

ADHD: Fact Sheet for Studying at Home

For a person with ADHD who studies at home: completing assignments, sitting online assessments, and working without a teacher in the room. Also for the family member or support person helping them.

What is going on

ADHD affects executive function. Executive function is the brain's management system. It starts tasks, plans steps, holds information in mind, shifts between tasks and finishes them. As one researcher puts it, ADHD is not a problem of knowing what to do. It is a problem of doing what you know, at the time it needs doing (University of Minnesota, n.d.).

In study, this shows up as:

- Trouble starting, even when the person wants to do the work.
- Attention which follows interest. A dull task feels much heavier than its size.
- Weak sense of time. A deadline three weeks away feels like no deadline at all, until it is tomorrow.
- Limited working memory. Long instructions get lost partway through.
- Easy distraction by noise, a phone, or a new thought.
- Careless errors, skipped instructions and misread questions, from rushing rather than not knowing (Raising Children Network, 2025).
- Strong emotional reactions to criticism or failure.

ADHD shows up in three ways: mainly inattentive, mainly hyperactive and impulsive, or combined. A person's pattern often changes over time (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2026).

Strengths to build on

- Creativity and unusual approaches to problems.
- Intense focus, sometimes called hyperfocus, on topics of real interest.
- Energy, initiative and resourcefulness.
- Openness to new ideas and experiences.

These strengths come from ADHD research and education guidance (Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training [ADCET], n.d.-a; Raising Children Network, 2025). Use them: start with the interesting part of a task, choose assignment topics linked to real interests, and use bursts of energy for the hardest work.

Setting up to study at home

- **One study spot.** Use the same place each time, away from the television, windows and busy rooms.
- **Phone out of reach.** Put it in another room, or use a website and app blocker during study time.
- **Sound control.** Use noise-cancelling headphones, or background sound such as instrumental music, if silence feels worse (Raising Children Network, 2025).
- **Everything ready before starting.** Gather books, laptop, charger, water and notes first. Hunting for things mid-task breaks focus.
- **Movement allowed.** A fidget tool, a wobble cushion, a standing desk or a short walk between sessions helps, not hinders.
- **All dates visible.** Put every due date into a calendar with alarms. Use a wall planner as well, so deadlines are seen without opening an app.

- **Best time of day.** Schedule the hardest work for the time of day when focus is strongest.

Doing an assignment, step by step

1. **Capture the date.** On the day the assignment is set, put the due date in the calendar, with reminders one week and two days before.
2. **Understand the task.** Read the question and the marking guide. Rewrite the question in your own words. If anything is unclear, email the teacher now, not the night before.
3. **Break it into tiny steps.** A step should take under 25 minutes. “Write the essay” becomes “open the document”, “write the heading”, “list three points”. Free tools such as Goblin Tools break a task down automatically (University of Minnesota, n.d.).
4. **Give each step its own mini-deadline.** Write these in the calendar too.
5. **Start with the most interesting part.** Momentum from the enjoyable part carries into the rest (University of Minnesota, n.d.).
6. **Work in timed blocks.** Work for 25 minutes, then take a 5-minute break. This is called the Pomodoro method. Many people finish more in 25 minutes than they expected (University of Minnesota, n.d.).
7. **Research with a limit.** Choose a set number of sources. Write the reference and page number as you take each note, so nothing needs finding again.
8. **Draft without fixing.** Get ideas down first. Dictation software helps if typing slows thinking.
9. **Edit in a separate session.** Read the work aloud, or use text-to-speech, to catch careless errors and missing words.
10. **Check before submitting.** Use a checklist: every part of the question answered, marking criteria met, word count, references, correct file name.
11. **Submit early.** Aim for one day before the deadline, to leave room for technical problems.

Doing an assessment or exam at home

Before

- Find out the format: time limit, question types, open or closed book.
- Practise with past papers or sample questions under timed conditions.
- Set up the room the day before. Clear the desk, charge devices, close all other tabs and apps.
- Tell everyone at home the start and finish times. Put a sign on the door.
- Eat, drink water and use the bathroom before starting.

