

# You Do the Math

...and you can with these helpful tips from our coach!

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Like it or hate it, we all need to study math. Even if you don't find it the most thrilling subject, you'll certainly discover it's one of the most useful. You calculate the miles you run in the park, budget paychecks from your summer job, and before you know it, you'll be balancing your own checkbook. So having a sound knowledge of math really pays off.

But when you're a teenager with AD/HD, math poses many challenges. More than other subjects, math requires sustained attention and good test-taking ability. It's a cumulative subject, so you need to understand today's material in order to keep up with tomorrow's. The more advanced the math, the more sequential steps you'll need to solve problems.

If you're someone whose mind wanders, you can easily fall behind in math, even if you maintain good grades in other subjects. So whether you're working on equations in summer school, or getting ready for math class to

resume in September, these useful tips can help you succeed in this essential subject.

## Location, Location

Identify any distractions that may be limiting your ability to stay focused. This may mean requesting a seat up front near the chalkboard, or away from a window or—sorry—your friends.

## Speak Up

For any school subject, perhaps even more so for mathematics, asking questions will help you pay attention. If you think you missed some-

## 4 Steps to Solving a Math Problem

- 1 Read the problem through carefully. Make sure you understand exactly what the question is.
- 2 Devise a plan to solve the problem. Choose which formulas you'll use, and decide the order in which to use them.
- 3 Focus on each step of the problem individually. Take your time with each step.
- 4 Always review your math. Ask yourself, "Does the answer seem reasonable? Does it make sense?" If not, repeat these steps.

thing, ask the teacher to repeat it. Chances are, someone else missed it too. Do you find you work better at a particular time of day? Ask your guidance counselor if you can schedule math for that particular time.

### Solve Problems

Math requires active—not passive—studying. In other words, you have to *do* math problems, not just think about how to do them. The more you practice problems, the better your math skills will become. Working on math consistently throughout the year, even in summer when school isn't in session and homework hasn't been assigned, will make formulas and techniques easier to master.

### Keep Things Interesting

As a teen with AD/HD, boredom may be your number-one enemy. If the doldrums set in, you'll have even more trouble concentrating than you usually do. So, instead of sitting at your desk for two hours being

bored by your math homework, form a study group and make math fun. (Start a study group this summer, and all of you will have a head start on September's les-

sons.) Others can help you focus by making math interactive. As a rule, the more challenging the material, the more time you'll have to spend on it. Suggest that

## MATH TEST TIPS

1. Glance over the entire test before you begin. If you don't have extended time, this will provide a rough estimate of how quickly you'll need to proceed.
2. Answer questions out of order. Begin with the questions you absolutely know how to do. Tackling the easy questions first will build your confidence. Check the problems off as you go along, so you don't miss any.
3. If you get stuck on a problem, move on to the next. You can always go back later.
4. If a problem has more than one part and you can't do the first part, proceed with the second. Often, partial credit is awarded for what you do.
5. Read questions carefully, and make sure that you don't omit any parts to the problem. You don't want to miss the opportunity to receive full credit.
6. Verify that the final answer makes sense. You may catch a lost decimal point.
7. Take extra time to check your basic calculations.
8. Before the test, avoid hanging out with classmates who tend to make you worry or cause your stress levels to rise.

your group meet once or twice a week. The end of the course will be more difficult, so meet with your study group more frequently as lessons get more involved. Also, think of ways to use the math concepts you are studying in class outside of class. For example, add up numbers relating to your budget, instead of just adding random ones, to make learning math skills more interesting.

### The Big Test

Unlike English or history, where you may be graded on papers, math grades largely depend on tests. And while you probably won't be taking any until fall, it's never too early to start addressing test-taking anxiety. The condition is very common in students with AD/HD—especially when the test is in math. Here are ways to lessen it:

#### Stay on top of your homework.

Studying over an extended period instead of cramming the night before is a must. This helps transfer information from your short-term memory to your long-term memory, which will be easier to draw upon during the actual test—even if you're nervous. Ask your teacher for assistance in preparing far in advance. If you're on the border between a C and a B, and your teacher knows you put effort into studying, it could tip the scale in your favor.

**Be your own advocate.** Find out what accommodations are available at school, and ask for them. Maybe you'd like permission to use a calculator. If you feel anxious about finishing on time, ask for extra time. If you're easily distracted, ask to take the test in a quiet room away from the rest of the class.

**Get a good night's sleep.** And not just the night before the test. According to research done by Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, it's important to get sufficient sleep on a routine basis. Staying out late on weekends can affect how much information you retain during

the week. If you're studying complex logic problems, for example, you can lose up to 30% of what you learn if you don't get enough sleep.

#### Eat and drink sensibly before a test.

Avoid food and beverages that will lead to a "sugar crash" or make you feel drowsy. Protein snacks and plain old water are excellent test-taking fuels. Consumption of foods rich in choline—which stimulates the brain neurotransmitter acetylcholine and is found in fish, eggs, meat, and rice—may help improve memory.

#### Address both the mental and physical components of test-anxiety.

Stress-management tools, like exercise, yoga, and meditation, can help. Start making these rituals part of your routine this summer. During the test, take deep breaths, concentrate on which muscles feel tense. Experiment with visualization. Picture a serene scene, like a waterfall or a beautiful forest. If you practice these techniques

before the exam, by the day of the test, you should have no trouble relaxing. And always arrive early for an exam, or you'll send your relaxation skills down the drain.

#### Get up.

If you're like most people with AD/HD, you find sitting for a long time difficult. When you can, take a bathroom break. Break your pencil and go sharpen it. Stretch in your seat.

**Be positive.** The second aspect of test anxiety is mental, and you can start addressing this now. If you tend to make negative comments about your abilities, change them to positive ones. Focus your thoughts on the test—not on your performance. Above all, remember that a test grade is not a reflection of who you are, nor does it predict future success.

**Reward yourself after the exam.** It doesn't matter how well you think you did. It's the effort that counts, and preparing is hard work, so celebrate.



### What do you do to get through school-work of any subject?

Tell us your strategies by writing to Study Tips, *ADDitude*, 42 West 38th Street, Suite 901, New York, NY 10018, or e-mail [letters@additudemag.com](mailto:letters@additudemag.com).

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