



10 ways to achieve success for university or college students with ADHD

1. **Register to your strengths.** The right class schedule can make or break any student. Investigate the course that you are considering taking, meet your professors, determine the common class size and read through each syllabus. Take a reduced course load and/or tackle overly difficult classes one semester at a time.
2. **Stay on top of your treatment.** ADHD is not static and may change over time. Habitual reassessments with your doctor, psychologist, or coach will better help you determine if your symptoms are changing and if you need to adjust your treatment plan accordingly. For instance, new longer-acting therapies and new forms of treatment that may work better for you are always becoming available.
3. **Get up and get started.** Getting up and out the door late can cause the rest of your day to fall behind. Make sure you start your day on time. Set two alarms to go off in sequence, one across the room so you have to get out of bed to turn it off. Know how long each morning task takes you (getting dressed and eating breakfast) and set reminder alarms so you know when it's time to move on. Remember, people with ADHD are not good at estimating time, so try some practice runs before the first day to develop a time log, and then add some time as a contingency. One way to test your time management skills is to create a time estimate of all routines and activities within your schedule (including travel time), and then compare this to your actual time log.
4. **A place for everything and everything in its place.** Clutter at your desk or in your room makes it tough to stay focused. Keep your room and desk tidy, always putting items back where you took them. Create a "Launching Pad" near your exit door for the things you will need before you leave (backpack, keys and cell phone). Using hooks for coats, keys, purse, backpack, laptop case, etc. will make this more convenient, and the more convenient and visual the organizing strategy is, the more likely a person with ADHD will continue to utilize it. People with ADHD are cued best with visual reminders, so find a way to organize things so that they are aesthetically pleasing but still within sight (not inside opaque drawers or across the room). If you need things in drawers, they should be clear containers so that you can see the things within. Organizing things where the clutter ends up in relation to the activity will help reduce clutter, too (i.e. mail center with trash container near the door, calendar near the phone in the kitchen, files near the desk). You may have to ask someone who is a natural organizer to assist you with organizing your work desk and possibly your living space as well.
5. **Get organized.** Being organized is key to staying on top of assignments or studying for exams. Dedicate one binder for each class, using dividers to create sub-sections according to the syllabus. Keep your notebook or loose-leaf paper in your binder. Carry a three-hole punch with you so that you can file papers away as soon as they are given to you. This will help avoid losing papers. You can also use binders with outside zippers, and pockets so papers and other materials have a place, and stay confined. Only keep things in your binder that are relevant to the next exam, then file that unit's papers into a file box or hanging file keeper at home in a colour-coded fashion by subject and tab-labeled by unit or chapter. When you have a mid-term or final, you will revisit those files and use them to study, but you won't be carrying them to class each day if they are not yet relevant.
6. **Plan plan plan.** Time management is extremely important. Use an electronic calendar or Smartphone to organize your schedule and keep track of classes, assignments, projects and exams. Chunk long assignments, "dead week" study, and projects into manageable parts with sub-deadlines, put them into your calendar and/or agenda and stick to them. Plan time for each of your daily "to do's", include breaks and eating to your schedule in your agenda. Copy your daily "to-do's" (brief list, 3-5 maximum) on a sticky note and put it on your door, mirror, car dashboard, purse, front of your agenda or backpack. Again, practice runs timing yourself are very helpful in deciding on the amount of time required. Set electronic reminders in case you lose track of time. Bring it with you wherever you go so you can

instantly add or change items. An assignment notebook or agenda is also useful if you can't afford an electronic organizer. The key is to constantly carry it with you.

7. **Learn how to learn.** It sounds obvious, but figuring out how and in what environment you learn best can really make a difference in your success. Doodle: doodling in margins can actually help you recall information from a lecture. Use stars, arrows, underlining, or other visual cues in your notes if the professor seems to stress a particular statement. Read out loud or while standing up to keep you focused and less likely to drift. Pretend you are teaching the information to someone else or actually try to explain the information to someone else when studying to help imbed it into your memory and increase your comprehension of the material. If being alone is too boring, form a study group or find a more stimulating location. You may have to leave your home environment to cut down in distractions and go to the library or a corral at school to study.
8. **Set up accommodations.** A documented diagnosis of ADHD is considered a disability in the post-secondary system, which means that you can access specific accommodations, like , access to a special needs advisor who can assist with time management, additional time for assignments and exams, access to the professor's or another student's notes, being able to tape lectures, and possibly alternative testing. Get your documentation to the appropriate office, well before school begins, and get connected to an advisor. You may never have to use your accommodations, but if a problem does come up, you will already have the structure in place.
9. **Be your own advocate.** Become knowledgeable about your disability and both confident in and adept at describing your disability and related needs to others. When you are researching schools during the application process, also review their policy and resources for students with disabilities. There's no need to be ashamed at being different or asking for help.
10. **Don't forget to play.** Physical and social activities make for a balanced lifestyle and add to any learning experience. Make sure to allot time in your schedule for sports or outings - taking your mind off school and releasing any pent-up energy. Physical exercise has also been shown to help with brain functioning, so a daily exercise routine can help you to stay more focused throughout the day. This doesn't mean that it has to be structured; intramural sports, teams, and outings can be a fun, social way to stay active. Many universities offer a recreation centre or gym as part of your tuition and host a variety of activities. There are also many student-led groups on most campuses that tend to be free or nearly-so, so you may review with the student life section of your university's website.