

# Learning to plan with ADD / ADHD

## 1. Estimating time

Many students with ADD/ADHD often overestimate how much time they have. Using this formula can help:

Your estimate of how long something will take + 50% extra time = a better estimate.

## 2. Visually block out the time in your diary

Decide what kind of diary works best for you. For example, do you want one with blank pages or pages with lots of lines? How many days do you want on a page? Etc. Instead of noting down the time of an appointment in your diary, you can visually indicate how long you think it will take. For example, draw a thick line from the start to end time. Use different colours if that's clearer for you.

## 3. Use a time logbook

You can improve your notion of time by using a time logbook for a while. There's a good chance that this will help you make a more realistic study plan. Here's how to do it: First make a list of study tasks and chores (shopping, etc.) that you want to include in your weekly schedule. Then make a note of how long you think each task or chore will take. Then record the start and end time of each activity in your logbook for one week. Of course, it doesn't matter if you forget to do that on the odd occasion! You can use this information to make a more accurate schedule, giving you more time to plan fun things.

Example of a time logbook:

Task / chore	estimated time	start time	end time	total duration
Shopping	30 min	16.00	17.00	60 min
Repair puncture bike wheel	15 min	11.00	11.30	30 min
Email lecturer	10 min	10.00	10.15	10 min

## 4. Make the most of your alert curve

Do you know at which time of the day you are most alert? Do you know when your concentration level is at its lowest, so you shouldn't work on those tricky sums then? See if you can make your own alert curve for a typical day. How do you wake up? How much time do you need to have a sufficient level of concentration to study? Once you have drawn your alert curve, it can give you important information that you can use to help you make your schedule. Plan to do challenging study tasks when your level of concentration is at its highest. And do those easier tasks when you know your focus drops.

You can also use the alert curve to see if you can influence your level of concentration. For example, pay attention to what you eat and drink. How does that affect you? Can you change anything there? It's often a matter of trial and error to find out what exactly improves or reduces your concentration.

## 5. Break down big tasks into smaller ones

Don't know where to start? Have you fallen behind or can you no longer see the wood for the trees? First, take a deep breath. Then start with the first specific task you can think of, e.g. calling someone or looking for your textbook. Then grab a pen and paper. Write down max. 7 specific tasks that you can think of. Start doing them right away or include them in your schedule. Tick off what you've already done. That's a great motivator!

## 6. Use a to-do list (ABC method)

It can be useful to use a to-do list in addition to having a diary.

On the to-do list, write down the tasks and chores that you still have to do. That way, you don't have to remember them all the time! Then make a note of the deadline next to each activity.

What will you do first? How do you know what's important and what isn't?

A useful way to decide which tasks are most important is to give them a score. We tend to do the easiest tasks first. These are not always the most important ones. This makes it look like we've done a lot of work, but we've still got to do the most important tasks. That can be stressful!

Give each task one of these scores:

A tasks: the most important tasks, which have to be completed very soon (within two days).

B tasks: the less important tasks, for which you have slightly more time to complete.

C tasks: the least important tasks that are usually more fun and easier, but have less priority than the A and B tasks.

Don't put too many A tasks on your to-do list. Tell yourself that you are not allowed to start the B tasks until you have finished the A tasks. You can also see the C tasks as a reward, which you are allowed to do once you have completed another task. Tick off tasks as you go along. That's a great motivator! Not finished a task? Put it on a new to-do list.

Experiment with this method and see what does and doesn't work for you.

### Tips from other students with ADD/ADHD:

- Use an ideas book or folder to make a note of ideas so you don't have to keep remembering them.
- Make sure you get up and go to bed at fixed times. That will make your daily routine easier.
- Stay positive! Overslept? You can still get some studying done!
- Involve your senses. For example, you keep seeing those dirty dishes, put a to-do list on the wall in the living room).
- Use handy apps to help you plan, sleep or study better.
- Don't expect to be able to do everything at once, even though it sometimes feels like you can.
- Identify what you need in order to work productively. It's better to stop an hour early than to keep going for 3 hours without making progress.
- Schedule rewards, e.g. drinking coffee with friends or going to the cinema when you've finished studying for the day.