

# THINKING LIKE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

Researchers who study how the brain works describe three important functions that are a lot like what air traffic controllers do. Each is a critical part of high-level thinking (“executive function”), which develops throughout childhood and adolescence.

Function	What It Means	How Air Traffic Controllers Do It	How Students Do It
<p><b>Juggling</b> (Working Memory)</p>	<p>Keeping lots of information in mind at the same time.</p>	<p>Safely land multiple planes at the same time by giving directions to each plane without forgetting about the others.</p>	<p>Follow multi-step directions that are involved in an activity, task or assignment.</p>
<p><b>Switching</b> (Cognitive Flexibility)</p>	<p>Changing what you’re thinking or doing based on what the situation demands.</p>	<p>Switch attention from one plane to another, and follow different procedures for different planes so each one can land safely.</p>	<p>Adjust behavior to fit the situation you’re in. (For example, you act differently at a library than you would at a park.)</p>
<p><b>Self-Control</b> (Inhibitory Control)</p>	<p>Resisting automatic urges and distractions so you can stay focused on what’s better in the long term.</p>	<p>Staying focused on the assigned planes, and not getting distracted by other conversations or situations.</p>	<p>Doing what you need to do rather than what you want to do.</p>

