



## Tips for Educators

# Helping Students with ADHD Using the Instructional Process

Effective academic instruction helps children with ADHD succeed. As you plan and carry out lessons, use these techniques across subject areas and grade levels to enhance the learning for students with ADHD.

### Introducing Lessons

Students with ADHD learn best when structure is incorporated throughout lesson planning. Having a sequence that follows a basic routine and maintains a level of consistency are both vital. It allows students to focus on the new information and activities, rather than on trying to figure out what comes next and what they are supposed to do. Use the following strategies to develop a routine that works for you, and use it when introducing every lesson.

### Summarize the activities of the whole lesson visually and verbally

Start any lesson with a review of what the student will learn and the activities you will use to teach it. For example you could say, "Yesterday we worked on counting by tens. Today we are going to review yesterday's lesson. We are then going to learn to count by fives. You will be doing work with your partner as well as independent work." On the board you might have written

1. Review counting by tens
2. Learn to count by fives

3. Practice counting by fives with your partner
4. Practice counting by fives on your own



### Present learning objectives in many ways

Students with ADHD often benefit from many modes of presentation. For example, with learning objectives, you can write them on the board, say them aloud, ask students to repeat them, or ask students to copy them off of the board. Include at least two forms of presentation.

### Describe behavior expectations

Tell students how they are expected to behave during the lesson. For example, if they are doing

group work, explain that they may talk with their partner or group. If they are doing independent work, you might tell them you expect them to work quietly. You also want to include how they can get your attention if they have a question, need help, or if the behavior expectations provide a challenge, e.g., they feel disrupted by other students talking.

### List materials

Tell students the materials they will need during the lesson rather than leaving them to figure it out on their own. Be specific. For an art project, tell them specifically the items they will need, such as “three sheets of construction paper, their crayons, and scissors.” For a reading assignment, you might tell them they need their reading book, workbook, and two pencils.

### Include time limits

Tell students how long they will have to work on each activity, and consider setting a timer to help them externally see the time. Include the specific



time set aside for each part of the lesson—reviewing previous materials, instruction of new lesson, group work, and independent work—rather than large amounts of time such as “the next hour” or

“the whole class period.” Time limits are meant to help students stay on track and enhance their learning, not cause anxiety. You might need to experiment with different time limits to see what works for your students.

### Teaching the Lesson

Conducting the lesson means presenting new material to students and letting them practice. To help students learn and remember the new information, connect it to prior knowledge. Give them ample opportunities to practice the material with you guiding, with other students, and on their own. Provide feedback throughout the lesson and prepare different types of tools to help students who are struggling.

### Stick to the plan

Your introduction sets expectations for the whole lesson. Try to follow the outline you have given. This strategy helps reinforce structure and consistency within a lesson. If changes are made, provide explanations so that they become predictable.

### Review the previous lesson

Students with ADHD are more likely to have deficits with their working memory. Help students recall previous knowledge by reviewing it. This practice will not only reinforce the previous lesson, but also help them remember the new lesson. Practice provides context for them to connect to in their memory.

### Provide guidance to stay focused

Students with ADHD lose focus easily. They might become captured by a day dream or other activ-

ities in the classroom. During lessons, help them stay focused by using tools such as guided notes, colors, mnemonics, and probing questions.

### Check for understanding

While presenting the lesson and during practice activities ask open-ended questions. You might start by asking and then answering your own questions. You can then guide the class to the answer, allow students to answer collectively, and lastly answer on their own. Sample questions include, “What have you learned so far?” “How did you get that answer?” and “Why is this information important?”

### Give students enough time

Often more processing time is needed to learn new tasks. One teaching model, the gradual release of responsibility, transfers responsibility from the teacher to student through four stages (I do, we do, you do together, you do alone). Giving ample time in each stage allows students to practice mastery of information before moving on.

### Provide extra support

Watch for students who are having difficulty comprehending the information. Provide extra help by explaining the material in a different way, using more examples, or having another student serve as a peer tutor.

### Break work into small steps

When completing class work, divide assignments into smaller pieces. For example if you have a worksheet with 10 questions, cut the worksheet in half. Give the students the first five questions and then after they complete it, give them the remaining five. This helps students learn to break tasks into steps and keeps them engaged, setting them up to successfully complete an entire assignment.

### Incorporate assistive technology

The use of technology allows students to participate actively and may help them organize their thoughts. Allowing students to do practice work

on a computer or tablet or write on the board are ways to make assignments more engaging. Assistive technology can also be used to separate tasks into components and thus can avoid unnecessary multi-tasking. For example, dictating



notes before typing or writing an essay separates brainstorming from the task of writing and can make it more manageable.

### Provide time reminders and model how to pace

Often students with ADHD need help managing their time. Even though you’ve give total times for the lesson and each activity, continue to provide consistent and frequent reminders. In addition, model for students how to pace and work within a given time limit. For example, “You have 10 minutes left to complete these 6 practice problems. You should be on problem number three or four by now.” These reminders help students stay on task and complete their work in the allotted time.

### Ending a Lesson

Conclude your lesson and help students transition to the next activity smoothly. How you end a lesson is as important as how you start it. Make sure you finish strong so that you can transition to the next lesson and start the process over with ease.

### Summarize key points

Help students solidify the new knowledge they learned by reviewing the key concepts. Repetition is a must for student with ADHD. You can

use open-ended questions to have students explain what they learned, or you can restate the objectives.



### Review take-home assignments

As with activities during the lesson, make sure to review homework assignments. Ask students to read the assignment listed on the board and write it down. You might even have a few students repeat what the assignment is out loud. Consider checking planners to ensure that students wrote everything down accurately. Remember to tailor practice homework to skills the students have learned. Independent practice at home should serve as a reinforcement to promote retention of the content taught.

### Smooth transitions

It is important for students with ADHD to know what activity or situation is coming up next. You especially want to focus on reminding them of any changes in the rules for the next activity. Step-by-step instructions on how to prepare for the next lesson, visual prompts, and more time for students to organize will help create a smooth transition.

## References

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For further information, please contact:  
National Resource Center on ADHD:  
A Program of CHADD  
4601 Presidents Drive, Suite 300  
Lanham, MD 20706-4832  
1-800-233-4050  
[www.chadd.org/nrc](http://www.chadd.org/nrc)



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