Focusing on a task for any extended amount of time, especially if it is repetitive and not particularly engaging, can be difficult for many people. As someone with ADHD, I used to find concentrating on anything challenging. In second grade I started taking medication for my ADHD, and that continued throughout grade school. However, I was always told that when I became an adult, I’d have the self-control to maintain my focus without a pill or patch.

But no one ever explained to me exactly how that would happen. ‘Practice’ and ‘maturity’ never seemed like very useful pieces of advice. I’ve noticed that even many adults who have had decades to practice focus still struggle to concentrate, so obviously there’s more to it than that.

As my senior year of high school progressed, I became determined to ween myself off my medication by college, without having my GPA suffer. That’s when I realized that focus is not some natural ability or skill that needs to be practiced. I realized that maintaining focus is about a mindset. That gave me a lot of hope, because of course the mind is a very malleable tool.

By the end of my first semester of college, I stopped taking my medication completely. I stopped thinking about needing it, even for exams. Yet no one noticed any change in my work ethic, and my GPA remained solid. The key was changing my mindset when it came to work, and the biggest factors that changed my mindset were finding purpose, making lists, and marking achievement.

Now, when I start any task, as soon as I know **what** I need to do, I ask **why** I should do it. What benefit, knowledge, or skill will this task bring me? Once I find the meaning, I hold that in place and use it to motivate me. This is hardest when the task simple but required, yet even their purpose can be found. I usually say something like “this is necessary to move on to the next, more interesting step” or “repetition will build my understanding/proficiency.”

In the mornings and evenings, I am an avid list maker. I fill my planner, as well as sticky notes and scratch paper, with lists of what I will do today (and throughout the week), and how long I will spend on each task. And I make sure that every moment of the day, from waking up to falling asleep, is accounted for. Sometimes the task may just be “(6- 6:30pm: Break)” in which case I do whatever I want. The point is that at any given moment, I only have one task scheduled. It is much, much easier to focus on one thing than two or three. Lists also get all of the worrying of what you need to do on paper and out of your mind.

Lastly, I make certain to mark achievement. This is similar to motivation, as marking the accomplishment of a task brings a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Additionally, it tells your mind “this task is done” and you can now forget about it, making room for other things. I usually make a box next to every task on my list, and check it off when it is done. I may also take a quick 2-3 minute break between tasks, particularly between drastically different tasks. This helps give the mind a breather and freshen it up for taking on the next challenge.

Another useful technique to help both with focusing and time management is the Pomodoro Technique. This involves 25 minutes of work followed by a 5 minute break. Every 4 repetitions (2 hours) take a half-hour break. This is meant to keep the mind fresh while keeping the time you do spend working productive.