

Many students, though, struggle to focus and stay organization. Fear not! There are many tips and tricks for keeping yourself on task and organized.

1. Use your smartphone (see below)

Smartphones are built with every organizational tool imaginable. At the beginning of the semester, put all the important dates into your calendar and use the alerts to remind you in advance. Set reoccurring alarms to wake you up or remind you to go to class.

ADD students have the unique ability to hyper-focus. As such, you run the risk of finding yourself so caught up in a task that you completely miss your 2 o'clock class. Set alarms for everything! Also, when studying, put your phone in airplane mode to minimize distractions like emails, texts, or social media pushes.

2. Identify what distracts you

As Socrates echoed, "Know thyself." Does your mind wander in utter silence? If so, avoid the library. For some ADD/ADHD students, a quiet room with the occasional sound, like coughing, page turning, or whispers is more distracting than a noisy environment where they can tune everything out. If this is you, find a restaurant, café, or coffee shop that has Wifi and study there. Only, make sure you are respectful and buy something.

Do you need utter silence? Find a private study room in the library. If you have a hard time sitting still, a private study room will allow you to pace while you study without feeling like other people are looking at you.

Do you find yourself remembering other tasks, like mailing a letter or washing the dishes? If so, studying at home or in your dorm may not work well for you. The key is to figure out what distracts you and avoid those environments. It may be a trial and error process, but keep trying different settings while evaluating your productivity.

3. Break up your study times into chunks

The thought of studying for hours at a time can be daunting. Set a timer for increments of dedicated study time and be sure to include short breaks. If you find yourself "in the zone" and want to go longer than the dedicated study time, keep going! Just remember that when you take a break, set an alarm so that you don't accidentally spend an hour Facebook or Pinterest.

4. Make lists

Studies show that the ADD/ADHD brain has a difficult time prioritizing. Sit down and make a list of everything that needs to get done. Don't worry about the order. Go over your list a second time and number the tasks in order of importance.

If you have a large assignment, write out all the steps. This will help divide the task up into manageable chunks so that you are not overloaded with everything all at once. This will help you set realistic goals for yourself.

5. Save the best for last...or maybe not

There are two opposing strategies that work well for students, ADD or not.

The first way is, if there are multiple assignments of equal importance, do the ones you like least first. Starting is often easier than finishing for an ADD/ADHD student. After a certain amount of time, your attention will wane. But, if you are heading toward an assignment you want to do, it can help you stay focussed while you get there. Also, the victories you earn as each assignment is completed will fuel you to keep going. You may be more productive if you save the best till last.

On the contrary, some students find it best to start with the easiest tasks first. Going this route can help you get the juices flowing. Also, it may very well be the case that you cannot concentrate on the less appealing tasks because your mind keeps going back to the more favorable assignment. If you struggle to get the ball rolling, do what's easiest first. The same principle as stated earlier applies: the victories you earn as each assignment is completed will fuel you to keep going.

6. Write down stray thoughts

Our natural instinct is to find an escape route from unpleasant tasks. Menial things, like thinking about returning an email, or wondering what your dog is doing at home, pop into our minds and it is a temptation to do them "real quick" so that we don't forget. Don't fall into the trap.

Write down the fleeting, distracting thoughts. The brain is programmed to keep things that we don't want to forget in the forefront of our mind, which crowds out the information you are trying to learn. These thoughts can easily bounce around, distracting you from the task at hand.

Any stray idea that you feel the need to address, just write it down. Get it all out. It'll clear your mind so that you can concentrate on your work; if it's written down, it won't have to stay on your mind!

7. Find out what accommodations your school has

Traditional students can find a variety of resources at their schools, and many online programs are beginning to offer learning accommodation for students in need.

Learning accommodations counselors will help you find access to disability counselors or doctors who can prescribe medication. Your school might have accommodations for students with formally documented learning differences, including extra time for tests.

Find a counselor on campus to learn about your options. Several online schools like Oregon State, University of Connecticut, or American University offer academic support. These are only a few; there are more. Research your school and make some phone calls to determine what resources are available.

8. Get the correct diagnosis

If you struggled less (or not at all) with ADD/ADHD in high school, don't immediately assume that that is the problem now. Many of the symptoms of ADD/ADHD mimic the symptoms of anxiety. Medication like Ritalin or Adderall will actually make the problem worse instead of better.

General practitioners can help, but it's best to meet with a mental health counselor who will take the time to appropriately identify what is holding you back. It may be that talk therapy can help, or medication may be required. Most colleges provide mental health services for students, at no cost. It's best to take the time to fix the problem right the first time.

9. Move around!

This is a particular problem for those with ADHD—sitting still can be hard. When studying, find a place where you don't feel self-conscious moving around. Repetitive movements, like pacing back and forth or rocking in a chair can help you to concentrate and better retain information.

If you are attending classes in person, talk to your professor at the beginning of the semester and explain that you might need to stand at the back of the room occasionally. However, avoid doing anything that will distract the other students, like tapping your pencil or sitting in a squeaky chair if you have keep changing position.

10. Talk to yourself or others

If you are an auditory learner, don't be afraid to read information aloud to yourself. If you retain information better by talking through the concepts, study with someone else from the class. You can pace your study so that you alternate personal study with discussion.

College is a time for learning about yourself, among other things, and developing habits that you will take into the workforce. Often, individuals to whom things come easily get blindsided when they are finally faced with a task that doesn't. Learning how to overcome personal challenges now will make you that much more prepared to tackle challenges in the future, and with less frustration.

If organization seems more difficult for you than others, just remember that overcoming a difficulty makes you stronger than someone to whom it comes easily, and more able to overcome challenges in the future. See our article: [How to stay organized with your smartphone](#).

