would find this useful in helping their clients identify potential challenges to college success and even assisting with college selection, based on profiles of strengths and weaknesses. College and university learning support centers could use the ESQ-R to help pinpoint student needs and matching those needs to appropriate services. Executive skill coaches, a field that is undergoing rapid expansion, would find this scale useful, as would educational therapists (a field that is quite common in states such as California and Texas). In the mental health field, therapists and clinical psychologists are increasingly addressing executive skill challenges as part of their therapeutic work.

**Potential uses.** We envision the ESQ-R being used both for diagnostic purposes (to identify strong and weak skill areas) and to help design interventions targeting both individual students and whole classes as appropriate. Here are some ways the instrument might be employed:

- A general education or special education teacher might decide to teach a weekly seminar on executive skills. That teacher could use the ESQ-R to assess skills before and after the seminar and use the questionnaire within the seminar to help students set executive skill goals.

- A special education teacher might implement a group coaching model to help students identify goals that target executive skills as a way to improve academic performance. The ESQ-R could be used as a pre/post measure of coaching effectiveness.
- Any professional who works with individual students to improve executive skills could use the ESQ-R as a way to identify targets for intervention and to assess change as a result of the intervention.
- A school district that uses an MTSS model of service delivery could use the ESQ to help determine to which tier a student would be most appropriately assigned and as a measure of intervention effectiveness to help determine whether the student needs more (or less) intensive services.
- College learning centers could use the ESQ-R as part of an initial screening both to identify appropriate students for their services as well as to assist in designing individualized intervention plans.
- Researchers could use the instrument as a pre/post measure to assess intervention efficacy.

At the present time, the instrument is available free of charge. Students will complete the quick 25-item survey on-line, and a results screen will appear at the end of the test showing scores for each factor and overall results.

Because we hope to collect information about how students respond to the survey, we will be asking for some demographic information about the students completing the survey (gender, grade, age), but *we do not want to receive information regarding the students' identities*. This information will remain in the hands of the people submitting the survey results to us. The Instructions for Use provides specific directions for creating unique codes for each student completing the form. **Remember, these codes are for you to be able to identify your own students, without giving us any personally identifiable information. Be sure to keep track of students and their ID numbers.**

Many thanks to Isaac Dawson who helped us automate the survey to enable users to get results immediately upon completing the survey. We couldn't have done this without his help!

## ESQ-R Skill Areas

The work of Dawson & Guare on executive skills identifies 11 executive skill domains that are felt to be critical to school success, and the original self-report version, along with all other versions of the Executive Skills Questionnaire, consists of 33 items assessing the 11 executive skills (3 items per skill). We have found this version of the questionnaire very useful in our work with students and their parents and teachers. We subjected the revised version of the ESQ to factor analysis and through this process, the items grouped into five skill areas. While this version loses some of the specificity of the ESQ, we believe it is a more valid and reliable measure that is better suited for use for research purposes and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. We also think the five skill areas are distinct and can help differentiate different executive skills profiles. We believe the skill areas are distinct enough to enable those using the ESQ-R to design interventions based on a student's specific profile of stronger and weaker skills. Below are brief descriptions of each skill area, along with the specific items representing each skill area. These descriptions should be useful in helping students and those who work with them interpret the scores obtained.

**Plan Management:** This skill area refers to the ability to create and manage plans for accomplishing tasks. It includes individual executive skills such as planning/prioritizing, sustained attention, flexibility, metacognition, and goal directed persistence. The individual items included in this factor are:

- 6. I run out of energy before finishing a task.
- 7. It is hard for me to set priorities when I have a lot of things to do.
- 12. If the first solution to a problem doesn't work, I have trouble thinking of a different one.
- 13. I skip checking my work for mistakes, even when the stakes are high.
- 14. I get annoyed when tasks are too hard.
- 16. I have trouble with tasks where I have to come up with my own ideas.
- 17. It's hard for me to tell how well I'm doing on a task.
- 18. I have trouble reaching long-term goals.
- 22. I have trouble getting back on track if I'm interrupted.
- 23. I have trouble making a plan.
- 24. I focus on details and miss the big picture.

**Time Management:** This skill area refers to the ability to manage various aspects of time, including time estimating, time allocation, and being able to work within time limits and time constraints. It includes the individual executive skills of time management, task initiation and working memory. The individual items included in this factor are:

- 10. I have trouble estimating how long it will take to complete a task.
- 11. I'm slow getting ready for school, work, or appointments.
- 15. It's hard for me to put aside fun activities to start things I know I need to do.
- 20. I get so wrapped up in what I'm doing that I forget about other things I need to do.

