



Studying and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Many students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) find that conventional study advice is based on assumptions about attention, motivation, and organisation that don't reflect how their brains actually work. This guide takes a different approach, focusing on the specific conditions under which you are most likely to engage, and how to build those conditions into your study practice.

The strategies here are grounded in what research and lived experience tell us about ADHD. They emphasise designing your environment, habits, and support systems to make it easier to get started, prioritise tasks, and keep going. Some ideas here might be familiar, others new. Ultimately, what works is personal, and will likely take a process of trial and error over the course of your degree.

ADHD and motivation

Most people assume motivation functions like a dial you turn up when something matters enough. For many people with ADHD, that's not how it works in practice. Importance and good intentions often aren't sufficient to get a task moving, even when you genuinely care about the outcome.

Research on ADHD suggests you may be more likely to activate around a specific set of conditions: **interest, challenge, novelty, urgency, passion, or social connection**. When a task aligns with one of these, engagement can come relatively easily. When it doesn't, starting can feel disproportionately difficult because the conditions for activation aren't present.

Reflection: how could you leverage these motivators to help you with your study?

ADHD brains experience time differently

You might hear this described as "time-blindness," but some people say it's more like a distortion of time – where time can feel inconsistent, hard to track, or disconnected. This might show up as:

- knowing a deadline is coming but not feeling any urgency about it
- estimating a task will take 30 minutes when it actually takes much longer
- feeling like you have "plenty of time", then suddenly you don't
- struggling to start something because it feels too far away to be real
- getting absorbed in one thing and losing all track of other deadlines.

We don't always have to fight against our different experience of time, but it is worth understanding when it does become a problem for you and having some tools you could try. Practical strategies tend to focus on making time visible and concrete.

Making time visible



- Timers, clocks in your study space, and time-blocking on a physical or digital calendar can all help anchor you to how long something will take.
- Breaking tasks into smaller, timed chunks creates more immediate reference points for you to work with.

- When a task feels vague, such as “work on lab report”, getting started feels harder. However, if you define it as a set of discrete tasks with set end points, it may be easier to tackle.

Creating the conditions for success

For students with ADHD, the environment can play a powerful role in either supporting or undermining concentration.

- Think about factors such as noise level, lighting, clutter, and the proximity of distractions. These could be the difference between a productive session and one that never quite gets started.
- Studying alongside others – known as body doubling – can significantly improve task initiation and persistence, even when there is little or no interaction.
- Having a consistent routine reduces the mental effort of getting started. When you recognise a familiar sequence, you can shift into focus mode more easily without the internal negotiation that often leads to procrastination.

Design your own “launch sequence” – a short ritual (3–5 minutes) that tells your brain: it's time to study.

(e.g. make a drink, put headphones on, write today's one goal on a sticky note)

Step 1: _____

Step 2: _____

Step 3: _____

ADHD and wellbeing

Stress does not always present in obvious ways. For many students with ADHD, it can look like increased avoidance, a sudden inability to start tasks that would normally be manageable, or heightened emotional reactivity. Recognising your own early signals is an important and learnable skill.

If you have a diagnosed condition that is likely to impact your studies, register with our Student Wellbeing Advisors for support. Visit [Accessibility Support](#) to explore available services.

UWA India offers mental health and wellbeing support, including confidential counselling and strategies to build resilience and manage stress. Visit [Wellbeing Services](#) for more information.

If you are in immediate danger or a life-threatening situation, call the national emergency helpline [112](#). For mental health crisis support, please contact the TELE-MANAS helpline (toll-free, 24/7): [14416](#) or [1800-891-4416](#).