

A Simple Plan for Student Planners

Kids with attention deficit may resist getting organized with a student planner — but our expert tips for using this tool will help even low-key learners.

by Susan Kruger, M.Ed.

Most teachers agree that planners are essential. Students who use them usually earn As and Bs. Students who don't often miss deadlines and lose points on tests, classroom assignments, and projects.

Many students — especially those with ADHD — don't like using a planner. They think it's a hassle. My students find planners restricting. "I'm a laid-back person, so planners don't work for me," they say. I tell them, "Even laid-back people need to keep track of assignments, deadlines, and appointments. I have never met a student who wants to lose track of things."

I compare planners to a playbook in sports. A planner can serve as a playbook for their life by helping students play offense to manage their homework and to make time for "fun stuff" that they want to do. It also helps them play defense, guarding against the things that pull them off track.

Then I explain why using a planner has been so challenging for them. "You need to use your planner several times a day, but every time you need it, it's difficult to access. By the time you find it, open it, and flip to the correct page, your teachers have moved on...and you get lost." They usually nod, appreciating the fact that I understand their pain.

Then I give them tips to use their planner.

How to Set Up a Planner

- 1) USE THE RIGHT PLANNER.** The ideal planner will be thin, with a spiral binding and a weekly page layout. Avoid bulky planners and leather covers.
- 2) USE A BINDER CLIP TO MARK YOUR CURRENT PAGE.** Every extra page-flip adds stress to an ADHD brain. A binder clip becomes a "handle" for one-flip access.
- 3) KEEP A PEN IN THE SPIRAL BINDING** to avoid the "pen hunt" that often brings use of a planner to a screeching halt.

How to Use a Planner

- 1) KEEP THE PLANNER ACCESSIBLE.** Students should keep their planner in the front pocket of their book bag or a binder that they carry to their classes. It should take no more than two small actions to retrieve their planner.
- 2) REVIEW "TRANSITION POINTS"** clearly. Now that students can access their planner quickly, they should try to anticipate when to use it. Common transition points include: Sunday evening (see below), the time in each class to record assignments and due dates as they are announced, at the locker as they are packing up at the end of the day, at home to track the assignments they need to do, and a before-bedtime final check, ensuring that all of their assignments, books, and supplies are in their book bag.
- 3) WRITE QUICKLY.** Encourage your child to use "texting" language, so she can keep up with the rest of the class.

4) NEVER RELY ON MEMORY. Students with ADHD often say that their assignments are so simple that they can remember them without writing them down. The problem is that they forget, or they use valuable mental bandwidth trying to remember. Students with ADHD have the most to gain from writing in their planner, taking pressure off their frontal cortex.

How Parents Can Help

A meeting at the beginning of the week (on Sunday evening) works miracles in improving the use of a planner! Everyone in the family grabs their planners or calendars to discuss the week ahead.

Parents can start by telling family members about their weekly schedule--everything from deadlines at work to carpool plans. This sets the stage for children to respond with *their* plans. This is a great way for the family to coordinate and avoid last-minute conflicts. Most important, it drives home the importance of "thinking forward."

Copyright © 1998 - 2016 New Hope Media LLC. All rights reserved

Source: A Simple Plan for Student Planners