

# Getting Organized

## Folders

Taking action daily is the key to getting through the semester. And it's a lot easier to take action daily if you are organized.

Disorganization is a key trait for those with ADHD. The best way to get organized is design a system you'll use from day one and follow it every day afterwards.

You should rely on a system of folders for both your electronic and paper files. Each course should have two folders—one on your hard drive (or in the cloud) and one in your room. I recommend that you use colored photos and pick a different color for each course.



Image by freedigitalphotos.net

I also recommend purchasing a set of colored transparent plastic folders the same color as you course folders. These are to hold your syllabus and only your syllabus. Any time you need to confirm a due date or look up the requirements for an assignment, you only need to pull it out of your bag.

Label all three sets of folders the same to avoid confusion. Now you can store electronic files—the papers and journal entries you write—in your digital storage cache while your handed back work—labs, quizzes, tests, etc.—will go in your paper folders.

To further help you organize, devise subfolders on line for various aspects of your work. You might have a subfolder for journal papers, another for your semester project, and one for digital readings.

Next you need to take all the due dates listed in your syllabus and put them in your calendar. Schedule an alert to go off two or three days before each assignment is due as a reminder of the pending due date. Also be sure to put in the dates when classes are cancelled or there are holidays. These create bonus study time, or if you're caught up, sleep or gym time.

### **To-Do Lists**

To do lists should be compiled today for tomorrow's tasks. Look at your calendars and see what you have due over the next few days. Look how your work is chunked out—see below—to determine what you have to do when for your upcoming classes.

Make a list of the items you have to complete to get your work done for class. List them and the date due on a piece of paper or in your phone or computer—someplace where you'll be sure to go look at it.

As you look ahead your to-do list will grow long. I know from my own battles with ADHD that I like to choose the easy and fun tasks to do today, even if they're not due for a week. This creates a time sucking death trap that you never escape because the urgent things—everything that's due tomorrow—doesn't get done.



Image by Enderst07 <http://flic.kr/p/8cGaAN>

That long to do list can look like a pit of poisonous snakes that are itching to bite you. Don't shove it at the bottom of your bag. You need to prioritize your list.

The first thing to prioritize by is the due date of your assignments, tests, and semester projects. Remember, you're going to chunk out your work, so prioritize also by when your chunks are scheduled to be completed.

It's important to break down your items that need doing into actionable items. Therefore, don't write "study for test" down as a to-do. Break it into smaller actionable items like "Read lecture notes," or "Review last three chemistry labs." Doing it this way gives you specific tasks that you're more likely to do. Also, "review lab notes" is less forbidding sounding than "study for test."

Plus, "review lab notes" has an end point that is definite. "Study for test" is less definite. You may not be sure when to stop. If you end up hyperfocusing you could end up all your allotted school work time for the day and not get your other tasks done.

## Chunkin'

Chunking is the key to managing your assignments and projects. Having ADHD, you're going to find that working for a long time on the assignments that bore you is pretty painful. That's why you got to break them up. You work on a small part of the assignment each day.

### Reading

Let's take reading first—many ADHDer's least favorite thing to do. Imagine that each week you have a Monday night political science class. The syllabus says to read chapters one and two before the next lecture, which is 58 pages of reading.

Yes, 58 pages of reading on government and policy *can* be torturous if you're an art history major. But stick with me. We're going to chunk it out and take action daily.

- Tuesday: Read pages 10-19
- Wednesday: Read pages 20-29
- Thursday: Read pages 30-39
- Friday: Read pages 40-49
- Saturday: Read pages 50-59
- Sunday: Read pages 60-67