During

- Read every instruction twice. Underline the key words in each question, such as “compare”, “explain” or “list two”.
- Answer the easiest questions first to build momentum. Flag hard ones and come back.
- Set an alarm for the halfway point to check progress against time.
- Before moving on from each answer, reread the question once. This catches the most common ADHD error: answering a different question from the one asked.

After

- Write down one thing which helped and one thing to change next time.

When the person is stuck

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What you notice	What to try	Why it helps
Cannot start, even with time available	Pick the smallest first step: open the file, or write the title. Set a 5-minute timer. Agree to stop after 5 minutes if it still feels impossible.	A tiny start removes the wall in front of the task. Momentum usually carries past 5 minutes.
The task feels too big	Break it into steps on paper or with a task-breakdown tool. Choose one step only. Hide the rest.	A long list overloads working memory. One visible step does not.
Bored and drifting	Start with the most enjoyable part. Change location. Set a small reward for finishing the step.	Attention in ADHD follows interest and reward.
Distracted by a new thought	Write the thought on a “Later” list and return to the task.	The thought is saved, so the brain lets it go.
Lost focus partway through	Stand up and move for two minutes, then return to the checklist and find the next step.	Movement resets attention. The checklist shows where to restart.
Working alone feels impossible	Body doubling: study alongside another person, in the room or on a video call, each doing their own work (University of Minnesota, n.d.).	Another focused person nearby helps the brain stay on task.
Hyperfocused on one small part	Set a timer for each section of the assignment. When it rings, move on.	Hyperfocus loses track of time and of the bigger task.
Deadline tomorrow and the work is not done	Contact the course provider today and ask about an extension. Then work on the parts worth the most marks first.	Early contact keeps options open. Marks-first planning saves the most grade.
Upset after feedback	Read the feedback once, then put it away for a few hours. Come back and choose one thing to fix.	Strong emotional reactions settle with time. One fix feels possible.
Forgot what the task asked	Keep the task instructions printed or open beside the work at all times.	Working memory does not need to hold the instructions.

Tools which help

- Calendar app with alarms, and a paper wall planner.
- Task-breakdown tools such as Goblin Tools.
- Pomodoro timers such as Pomofocus.
- Website and app blockers.
- Dictation (speech-to-text) built into Word, Google Docs, Windows and Mac.
- Text-to-speech for reading and proofreading.
- Noise-cancelling headphones.
- Online body-doubling sessions.

Adjustments to ask your course provider for

In Australia, the Disability Standards for Education 2005 apply to schools, TAFE, universities and training providers. Providers must consult with the student and make reasonable adjustments (Department of Education, n.d.). Adjustments used for ADHD include (ADCET, n.d.-a; Raising Children Network, 2025):

- Extra time in exams and timed assessments.
- A separate, quiet room for exams.
- Rest or movement breaks during exams.

- Assignment extensions, agreed in advance where possible.
- Assistive technology in assignments and exams.
- Instructions given in writing as well as spoken.
- Large assignments broken into smaller submitted parts.
- Reading lists provided early.
- Recorded lectures.

Contact the provider's disability or student support service at the start of the course, not when a problem arises.

How a support person at home helps

- Help break the task into steps, without doing the task.
- Sit nearby and do your own work, as a body double.
- Agree on check-in times. A check-in is "How is step three going?", not "Have you done it yet?"
- Help set up the calendar and reminders at the start of the course.
- Praise effort and progress, not only results.
- Keep the home quiet during exam times.

Avoid

- Long spoken instructions with no written copy.
- Telling the person to focus or try harder. The difficulty is not effort.
- Sarcasm or criticism about lateness or mess.
- Long to-do lists shown all at once.
- Starting several tasks at the same time.
- Doing the work for the person. This removes the chance to build the skill.

Sources

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