The ADHD Time & Routines Workbook

12 Executive Function Tools for Adults Who Don't Work at a Desk, Each With a Two-Minute Version: Shift Workers, Nurses, Cooks, and Drivers

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Read This First

If you stop halfway through a page, the page still worked. The half you did is the half you needed today.

That is how this whole book is built. You are allowed to skip around. You are allowed to come back next month. Nothing in here expects you to read every page, and nothing in here will make you feel bad for the pages you skipped. If you want to skip everything and do one useful thing tonight, it is the first two-minute box, in Module 1. It takes two minutes.

Every tool in this book comes three ways:

- **Filled in once for a made-up person**, so you can see what a finished page looks like before you touch yours.
- **The two-minute version**, in a dashed box, for the days when the full page is too much. The two-minute version is not a consolation prize. It is the tool you will probably use most days, and it is the restart. There is no Monday in this book. There is no starting over. There is only the box, whenever you get back to it.
- **The full page**, with blanks, for when you have twenty quiet minutes and a pencil.

The three together are the whole method, and the method has a name so you can find it again: the Real Day Method. Measure one real day. Attach your routines to things that happen, not to clock times. Keep a two-minute version of everything.

A pencil is better than a pen. You will change your mind, and that is the point. Keep this book where you keep your keys. The worksheet pages are meant to be photographed, torn out, or cut down to pocket cards; they do not need a desk, because you may not have one. Reading this on a Kindle or a phone? The blanks are on paper: the whole worksheet set is a free printable PDF at cleartablepress.com/adhd, no email address required.

The thirteen worksheets

Worksheet	Page	Worksheet	Page
0. Your Anchors	7	7. The Pocket Card	41
1. Your Real Day	11	8. Minimum Viable Day Off	46
2. The Leak	17	9. Three Numbers	50
3. The Hours Before	22	10. Three Faces	54
4. The Launch Pad	27	11. The Handoff	59
5. From Sit-Down to Bed	32	12. The Reset	63
6. The Recovery Day	37		

What this book will not do

This book is about time, routines, and the pile of small tasks that follow you home. It does not give medical advice. It does not discuss medication, when to take it, or how it fits a night shift; that conversation belongs with the person who prescribes it. It does not give advice about staying alert on a long drive or a long night. It will not tell you whether you have ADHD, and it does not need you to have a diagnosis to be useful. If you want any of those conversations, they belong with a clinician who knows you. The last module has a page on when a workbook is the wrong tool and a clinician or a coach is the right one.

The people in this book

The made-up people in this book do not work at desks. Their days do not have a nine and a five, and most of the advice they were given about time was written by people whose days do.

Dez is a nursing assistant on a hospital unit, on rotating twelve-hour shifts: three one week, two the next, some of them nights. Dez has a dog, a badge that hides, and a couch that wins most nights around 11:40.

Marisol runs the line at a restaurant four nights a week, 2 p.m. to close, and picks up Sunday brunch. Her tips are cash, her paycheck lands on the 1st and the 15th, and her mail has a coffee ring on it.

Theo drives a parcel route. He is at the depot at 5 a.m., home by 3:30, and has a two-year-old named Nico and a partner, Sam, who works evenings. His mornings start at 3:50 and, on a bad day, leave the house at 5:12.

You will meet no one else. Every rule in the book is shown done once for one of these three before you do it for yourself. They are composites, built from the rules, not from any real person.

Your Anchors: the one page that runs the book

An anchor is something that happens on every working day no matter which shift it is. “Seven o’clock” is not an anchor, because on a night run seven o’clock is bedtime. “Clock in” is an anchor. “The first time I sit down at home” is an anchor. “Coffee” is an anchor for most people and “the dog goes out” is an anchor for the rest.

Every routine in this book hangs on an anchor instead of a clock time, so a day run and a night run use the same routine. There are seven, and you will use most of them:

Anchor	**On a day run, Dez**	**On a night run, Dez**
Wake	5:05 a.m.	3:00 p.m.
Leave	6:19 a.m.	6:19 p.m.
Clock in	7:00 a.m.	7:00 p.m.
Break	about 10:30 a.m.	about 10:30 p.m.
Clock out	7:30 p.m.	7:30 a.m.
Sit down	about 8:35 p.m.	about 8:35 a.m.
Bed	after the sit-down routine	after the sit-down routine

The clock times move by twelve hours. The anchors do not move at all. That is the whole trick, and it is why the rest of this book can be short.

Fill in yours once. You will point back to this page from every worksheet.

Worksheet 0. Your Anchors

Rule on this page: an anchor is an event, not a time. Seven anchors, filled in once, reused by every routine in the book. *Time: about five minutes.*

The two-minute version. Write down the one thing that happens on every working day, day shift or night, that you would notice if it did not happen. That is your first anchor. The rest can wait.

