

Published on ADDitudeMag.com

## 6 Tips to Fight Distractions and Get Homework Done!

From fidgeting to shifting between different tasks, six techniques to help distracted ADD/ADHD students focus at school and on their homework.

by Melinda Boring

---

Having two children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), I tried a lot of traditional study methods through the years, with no success. Such techniques – usually involving sitting down at a table for extended periods with pen, paper, study guides, and textbook – do not accommodate the way that ADD/ADHD brains work.

My son, Josh, has severe ADD/ADHD and poor working memory. His standardized test scores didn't reflect his high IQ, because he rarely finished a test in the time allotted. The scratching of students' pencils and whispers from those who had already finished drew his attention away from his work. We brainstormed ways to shut out the noise and keep him on task. When he wore foam earplugs to block out background noise and used a visual timer to pace himself, he finished every test.

Study strategies that use the ADD/ADHD brain will turn a laggard into an achiever. Here are six of my favorites:

### 1) Move Around

Walking around or marching while studying helps maintain a child's focus. Some children do better with their book in hand as they pace, using it as a reference to check information as they memorize it. My children prefer to be hands-free, with the study material propped up on a mantle or bookshelf in the living room. Josh would look at a spelling word, take one step for each letter he spelled aloud, and spell it again as he marched back to the book.

### 2) Speak Out Loud

Talking out loud adds auditory support to the information a child is studying. This improves recall. It is easy for ADD/ADHD students to look at a page and "read" it without focusing seriously on the material. By speaking study material aloud, the student forces his attention to stay on task. My daughter, Beckie, is a strong auditory learner. As she studies her biology notes, she reads a section of the text and paraphrases it, out loud, in her own words.

### 3) Fidget

Studying at school, without the opportunity for short breaks, is unbearable for most children with ADD/ADHD. When a student can't get up and move around, "fidget items" can provide small, controlled movements that increase attention or calm him down, as needed. My children's favorite fidget item is Wikki Stix – wax-covered, reusable string – that they wrap around a pencil or form into shapes. As Josh grew older, he wanted to be more subtle about his fidgeting, and kept a squishy ball in his sweatshirt pocket.

### 4) Change Position

Have your student use a sitting disk, instead of a chair, when he is doing written work – an essay or filling out a study guide. This sturdy, lightweight, portable cushion fits on top of a chair seat, or it can be placed on the floor. The gentle, controlled motion of the disk satisfies a child's need for movement without distracting him. The sitting disk was the only thing that could keep Josh in a chair for any length of time.

### 5) Work in Bursts

Encourage your child to study in bursts. Children with ADD/ADHD struggle to maintain attention when doing activities that don't interest them. Working intensively for short periods of time will be more productive for them. Beckie struggled to memorize multiplication tables. She needed repetition, but she was easily bored and frustrated, so we used the "Can Do Kids" DVD, to bolster her memorization skills in a multisensory way. She would watch a brief segment of the program, which had different songs and exercises for each number family, over and over. Seeing a math fact written on the screen while moving around to fast-paced music helped her



## 6) Shift Subjects

Many successful students with ADD/ADHD use shifts when studying. "Shifting" is not multitasking, it is having a student work on a subject until his attention starts drifting. When it drifts, the student works on a different subject. A child may have to shift back and forth between assignments several times before the work is completed. Giving the ADD/ADHD student a mental break from one subject area by starting another is the key to being productive.

*[Faint, mirrored text from the reverse side of the page is visible through the paper, including phrases like "study strategies that use the ADHD brain will run a hybrid..."]*