

THE THINKING SKILLS WORKBOOK

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Third Edition

THE THINKING SKILLS WORKBOOK

A Cognitive Skills Remediation Manual for Adults

By

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PREFACE

Thinking skill deficits are typically not as obvious to the observer as are many physical disabilities. Nonetheless, even mild cognitive deficits can be frustrating and cause irritation, denial or possibly depression, while more severe cognitive deficits can have a profound effect on one's overall quality of daily living. *The Thinking Skills Workbook* offers a means of identifying areas and degrees of individual deficits and is a useful tool that can provide measurable improvement. This workbook can be used as a part of an ongoing rehabilitation program for inpatients and outpatients or it can be used in nursing homes, adult day care centers or at home. The *Workbook* was written so that it can be easily used and administered by professionals and paraprofessionals, as well as by family members.

Previous editions of this training manual were a direct product of years of both basic and applied research. Occupational therapists and volunteer teachers in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes and private living environments had used earlier editions successfully with a wide range of people in need of cognitive skill training. Their suggestions and feedback over the years have helped to make the manual more usable for practical application in a variety of settings.

This Third Edition is both revised and updated with new exercises and suggestions for the teacher-learner team. We have added more training exercises to all of the sections and have made major revisions in the sections on Listening, Scheduling and Time Management and on Memory in Everyday Living. This edition also has three new chapters on Understanding the Recovery Process, Maintaining Wellness, and Mood and Thinking. The addition of these chapters addresses the need to consider other important factors such as one's attitude, mood state and overall health in the ongoing recovery process. Our intent is not only to increase the awareness of how these issues can impact the rehabilitation process, but also to offer specific suggestions that may help in facilitating overall recovery. For example, in the chapter on Maintaining Wellness, we discuss the power of the

mind and how one can change to take more responsibility for one's own health and recovery. We also present specific suggestions and topics for discussion with one's health care practitioner for obtaining optimal nutrition and for reducing stress. Both of these important changes can lead not only to better health but also to enhanced thinking skills performance.

The Thinking Skills Workbook is designed to be most beneficial when the teacher and learner interact on a one-to-one basis, so that individual needs can be effectively incorporated into the training session. Additionally, the exercises encourage the use of basic learning principles such as the use of immediate feedback and positive reinforcement while gradually increasing the difficulty level of the exercises. For each of the training sections we also offer specific suggestions to assist the teacher in finding additional exercises and activities that are personally relevant to the learner. Throughout the *Workbook* we emphasize the importance of giving encouragement and providing feedback on the learner's progress to help maximize motivation and interest in the retraining process. We hope the incorporation of these effective learning strategies, along with the many revisions, will make the use of our new edition of *The Thinking Skills Workbook* rewarding for both teacher and learner.

L.T.R.
M.A.L.
J.L.C.

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Finally, the authors would like to thank our colleagues, friends and families who have encouraged us over the years to complete this third edition and to all recovering stroke and head-injured patients who continue to be a source of inspiration and hope.

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THE THINKING SKILLS WORKBOOK

INTRODUCTION

WHO SHOULD USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is designed to help adults who are having problems with certain cognitive or thinking skills, such as following instructions, paying attention, reading, remembering, listening, managing time, reasoning and/or problem-solving. The person needing cognitive skill retraining (the “learner”) may be someone who has suffered a stroke, head trauma, or other brain injury, or someone who is experiencing the cognitive effects of disease processes, such as diabetes or Parkinson’s disease. The exercises presented in the *Workbook* can also be used to keep a normal, aging brain “limber.” Like our bodies, our minds work best when active and appropriately nourished and exercised.

The “teacher” or person facilitating the learner’s efforts may be a family member, a friend, a therapist, a direct-care provider, or anyone familiar with the person and his or her needs. Some attributes that make someone a good “facilitator” are patience, enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and good organizational skills. This *Workbook* gives specific guidelines, exercises and suggestions for teachers to help them to provide a successful and rewarding retraining program.

