

title: **Working as a software engineer with ADHD**

num_comments: 11

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Post Text

Hey guys! I recently graduated from a BSc in CS program and, because of the fact I was diagnosed with ADHD, I was given 50% extra-time on exams but never struggled with deadlines when it came to assignments or projects. I ended doing great in uni and graduated with a 3.7 GPA and I'm currently weighing my options for graduate school, but now I'm worried that my learning disability will make my software engineering career unsuccessful as I know that companies can't accommodate for my disability in the real-world. Any of you guys that have learning disabilities and struggled in their careers because of them or were you not bothered by them? Thanks!

Comments

Commenter_2

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 27

If you go into industry, you'll quickly find that exams are not indicative of real world work. Very few developers work independently and in many cases reinventing the wheel with clever but difficult-to-maintain data structures or algorithms is rarely preferable to using an established, maintained library.

Being able to work with a team, make good design decisions and evaluate tradeoffs, and deconstruct a problem into system components or chunks of work are all very important skills. If you are good at diagnosing, problem solving, or write good documentation, you're worth your weight in gold.

Have you done any internships? Getting a chance to see how industry or government development works is really eye-opening.

As someone with ADHD-PI, my main issues are time management, spreading work out over time reasonably, estimating how long anything is going to take, avoiding time-traveling over meetings (thanks, time-blindness), and staying out of interesting rabbit-holes that don't actually add to my project goals.

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

One thing I noticed about software engineering is that my work can be a rabbit hole all to itself. I once got so absorbed in finishing a PR I'm proud of, I missed my lunchtime hairdresser appointment. Cue profuse apology, but this was one of the first times I actually missed appointments for a semi valid reason. My fiancé sometimes catches me sneaking some work in late at night. Work can be really addictive.

Commenter_3

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 8

The only thing you really will need to structure your time on will be leetcode - industry is a different beast that accommodates all types of minds.

That being said, you will need to start build a structure in your life to deal with ADHD outside of work (which in reality is the harder part)

Commenter_4

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

Tons of software engineers have ADHD and also related conditions, so don't feel alone.

I am an iOS developer, what I found helpful was working in a constrained creative environment. Deadlines and target help keep me focused, but usually I am given, or I ask for, space to solve the task/problem the way I see fit. This way you don't end up starting things and not finishing before you get bored and want to do something new.

Communication is key. On a daily basis, I tell someone senior (my manager usually) what I am working on, how I'm doing, and what I'm struggling with. This helps set expectations and reduces stress and self-doubt because I now don't get asked "Why is this taking so long?" or "Why has this not been done yet?".

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

We have a daily meeting where we do just that. Report what we did, what difficulties we faced and what we want to do. I actually love it. It helps me feel less alone and feel accountable. And if I encounter difficulties I can air it right away instead of not having any new input and slacking off because I'm discouraged.

With coronavirus one of the first priorities my team had was finding a suitable tool to replace our in person meetings. We pretty much demanded it because we can't imagine working without it.

Commenter_5

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

As long as the teacher is passionate, I can learn easily.

To bad most teachers are not.

In middle school, I've struggled with pretty much every course. I always thought I was pretty dumb. Then I found programming, and even went to college (okay 2 times, failed hard the first time :)).

In college, I aced courses (like math) which I failed very, very (very?) hard in middle school. The difference: passionate teachers (mostly) and way less contact hours. I had a buddy to team up with though. I did so the first 3,5 years, which helps to start doing something.

Also having some hacks. If I start something, I can't get it out of my head. But it's hard to start something, it seems like a lot of work... So I just started an assignment by only writing a single paragraph. Sometimes this led to me writing a full assignment, other times I came back the next day or so.

Time management was the hardest part for me. Thankfully I had my non ADHD buddy.

Commenter_6

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

> I was given 50% extra-time on exams but never struggled with deadlines when it came to assignments or projects

You're in luck! Work in the real world is pretty much a series of group projects.

> as I know that companies can't accommodate for my disability in the real-world.

The picture isn't quite so bleak as that.

1) Many companies accidentally provide ADHD accommodations without even actually considering ADHD. Examples include:

* Skilled Product/Project Managers. Seriously. A good PM is the #1 ADHD accommodation you can find. Go to

PM meetups and network. Don't talk about your own brain, but just about how you know that a good PM is critical to team success.

* Project documents where engineers, designers, and PMs collaborate to write down things like [company/team goals](https://qconlondon.com/london2020/presentation/how-build-engineering-culture-focuses-business-impact), why the project matters, [how to recognize success](https://www.leadingagile.com/2018/02/leading-lagging-indicators/).

* Automated test frameworks. Test-Driven Development is an amazing flow to get into, but even if you're not doing it strictly, just having automated tests to re-run and remind you what you were doing is **amazing**

* Test Engineers. Does your ADHD come with a side of anxiety that you're going to fuck things up? Guess what: There is a 2nd entire fucking job title for someone who can usefully structure the conversation about that and rather than just fobbing you off with "don't worry", collaborate with you rationally assess the risks and to design approaches to mitigate the impactful*likely ones. I also highly recommend taking the Rapid Software Testing course if you can seriously worth more than 8 sessions of cognitive behavioral therapy.

2) Many companies do explicitly make accommodations. These tend to be on a smaller scale.

Commenter_2

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

>A good PM is the #1 ADHD accommodation you can find.

This is so incredibly, absolutely true!

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

My tech lead (i guess same as PM) is so accommodating. He doesn't know I have adhd but he never minded manifestations of my adhd symptoms just because he knows different minds work differently, and as long as we do good work who cares? Sometimes I think at a different company I might not have done half as well.

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

> Any of you guys that have learning disabilities and struggled in their careers because of them or were you not bothered by them?

Somebody will probably strangle me for saying this because I almost think this is a dirty secret... but it's very hard to notice ADHD in software engineering in my experience. Nobody at my work noticed. Of course it also helps that coding is very addictive for me. Every time my couple of lines of code works I get a dopamine hit so no matter how I slack off I always go back to work. I feel like I can adapt my work to my ADHD instead of contorting myself to please arbitrary school standards.

At my appraisal interview I told my tech lead I slack off a lot. He said 1. He didn't notice because I deliver high quality work at a blistering pace 2. He doesn't care. If "slacking off" (or AKA taking long breaks doing other things) helps me in my work and keeps me satisfied, he doesn't mind if I do it.

As long as you're delivering work on a regular basis, *they can't tell* if you're taking "1.5 time" or whatever. It's a meaningless concept outside an exam. You could get lucky and stumble upon just the right documentation to do what you need to do, or you could spend days banging your head against the wall. You take however long it takes, in whichever way you get there.

On the whole I think I deliver at least as much work as my coworkers. My bosses are very satisfied with me and said to me that everyone had only good things to say about me and they plan to give me responsibilities more than my experience level would warrant. Yes, me. The slacker. My teachers hated me. You'll be glad you're out of school.

Commenter_7

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

you got WHAT? what uni did you go to