

Going to College Onli

ONLINE CLASSES can be even more challenging than in-person classes for college students with ADHD. The lack of immediate structure and feedback often found in such classes can make it so easy to put off the work. Without the daily reminders from being in class and working with other students, they may need to recreate those reminders and structure at home. If you're a college student who has ADHD, here are some recommendations that can help you to succeed.



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by Ruth A. Hughes, PhD

Choose the right class. In college, you can often choose your classes. Online courses can be divided into two flavors: synchronous and asynchronous. The first, synchronous, includes regularly scheduled class meetings online, where students and the teacher can interact with one another. Asynchronous classes have no regular meetings, and all activity is done whenever the student logs on and reviews the material and assignments. Most students with ADHD will do better in the synchronous classes.



Claim and set up a quiet study space. Now that everything you are doing for school is at home, it's a good idea to have a designated, quiet place for you to use for online classes and studying.

- **Find a space.** Try to make it a place that you only use for studying (not playing video games, email, etc., which may mean moving your laptop for study time). For some of you who have limited personal space and share with family or roommates, finding an appropriate space might be harder. If this is a problem, try to have a basket or crate with all the things you need in order to study, and then claim a space that is used for other things at different times, such as the dining room table.
- **Gather your supplies.** Make sure you have everything you need, so you don't have to interrupt your study time.
- **Deal with noise.** Some people need quiet to study. Do the best you can to schedule a quieter time and let your family or roommates know that you would appreciate quiet during that time. If that's not possible, think about noise-cancelling headphones or a white noise machine to drown out the sounds around you. You can also load a white noise app onto your cell phone and use your ear buds with it to block out the noise around you.
- **Consider music.** Some students feel they study more effectively if they are listening to music. Researchers have determined that music with 60 beats per minute helps you learn (think classical Baroque music). Contemporary music is faster at 100 to 140 beats a minute and may slow down learning.

Schedule a block of time daily to study and do assignments. Then figure out how to make sure you stick with the time. Share the schedule, and request that your family or roommates do not interrupt you and agree to keep the noise down during these times. Set up alarms on your cell phone to remind you when to begin. You can make these alarms recurring, so you are always reminded. Block out a time and stick to it daily.

Schedule all due dates and activities for assignments. Use a large calendar, a planner, or the calendar on your cell phone and list all assignments as soon as you know about them. Highlight your daily study time. Once the due dates are listed, go back and schedule chunks of time to do each step in the assignment. Chunking a paper might look like this:

10/8 through 10/12	Research topic for paper
10/13	Outline the paper
10/14	Do a first draft of the introduction
10/15	Write section 2 of the paper
10/16	Draft the conclusion
10/17	Be sure all references are listed correctly
10/18	Review the entire paper and do a second draft
10/19	Turn it in!

Create a to-do list to manage your online assignments.

Now that you have a schedule worked out and are beginning to stick to it, the next step is to figure out how to use your study time most productively. Time for the infamous to-do list. Keep it simple—no more than four to six items a day.

- Make your list the first thing you do every day so you have a good sense of what you want to try to accomplish during the day.
- Now go back and prioritize the most important and/or urgent tasks for today. Always begin with the most important task first. You will be tempted to do the easy things instead. Don't.
- Remember to check off what you have done during the day. It can be extremely rewarding to see what you have accomplished.
- Give yourself a reward for completing the list. This is the time for that video game or movie that you were so tempted to watch earlier in the day.

Deal with distractions. There are a million ways that your study time is interrupted. Be mindful and say no to these disruptions. Set rules for yourself to not engage in these distracting activities.

- **Phone.** Turn it off and keep it off during study periods, unless you are using it to generate white noise or music to help with studying. Texting, emails, and calls all disrupt studying and make it much harder to come back to the work at hand. It is worth the effort to learn to turn it off and keep it off.
- **Email, games, and other computer distractions.** I know some of your favorite video games may also be on your computer, and they are so tempting. As is the email that just came in from a friend that will only take a minute to answer. No, no, no. These are huge time stealers. So, as you start your study time make sure your

email is turned off and don't be tempted by the games you would much prefer to play. Work first and play later.

Deal with procrastination on online assignments.

Now comes the hardest part: sticking with it. Often the most challenging task is starting. Once you are started, everything becomes easier. So how do you get over the reluctance to start a task, particularly one you are not looking forward to? Here are some hints:

- **Make a commitment to work on your assignment at least ten minutes at a time.** Most of us can do something we really don't want to do for ten minutes. Set an alarm. When the alarm goes off, ask yourself if you can keep going. Most of the time the answer will be yes. If the answer is no, then take a short break and go through the process again. As you get better at this, lengthen the initial study time.
- **Recruit a friend or family member.** Ask them to remind you when you are scheduled to start studying. Each day they can ask you for a report on what you accomplished. There's nothing like being accountable to someone to help you hunker down and do it. Ask them to heap on the praise for all that you get done. But no negative comments, please. You already have enough of them in your head.
- **Handle anxiety.** What if it's time to start and your anxiety is going through the roof? Close your eyes and take ten deep breaths. Then tell yourself that you can do it. If that is not enough to hold back your anxiety, think about using a meditation app to calm down before studying. Exercise is another great way to push back anxiety.

- **Promise yourself a reward right after you are done with today's task.** It has to be immediate to work. It can be as simple as playing a video game, eating a favorite food, or calling a friend. But choose something you will forward to once you have put in your study time.

Get help when you need it and don't wait.

Things are not going well. You are getting further and further behind in your assignments. The least effective response is "I will do better," without actually changing what you are doing. Now is the time to ask for help and make real changes.

Take a deep breath and let someone know what the problem is. Here are possible resources:

- **Meet with your instructor.** Tell them you are struggling and ask for their input on how to best make up the work.
- **Meet with the counselor or coordinator for disability services.** Review your accommodations and see if changes need to be made
- **Get a tutor.** Not only will a tutor provide assistance with learning the material, but it also structures additional study time every time you meet. And a tutor can help you be accountable for doing the assignments.
- **Talk with a counselor or an ADHD coach.** These are experts in developing new strategies to help you succeed.
- **Study with a friend.** The act of doing the work with someone else can make a huge difference in the work you get done.

So, don't wait to make a change and ask for assistance. The earlier you reach out, the better the resolution.

Online classes do not need to be a calamity. But they do mean doing some hard work to develop new habits and to do some work every single day. When you are not able to stick to the schedule you've developed, then start again the next day with a commitment to put in the hours of work. It will get easier with time. And best of all, you will be developing strategies that will serve you well your entire life. 🧠

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