**Organization:** This skill area refers to the ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials. It incorporates the executive skills of organization and working memory. The individual items included in this factor are:

- 3. I lose things.
- 8. My desk or workspace is a mess.
- 9. I have trouble keeping my house or room clean.

**Emotion Regulation:** This skill area is identical to the executive skill of emotional control. It refers to the ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior. The individual items included in this factor are:

- 4. I have a short temper.
- 5. I get upset when things don't go as planned.
- 21. Little things frustrate me.

**Behavior Regulation:** This skill area refers to the ability to exhibit self-control and to think before acting or responding to consider the consequences of one's actions. It includes the executive skills of response inhibition and goal-directed persistence. The individual items included in this factor are:

- 1. I act on impulse.
- 2. I say things without thinking.
- 19. I "go with my gut" when making decisions.
- 25. I live in the moment.

### Brief Interpretive Guide

First of all, the higher the score, the more significant the weaknesses are. The instructions given to people when they complete the scale is as follows:

**Directions:** Everyone has both strengths and challenges in these skills depending on the situation they are in. Be as honest as you can in deciding what your strengths and challenges are. In particular, think about how you handle non-preferred tasks (the kinds of tasks you don't particularly like to do). Please read each item and decide how often you consider it to be a problem for you using the following scale:

- 0 – Never
- 1 – Sometimes
- 2 – Often
- 3 – Very often

Since we are still gathering data on this rating scale we don't have "norms" so we can't tell you what is typical for any of the 5 skill areas, described above. As a general rule of thumb, though, scores in the 2-3 range (both for Skill Area averages and for individual items) can be considered a relative weakness or problematic. Scores between 0 and 1 should be considered a relative strength or not problematic.

When working with individual students or clients, look at both the Skill Area scores and the individual item scores. Any individual item score rated as 2 or 3 is worthy of discussion because it means the respondent has identified that behavior as a problem either *often* (2) or *very often* (3). Even when an overall Skill Area looks relatively strong, individual items may highlight some behavioral challenges.

As a supplement to the ESQ-R, teachers, coaches and others using this survey may want to administer the Executive Skills Problem Checklist, available in the first two books listed in the Resource section below. This checklist was designed to identify with greater specificity, over 60 specific problem behaviors associated with each executive skill. The checklist asks students to check off all the behaviors that they feel "interfere with effective studying." Students are then

asked to review all the items they've checked off and choose three that cause the most problems. From these, the student and teacher or coach can select a target for goal setting.

Be sure to talk with students or clients about their strong skill areas and individual items rated as 0 or 1. Identifying strengths helps people feel good about themselves—and you can also talk with them about whether they can use any of their stronger skills to compensate for their weaker skills.

**Note for use with adults:** We built the ESQ-R from our student version of the ESQ rather than the adult version, and we don't have a scale for Stress Tolerance for kids, which is why those items didn't end up on the ESQ-R. People who are low in Stress Tolerance tend to be low on Emotional Control, so the Emotional Regulation Skill Area may overlap with Stress Tolerance. If you want to use the ESQ-R to provide feedback to your clients, your best approach is to talk with them about their scores on the five skill areas in terms of stronger and weaker scores. You can also look at individual item responses to continue the discussion, again with the understanding that low scores are strengths and high scores are challenges. The Skill Areas section above tells the numbers for the individual items in each Skill Area, so you should be able to find the corresponding score for each item in the hard copy version of the ESQ-R.

### ESQ-R Report Options

**Individual profiles:** Using this option will allow the respondent to complete the ESQ-R and get immediate results in the form of a brief report that provides scores on five Skill Areas and a Total Score (with comparison scores for others who have taken the survey). Please note that this is NOT a norm-referenced rating scale using a stratified sample that matches national or international demographics, but it may be helpful to compare an individual profile with average scores of others who have taken the survey. As of now (October 2020), several hundred people have completed the ESQ-R, and we expect that number to grow.

**Other Uses:** We apologize that we do not have the resources at this time to pull particular individuals' or groups' data on our end. Here are some ideas for collecting and managing your own data:

**Individual time series:** You may be interested in comparing a single individual's performance across multiple time points. Before using the ESQ-R with students, show them how to screenshot their results. Then, each time the student takes the ESQ-R, ask them to save/send their results to you. It will likely be easiest to keep track of different results in an Excel spreadsheet, which will allow for graphing to examine trends, as well. You can also always use a printed hard copy of the ESQ-R.