WHY USE THIS WORKBOOK

People need reliable thinking skills in order to lead full and independent lives. Good thinking skills help people to feel more “in control.” Whether at home or in a skilled nursing/rehabilitation facility, those able to exercise control over their lives tend to report a higher quality of life and a greater satisfaction with themselves and their surroundings. We have identified a number of aspects of thinking that are important in everyday life and devoted chapters/sections to each skill, as follows:

CHAPTER 3 Section 1: *Paying Attention and Reading*

The ability to stay focused is important in learning and absorbing new information. It is particularly important in reading to be able to visually scan the entire page in order to process and understand new material.

CHAPTER 3 Section 2: *Concentrating on Detail*

The ability to identify small but important details is necessary in almost all household and self-care skills, and in higher level activities of daily living (e.g., driving, map reading, etc.) requiring good visual-spatial skills.

CHAPTER 3 Section 3: *Listening, Scheduling and Time Management*

This section helps to retrain a number of skills starting with listening skills that have been shown to relate to other orientation and functional abilities. Other skills addressed are scheduling and managing one's time. Good scheduling skills can allow a person to do more of the things he or she wants to do with less frustration. The ability to use time efficiently can have a great impact on improving the quality of life for someone with limited energy and resources.

CHAPTER 3 Section 4: *Memory in Everyday Living*

Many people can remember poems and songs from childhood, but forget grocery lists, names, etc. Forgetting can be extremely frustrating for anyone, but more likely to cause distress in aging adults or in one who has suffered brain injury. This section focuses on techniques and procedures that help to improve applied memory skills.

CHAPTER 3 Section 5: *Other Important Skills*

Reasoning and problem solving skills are based on one's ability to apply logic to practical situations. This section offers the learner some opportunities to practice and sharpen these and other higher level skills.

CHAPTER 4: *Maintaining Wellness*

A healthy mind needs a healthy body to support it. New research has given us more information about the relationship between mind and body in wellness. This chapter summarizes some recent findings and offers suggestions for applying the knowledge to maximize health.

CHAPTER 5: *Mood and Thinking*

How one feels has a great impact on how one thinks. This chapter discusses some of the ways depression, anxiety and other problems can impact negatively on thinking skills and what can be done about it.

Many learners will be extremely motivated to do everything possible to try to regain their skills. However, even the most dedicated may sometimes wonder about the immediate usefulness of some of the thinking skill tasks. For example a learner might ask, “How can practicing skills help me to complete my stroke rehabilitation program faster?” Throughout the *Workbook*, we have tried to provide descriptions of the usefulness/applicability of the exercises suggested, to help the learner to understand the relevance in his or her life. The teacher is encouraged to help the learner to identify personal goals and to think of how each exercise will help him or her to reach those goals throughout the learning process. For example: “Because you tire more easily since the stroke, better scheduling will help you to use your energy more efficiently, so you can do more of the things you want to do.”

HOW TO USE THE WORKBOOK

The cognitive skills that will be covered in this *Workbook* range in type and difficulty from relatively simple tasks (like letter recognition and following directions) to more difficult and complex tasks (such as memory and sequencing exercises). Some learners will find the entire *Workbook* very difficult. These differences depend very much on the learner’s personal skills, goals, motivation, problems and medical condition. However, because the *Workbook* is organized so that each task is separate and arranged in graduated steps of difficulty, it is hoped that the teacher will be able to adjust the training to fit the learner’s specific needs.

To help the teacher select appropriate materials, a “Pretest” is provided. This exercise is divided into five sections that correspond to the first five training skills of the *Workbook*. The Pretest should be given first to let the learner and the teacher develop a plan for how to proceed with the *Workbook*. The learner’s scores on each section of the Pretest will determine which corresponding section of the *Workbook* is required. For example, the first section of the Pretest and of the *Workbook* covers “Paying Attention and Reading.” If the learner scores perfectly or does very well on the Pretest for this skill, then the teacher should skip over the corresponding section in the *Workbook*. If the