**The Pros and Cons of Having AD/HD When You’re a Writer**

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**AD/HD Signs and Symptoms**

**Hyperactivity or Restlessness**

* Inner restlessness, agitation, racing thoughts
* Getting bored easily, craving excitement/risk
* Talking excessively, doing a million things at once
* Trouble sitting still, constant fidgeting

**Disorganization & Forgetfulness:**

* Poor organizational skills
* Tendency to procrastinate
* Trouble starting and finishing projects
* Chronic lateness
* Frequently forgetting appointments, deadlines
* Constantly losing or misplacing things
* Underestimating the time it will take you to complete tasks.

**Impulsivity:**

* Frequently interrupt others or talk over them
* Poor self-control, addictive tendencies
* Blurting out thoughts that are rude or inappropriate without thinking
* Acting recklessly or spontaneously without regard for consequences
* Trouble behaving in socially appropriate ways

**Emotional difficulties**

* Easily flustered and stressed out
* Irritability or short, often explosive, temper
* Low self-esteem and sense of insecurity or underachievement
* Trouble staying motivated
* Hypersensitivity to criticism

**Myth:** ADHD is just a lack of willpower. People with ADHD focus well on things that interest them; they could focus on any other tasks if they really wanted to.

**Fact:** ADHD looks very much like a willpower problem, but it isn’t. It’s essentially a chemical problem in the management systems of the brain.

**Myth:** Kids with ADHD can never pay attention.

**Fact:** Children with ADHD are often able to concentrate on activities they enjoy. But no matter how hard they try, they have trouble maintaining focus when the task at hand is boring or repetitive.

**Myth:** Someone can’t have ADHD and also have depression, anxiety, or other psychiatric problems.

**Fact:** A person with ADHD is six times more likely to have another psychiatric or learning disorder than most other people. ADHD usually overlaps with other disorders.

**Myth:** Unless you have been diagnosed with ADHD or ADD as a child, you can’t have it as an adult.

**Fact:** Many adults struggle all their lives with unrecognized ADHD symptoms. They haven’t received help because they assumed that their chronic difficulties, like depression or anxiety, were caused by other impairments that did not respond to usual treatment.

*Source: Dr. Thomas E. Brown, Attention Deficit Disorder: The Unfocused Mind in Children and Adults*

**ADHD that is undiagnosed and untreated can cause problems in virtually every area of your life**

**Physical and mental health problems.**

**Work and financial difficulties.**

**Relationship problems.**

The symptoms of ADHD can put a strain on your work, love, and family relationships. You may be fed up with constant nagging from loved ones to tidy up, listen more closely, or get organized. Those close to you, on the other hand, may feel hurt and resentful over your perceived “irresponsibility” or “insensitivity.”

The wide-reaching effects of ADHD can lead to embarrassment, frustration, hopelessness, disappointment, and loss of confidence.

**First Reframe how you view yourself:**

Chances are you’ve received and told yourself a lot of negative messages over the years as a result of your ADHD, which impacts how you perform as a writer.

It affects:

* Whether you see yourself as being a competent writer
* How much time you’ll spend writing
* Whether you’ll query your work (which will determine whether you’ll get a publishing contract or not)
* How often you’ll query your work

Take the negative messages and reframe them into something positive, for example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SEE | AS |
| Bossiness | Leadership |
| hyperactivity | Unlimited energy |
| Stubborn | persistent |
| Day dreamer | imaginative |
| Questions authority | Independent, free thinker |
| Argumentative | persuasive |
| Lazy | Laid back |
| Manipulative | Gets others to do the job |
| Fails to follow directions | Creative thinker |
| Strong willed | tenacious |

