

10 Tips For College Students With Disabilities

by Kathleen Masterson



College Bound With ADD

Emily Algire earned good grades in elementary school. But by middle school, there were signs that something was wrong. Emily was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. After being coached with specific learning strategies, Emily is now entering her second year of college with an upbeat attitude and good grades.

Get that story.

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A student's freshman year in college represents a big transition. Many students move out of their parents' home and onto a bustling college campus, where they can be overwhelmed with new workloads, academic demands, and a multitude of social and extracurricular events. For college students who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or learning disabilities, staying organized and focused can be extra challenging.

Clinical psychologist and author Kathleen G. Nadeau writes that the key to success is developing learning and organization strategies to cope with learning disabilities. In her book, *Survival Guide for College Students with ADHD or LD*, Nadeau outlines the importance of choosing a college that is a good match for the student and offers support for those with ADHD or learning disabilities. But most important, she says, is building and persisting with strategies and habits that help the student stay on top of his or her studies.

Here are a few of Nadeau's tips for students with ADHD transitioning to college:

1. Seek out help when you need it.

Support from others is key to success. Don't get discouraged; find a learning coach or a tutor to help you with picking classes, creating a study schedule and planning. Also,

consider joining or forming a study group to increase your learning and help you stay on track.

2. Map out how you will use your time.

With more unscheduled time and lots of extracurricular activities in college, it can be easy to fall behind in coursework. Find a time management tool that's easy and convenient for you, like a daily planner or a PDA, and set aside 15 minutes daily to map out your day. Be realistic about the time your tasks will take, and remember to schedule in breaks and adequate sleep.

3. Plan ahead, especially for final projects and tests that are a big part of your grade.

Break down assignments into smaller, more manageable chunks, using the syllabus that the professor gives out the first week of school. For example, if you know reading a chapter of a dense biology textbook takes you several hours, break it into sections and plan to read a section a day.

4. Learn how you learn.

It sounds obvious, but figuring out how you learn best can really help you understand, absorb and retain material much more effectively. Figure out if you are a visual, auditory or hands-on learner, and then study in a way that matches the strengths of your learning style.

5. Be an active learner.

When reading for class, stop yourself and ask: "What does this remind me of? What is the main point?" By associating new facts with things you already know, you improve your memory and understanding. Choose classes that are interesting to you to make the learning meaningful and fun.

6. Create effective study routines.

Find a study place that is distraction-free, such as the library stacks or alone in your dorm room. Your study spot doesn't have to be a quiet place; some people find that music helps screen out distractions.

7. Organize your study space.

Clutter at your desk makes it tough to work. Make a task list of the things you need to get done and keep it in your work space. Develop study routines so that your study habits are conducive to learning.

8. Start early.

Fear of failure or feeling overwhelmed are some of the main reasons that students procrastinate. If you have difficulty getting started, don't be afraid to talk to the professor or a tutor. They can help you outline realistic steps toward beginning and completing your work.

9. Identify problems that repeatedly get in your way.

If you're feeling frustrated, try to figure out why you are feeling that way and how you can problem-solve. Some questions you can ask yourself: "Am I frustrated because my ADHD/LD sometimes requires me to work harder than other students? Do I need a study buddy? Should I work on this course in smaller bites because it's so difficult for me?"

10. Inquire about resources that can help you learn.

If you ask in advance, often you can get text and assignments recorded. And it's always a good idea to talk to your professor about your specific challenges. For example, if multiple-choice questions are difficult for you to understand, you could ask to complete short-answer questions instead.