We don't recommend re-administering the ESQ-R more frequently than every 10-12 weeks. A teacher or coach who wants to track progress across an academic year might consider re-administering the ESQ-R at the beginning of the school year and at the end of each marking period. Another way to obtain this information is to print out the individual profile for each date administered and tracking progress that way by looking at how scores and graphs change

over time.

**Group profiles:** If you wish to use the ESQ-R with a large group, such as for a whole class, grade, or research group, we suggest having students screenshot and send you their results. Use Excel, Google Sheets, or similar software to organize results.

**NOTE FOR RESEARCHERS:** You may print the ESQ-R as a hard copy and use this to collect data. You may also wish to take the paper form and convert it to an electronic version using your own software (like Qualtrics, Google Forms, etc.). Unfortunately, we cannot share our electronic version. Please remember to always cite our work when using this measure. *Please contact Peg Dawson for permissions questions.*

### **Suggestions for Using Group Data:**

Here are some ways you might make use of these data:

- Look at the weakest Skill Areas and develop intervention targets based on item responses.
- If you have kept track of a whole group's data, share a group graph with the class and talk about what the stronger and weaker Skill Areas mean. Have students identify behaviors associated with the weaker Skill Areas and develop individual goals to improve those skill areas.
- Re-administer the ESQ-R after interventions have been in place for a while to see if progress has been made. We suggest interventions should be kept in place for a minimum of 10 weeks or 1 marking period.

***Students' responses to the questionnaires on this web site are entirely voluntary and will be used anonymously in ongoing research by Peg Dawson, EdD, Julia Strait, PhD, and their professional colleagues. You can fill out the questionnaires on this website if you agree to this.***

***Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data you provide on this web site. For online participation, your confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology being used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data via the Internet or email.***

### **Resources for Designing Interventions**

Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2018). *Executive skills in children and adolescents: A practical guide to assessment and interventions*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. New York: Guilford Press.

Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2017). *The work smart academic planner*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: The Guilford Press.

Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2022). *Coaching students with executive skills challenges, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. New York: Guilford Press.

### Other References

Beyond BookSmart (2022). *ESQ-R Coaching study results: 16 weeks*. Available at: <https://www.beyondbooksmart.com/>

Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2016). *The Smart but scattered guide to success: How to use your brain's executive skills to keep up, stay calm, and get organized at work and at home*.

Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2009). *Smart but Scattered: The revolutionary executive skills approach to helping kids reach their potential*. New York: Guilford Press. Guare, R., Dawson, P., & Guare, C. (2013). *Smart but scattered teens: The revolutionary executive skills approach to helping teens reach their potential*. New York: Guilford Press.

Guare, R., Dawson, P., & Guare, C. (2013). *Smart but scattered teens: The revolutionary executive skills approach to helping teens reach their potential*. New York: Guilford Press.

Nasir, H.; Tan, C.-S.; Pheh, K.-S. (2021) The Executive Skills Questionnaire-Revised: Adaptation and psychometric properties in the working context of Malaysia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18, 8978. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18178978>.

Strait, J. E., Dawson, P., Walther, C. A., Strait, G. G., Barton, A. K., & McClain, M. B. (2019). Refinement and psychometric evaluation of the executive skills questionnaire-revised. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 1-11.

## APPENDIX

### Instructions for Completing the ESQ-R

We are pleased that you want to use the ESQ-R to better understand your students' executive skills profile. In order for us to give you the information you are looking for as efficiently as possible, we ask that you do the following:

1. Create a unique ID for each student (no personal info like social security, names, or dates of birth, please). The ID should include 3 components:
  - a. A "code name" for your school or site
  - b. A different "code name" for the teacher for whom the student is completing the survey.

c. A unique numeric code for each student or individual you can keep track of  
For example, students in Ms. Smith's class (code name Acorn) at Washington Middle School (code name Squirrel) might have an ID that would look like this:

- SquirrelAcorn100
- SquirrelAcorn101
- SquirrelAcorn102

**NOTE:** If you are a therapist or coach using this survey with individual clients, the code name should have two parts: a code for the therapist or coach and a number for the client (e.g., Dogwood001).

**IMPORTANT!! In order to maintain complete anonymity, when you are creating a code name, DO NOT use the real name of either the student or the teacher, coach or therapist assigned to that student. We are promising users that the identities of the clients or students completing the surveys will be ONLY in the hands of the adults responsible for having clients or students complete the survey.**

2. Have the students complete the survey individually. The survey can be accessed at <https://www.smartbutscatteredkids.com/esq/> The test will be scored immediately upon submission and a 2-page report will be generated for each student taking the test. The report can be printed out or saved as a PDF file. If students are completing the survey on their own (e.g., as a homework assignment), they should email their results to their teachers so that teachers can have the results for their records.