**The Pros of Having AD/HD as a Writer**

* We focus on things we find interesting like writing– often for hours at a time
* We have oodles of creativity coming up with lots of new ideas for stories, characters, worlds (continually asking the question: what if) We can see the little picture as well as the big picture as we weave the smaller threads of minor characters and multiple themes into one great tapestry
* We’re constantly learning our craft and evolving as writers
* We love to learn new things and include what we’re learning in our stories
* We’re researchers, spending hours and hours searching information in books, on the internet etc. to add to our stories to make them better and to make us better writers
* We’re paying attention to our environment, watching people, places, things, listening to dialogue for opportunities to include them in our stories
* Our minds are constantly racing, processing information, thinking, writing scenes, rewriting scenes, looking for opportunities for stories, for ways to make our current stories better. We don’t stop writing even when a pen or computer is not at hand
* We’re good at problem solving and we don’t give up when we don’t find an immediate solution. We continue to think about the problem until a solution is found.
* We’re ambitious, taking on big projects like writing memoirs, writing not just one book but a book series, organizing writing conferences, volunteering in writing organizations, critiquing the writing of fellow writers
* Multi-tasking? No problem. In fact, it’s usually impossible to do just one thing at a time
* If you tell an ADHDer it can’t be done, we’ll show you how it CAN be done.

**The Cons of Having AD/HD as a Writer**

* Lots of ideas means a lot of stories started but not finished
* Have a hard time focusing on the things we find boring
* Hyper focused on what we find interesting, the mundane things that need to be done fall by the wayside (paying bills/doing taxes, doing laundry)
* Get so distracted by researching we don’t get actual writing done
* Get so distracted by our environment and how it applies to our writing we’re not paying attention to our involvement in it (i.e. listening to people, taking our off ramp on the freeway)
* Often take on too much and then get over stressed when the deadline looms
* Procrastinate things that are unpleasant
* When the negative self-talk kicks in it can be hard to believe your writing is any good, that you’ll ever be published/published again, or that if you do somehow get published, anyone will think it’s of any worth

**Some of the Cons Are Some of Our Greatest Strengths as Writers**

* Multiple projects: More than one project allows you to work on something else when bored or stuck - overall productivity maintained
* Distractibility: Great story ideas come during these times when we can’t stop thinking about the plot and characters
* Mundane tasks: Who really wants to do taxes and laundry anyway? JK (delegate)
* Procrastination: The taxes and laundry along with lots of other stuff will get done during our times of procrastinating something even MORE unpleasant - so no worries (ex. 18,000 word workbook done in a week, taxes done)

**Tips for Dealing with AD/HD as a Writer**

**Personal Evaluation**

Know your personal ADHD symptoms that are specific to writing and make a list of your strengths and weaknesses.

Know your support system and use them to help you be more successful:

* Family
* Friends
* League of Utah Writers and/or other Writing organization
* Critique groups
* Sprint groups
* Fans

League of Utah Writers: <https://www.leagueofutahwriters.com>

Online sprint group: <https://www.mywriteclub.com/beta/word-sprints#/>

See also LDS Beta Readers on Facebook for beta reading, sprints, contests and online conferences.

**STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS**

**1. Structure your environment/schedule so you can write more successfully**

* Figure out your best time of day to write
* If you don’t already know when the best time is, experiment with different times of the day
* Set up an area to write in
* Ideally it should be the same area so when you sit down your mind is primed to write
* Have your writing props ready to go (computer, notes, pens, pencils, drink, music, snack etc.)

**2. Have writing and editing goals and stick to them**

Be specific with your writing and editing goals so you have greater chance of achieving success not only in writing productivity, but completing projects

Use the SMART method: (insert image)

S-specific (knowing what you will do and how)

M- measurable (having a precise way to measure)

A- attainable (being able to visualize the path)

R – realistic (being able to visualize the results)

T – timely (having a timeline for achievement)

It’s easier to procrastinate writing, or to do less when we don’t have specific measurable goals to complete each writing session and to reach the end of a project

Keep a writing/editing calendar that is weeks/months in advance in order to keep yourself on track

**Writing Goal Examples:**

* Write 500/2000/2500 words a day/week
* Edit 500/2000/2500 words a day/week
* Write for 30/60/120 minutes a day
* Write two chapters of my novel a day
* Write a blog post once a week/month
* Submit an article to my local newspaper for publication
* Write a short story and submit to >>> Contest
* Write the back cover for my new book
* Write a query letter for my novel/short story
* Submit 5 query letters to agents and publishing houses every Monday
* Write my author newsletter once a month/two times a month

Use a goal tracker to help you track your progress from beginning to end of each project.