[How to stay organized with your smartphone](#)

Stay organized in college with the use of something you most likely have in your pocket—your smartphone. Fifteen years ago, the main tool for keeping track of day-to-day activities was a day-planner which was cumbersome to carry around, and easily misplaced.

Smartphones, now proverbial extensions of our bodies, are able to accomplish everything that pen and paper could do, and more. As a bonus, it can be backed up in multiple locations in case you misplace your phone.

With the use of your smartphone, you can ensure that your semester is organized, that you are on-time for events, and that your study time is productive.

Calendar your semester

A major benefit of smartphone calendars is audio alerts. This feature is invaluable, especially for those who forget to check their calendars on a regular basis.

Organizing the information from your syllabi at the beginning of the semester is time consuming, but worthwhile. Once it's done, you don't have to stress about missing deadlines. Within the first day or two of class, you should:

- Enter all important deadlines from your syllabi into your calendar (tests, papers, projects).
- Set alerts for each of these assignments at a time that will be convenient to check them—i.e., not at 5 AM or during another class.
- For assignments, make calendar alerts that will remind you a few days before the assignment is due, the day that it is due, and 10 minutes before it is due. That way, you have multiple lines of defense and no excuse for forgetting to turn in an assignment.
- If it is a larger assignment, enter a calendar “countdown” so that you don't find yourself in a time crunch—i.e., two weeks till paper due. Also, you can break it up into smaller chunks, and then place deadlines for each of those chunks on your calendar.

A term paper for example could have a deadline for the outline, the intro, the rough draft, reminders for people to review your rough draft, and the final draft. Always plan to have the assignment done a minimum of one day early. That way, if anything happens at the last minute, you have enough time to fix it before the actual due date.

- Follow your plan!!! The reason why some plans don't work is that the person doesn't follow them. It's not rocket science.

As the semester moves on, you'll be glad that you don't have to be constantly checking your syllabi. Edit your calendar if needed. Don't assume you'll remember that the test was moved forwards or backwards a week. As soon as events come up, input them into the calendar. This will keep you from accidentally double booking yourself with a study group on the same night as your friend's birthday party.

Alarms

It used to be that we only set alarms to get up in the morning. Smartphone alarms are much more versatile because you can set as many as you want, you can set them up to a week in advance, you can set reoccurring alarms by day and time, and even name the alarms. If you tend to be forgetful, use this feature to it's full advantage.

- For those who have a hard time getting up and getting to class on time, set 3 alarms: one for getting up, one for 5-10 minutes till you leave (to alert you that it's time to start gathering your belongings), and the third for when you need to be walking out the door. This is especially helpful for people with a long morning ritual.
- Set reoccurring alarms for reoccurring events. Luckily, if your schedule changes on a daily basis, you can have reoccurring alarms specific to each day of the week.
- If you have a tendency to hyper-focus, set alarms for everything! You might be taking a nap or studying between your 12 and 2 o'clock classes, and completely lose track of time. Set the alarm with enough time for you to pack up your belongings and be at class on time.
- Set alarms the night before for non-reoccurring events, like doctor's appointments, meeting a friend for lunch, or picking up bananas on the way home, just in case you don't hear the calendar alert.
- If the event is less than seven days in advance, you can set it as a reoccurring alarm for the day that it will happen the following week. You'll have to remember to turn it off afterwards, or else it'll keep telling you that you have a 3 o'clock dentist appointment.
- If you have a hard time getting to bed, set 3 alarms: one telling you to start wrapping things up, one 15 minutes later saying to start getting ready for bed, and one for the time you want to physically be in bed. This gives you adequate time to wind down and finish anything that you are working on.
- NAME ALL THE ALARMS! You can change the alarm names so that it doesn't read "alarm". Be descriptive: "Leave in 10 minutes" or "Lunch with Margot".
- If you are an online student, make alarms for predetermined study times. If you need transition time, make 2 alarms: one alerting you that study time will start in an hour, so be packing up whatever you are doing, and then a second one to signal the start of study time.

You might start getting worried that you will have too many alarms going on, but alarms can do two very important things: 1) they can remove the worry to remember everything, which can lead to unnecessary stress and lessened focus when you do get around to things; and 2) they will help you

get mentally prepared for a task before you have to actually start working on it, thus making your time more productive.

Timers

Timers are an invaluable tool for organizing your study time. Some people are comfortable studying for hours at a time. For those who are more easily distracted, timers will help you stay on task, while allowing time for breaks. [This is especially helpful for those with ADD or ADHD.](#)

- Use your timer to keep yourself from getting off-task. Determine the amount of time you want to study in chunks. For example, if you decide that you want to study for the next hour, then set your timer to go off in 1 hour. Any distractions that come your way, you can tell yourself that you will address them as soon as the timer goes off.
- If you'd like to take a break between chunks of study time, put your break on a timer (something like 15 minutes). Too many times people say "I need a break" and then get on Facebook for the next 2 hours. Make your break an actual break, with an actual planned time for the break to end, and for you to get back to work.
- If you have a few hours before you need to leave and don't want to go through the hassle of setting an alarm, figure out how much time you have and set a timer instead. It accomplishes the same goal.

Lists

Do you always feel like you write a to-do list and then you can't find it? There are a number of apps in phones that will allow you to create notes with different names. If you'd like a dedicated "to-do" list app, Wunderlist, Task, and Pocketlist are all included on the Forbes "Best To-Do list Apps." Several apps allow you to create lists verbally.

Smartphones are here to stay and vital for people who are either incredibly busy or incredibly forgetful. With your smartphone, you can create a schedule with manageable goals, study time with fewer distractions, and set alarms that remind you to be where you're supposed to be, when you're supposed to be there...as long as you stick with the plan!