

# Cognitive Capacity Observation Checklist

Helping you spot the **cognitive barriers** impacting RTW





## Introduction

When we think about “work readiness,” physical abilities often take the spotlight: how much someone can lift, how long they can stand, or whether they can walk for certain periods of time. But just as important is the cognitive side of readiness - the ability to focus, solve problems, stay organised and handle interruptions.

As exercise physiologists and rehab providers, we're in a unique position. We spend extended time with clients, which means we get to see more than just sets and reps. We notice the lapses in accuracy as fatigue builds, the struggle to return to a task after distraction, or the signs that a client is over- or under-estimating their own limits.

These small observations add up. They provide valuable insight into a client's cognitive capacity - their ability to sustain attention, adapt to change and organise tasks over time.

This checklist gives you a simple, repeatable way to capture those observations.



## How to Use This Resource

1. Bring the checklist into your next client session (printed or digital) or have it handy during your next phone conversation
2. Observe the client during questionnaires, exercises or conversations.
3. Tick the boxes as you notice relevant behaviours across categories.
4. Add free-text notes for context or examples.
5. Look for recurring patterns over multiple sessions, not just one-off lapses.
6. Use the insights to guide session planning, inform return-to-work recommendations and to consider next steps

# Observation Checklist: Signs of Cognitive Capacity

## MENTAL ENDURANCE

- ☐ Stays accurate and focused across the full session / conversation
- ☐ Begins making mistakes or slowing down as fatigue sets in
- ☐ Needs repeated prompting to stay on track

## EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

- ☐ Manages interruptions without losing focus
- ☐ Keeps track of appointments and responsibilities
- ☐ Can plan ahead and adapt when things don't go to plan

## ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

- ☐ Completes paperwork or logs accurately and on time
- ☐ Follows instructions without repeated reminders
- ☐ Keeps personal data (HR, HRV, exercise logs) consistent and organised

## SELF-AWARENESS & PACING

- ☐ Recognises when to take breaks
- ☐ Adjusts workload appropriately when fatigued
- ☐ Balances confidence (not underestimating or overestimating ability)



Tip: Readiness isn't about perfection. What matters most is whether the client demonstrates consistent behaviours that would sustain them across a workday.

# Observation Checklist: Signs of Cognitive Capacity

**SESSION SUMMARY / PATTERNS:**

**NOTES / TO DO:**