Excel sheet or track in an app

<https://www.pacemaker.press>

Other apps: Momentum—shows you your goal/task whenever you open a tab

Forest App: if you stick to your task without getting distracted by your phone, you grow a tree. If you fail, the tree dies. Goal: build a forest of trees and look back on your productivity.

**Ways to Prioritize Projects**

* According to deadlines (set by others and self)
* According to level of interest (what excites you the most—keeps your attention)
* According to % finished (what can you finish first)
* According to Maximum Effect (what packs the biggest punch)

**Maximum Effect**

What will build your author brand?

What will excite your readers the most?

What will bring in the most money?

What will excite you the most in the short term and keep you writing long term?

\* You can combine these for even greater effectiveness: A project that has a strict deadline, is 90% complete and which you’re excited about, and which your readers are also eagerly anticipating.

**3. Use Your Support System**

* Share your goals with your support system (ex. LDS Beta Readers and Google doc)
* Share your progress with your fans through newsletter or on author page with an app
* Establish your writing habit and get support from family/friends

**4. Eliminate Distractions**

* Know what distracts you and get rid of it before your writing time starts (ex. clean your work area)
* Listen to music to cut out outside sounds or for inspiration
* Focus button in Word (insert image)
* Use brackets to remind yourself to insert information later
* Turn off Wi-Fi on your computer, turn phone to mute

Apps:

* Use an app or program to cut yourself off from internet if necessary <https://visitsteve.com/made/selfcontrol/>
* Selfcontrol turns off email, Twitter and Facebook for a predetermined period of time. Once started you can’t stop it unless you delete the app or restart the computer
* You can use an app to turn off all of your devices (example: <https://freedom.to/pricing>)
* Noisli: a list of productive sounds to get you in the zone and help you concentrate (or not, depending on whether you like background noise)
* Timestats: Gives a weekly pie chart of your weekly site visits. See how much time has been spent in work, research and personal time.

**5. Writing versus Editing**

Creative thinking and analytical thinking are using two different areas of the brain.

They are in competition with one another.

Our overall productivity goes down when we’re editing while we write.

Final ADHD Myth: You don’t always have to have an intense level of excitement for your project to write

“A great writer … I blanked on who it was … said, ‘Sometimes you’re writing and you’re extremely motivated, cranking out words … and other times it’s just a slog. Every word on the page is a huge amount of work, and you feel like crap, like you’re hammering away … it doesn’t feel good at all.

“One thing you’ll notice is, if you wait a week, and then look back on the stuff you wrote, you can’t tell the difference between when you were motivated and when you weren’t.’

“It’s really important to remember that the quality of your work isn’t greatly affected by the amount of enthusiasm you had at the moment you wrote it.” Andy Weir author of The Martian

**Understanding Rewards/Motivators**

* In order for rewards to work they have to be rewarding to you
* Has to be something you are willing to work towards
* What motivates us/excites us changes
* People change, so do our rewards/motivators
* Look for new ways to motivate you, new methods, new apps

**Challenge:**

Choose one weakness from your list to work on and turn it into a strength

**Remember**

Change takes time but does happen

*“I'm not disabled. I'm excited, challenged, humbled. I chose a writing career where I learn every second, face my "disability," apply it, and excel.*

*Do I interrupt people? Yes. But I'll never interrupt anyone else as much as I do myself—and I don't mind interruptions. Ever. Bring on the joy.”*

William Gray (C-Span producer)