My first anchor: _____

Anchor	What it is for me	On a day run	On a night run (or a different shift)
Wake			
Leave			
Clock in			
Break			
Clock out			
Sit down			
Bed			

Module 1. Your Real Day

The gap

Dez is a nursing assistant. A coworker said, “Just wake up at the same time every day.” Dez works three twelves one week and two the next, some of them nights. The advice was not wrong. It was written for a different life.

Here is what Dez’s Tuesday actually cost. The shift started at 7 a.m. Dez planned to leave at 6:15, which meant being up at 5:30. Dez was up at 5:30. The car left the driveway at 6:41. Twenty-six minutes disappeared between the alarm and the door, and Dez could not have told you where they went. That happened four shifts out of five. Over a month of ten shifts, that is close to three and a half hours, spent standing in a kitchen, not late yet, then suddenly late.

The problem was not the alarm. The problem was that between the alarm and the door there were eleven things, and Dez’s plan had room for four.

One thing to say before the fix. Rotating shifts are hard on every brain and harder on an ADHD brain, because the sleep that keeps attention working never lands at the same hour twice. This book cannot fix the schedule. It can make the day inside it more predictable.

The rule

Time blindness is not a character flaw. It is a perception problem: the ADHD brain does not feel time passing the way a clock does. The fix is not to feel it better. The fix is to put time where you can see it.

Most time advice asks you to estimate better. This module asks you to stop estimating. You write down what actually happens on one ordinary day, once, in a form that takes about ten minutes total across the day. Then you build your routines around the day you actually have, not the day you keep planning.

Two things make this work for a shift schedule:

1. **Anchors instead of clock times.** A clock time moves when your shift moves. An anchor does not. “Alarm” is an anchor whether it rings at 5:30 in the morning or 3 in the afternoon after a night. “Clock in” is an anchor. “The

first time I sit down after work" is an anchor. You will attach your routines to anchors, so that a night shift and a day shift use the same routine.

2. **Counting the in-between.** The eleven things between the alarm and the door are the in-between. Nobody plans for the in-between, so the in-between eats the plan. You are going to count them once, and then give them a number.

The rule, done once

Here is Dez's Tuesday, written down the way this module asks. Dez set five phone alarms labeled "write it down" and spent two minutes at each one. That is all the effort this took.

Anchor	What I planned	What actually happened	Minutes I didn't plan for
Alarm (5:30)	Up, shower, dress, coffee, leave by 6:15	Up 5:30. Phone 5:30–5:48 (didn't notice). Shower. Couldn't find the badge. Dog needed out. Coffee. Realized lunch wasn't packed. Skipped lunch. Left 6:41.	26
Clock in (7:00)	Start	Started 7:04. Charted late all morning to catch up.	4
First break (~10:30)	Eat something	Scrolled instead. Ate nothing. Crashed at 1.	0, but it cost the afternoon
Clock out (7:30 p.m.)	Home by 8, dinner, bed by 10	Sat in the car 20 minutes. Drive-through. Home 8:35.	35
Bed	10 p.m.	Couch. Fell asleep 11:40 with the TV on.	100

Dez's in-between number for the morning was 26 minutes. Not 5. Not 10. Twenty-six, four days out of five.

What Dez did with that number is the whole point. Dez did not try to get faster. Dez moved the alarm by 25 minutes and did nothing else. The car left at 6:19 the next shift. Dez was not late. Dez did not "fix" a single one of the eleven things. Dez stopped pretending they took zero minutes.

What most books leave out

A bigger buffer tends to fill. Two weeks after the alarm move, check the door time again. If the in-between has grown back to 26, the number was never the problem; one item was. For Dez it was the phone: eighteen of the twenty-six minutes were 5:30 to 5:48. The phone now charges in the kitchen, and the alarm that goes off is a cheap clock on the dresser. That is the only one of the eleven things Dez ever changed. People who write about habits call this friction: the phone is not banned, it is eleven steps away at 5:05 a.m., which is the same thing.

The evening has a different lesson. The twenty minutes in the car is not wasted time. It is the transition, and shift workers need one. Dez kept it. What Dez changed was the anchor. "The first time I sit down at home" became the trigger for a three-step routine: phone on the kitchen charger, tomorrow's badge on the hook, lunch bag out. Ninety seconds. It runs the same on a day shift or a night shift, because it is attached to sitting down, not to a clock.

The couch at 11:40 is not in this module. It gets its own, Module 5, because it is the most common thing readers of books like this report, and it deserves more than a line.

What the tool is not

It is not a schedule. You are not going to write a schedule and follow it. Schedules assume tomorrow looks like today, and yours doesn't.

It is not a habit tracker. A habit tracker records every day you didn't do the thing. This page records one day, once. You can do it again in a month if you want. You do not have to.

It is not a promise to be faster. You are exactly as fast as you are. The number is for planning, not for judging.

The row that cost the afternoon

Look at Dez's break row again. If your appetite is low in the morning, for any reason, the fix is not willpower at 10:30. It is something you will eat cold, packed the night before at sit-down.

Worksheet 1. Your Real Day

Rule on this page: plan around the day you actually have. Measure one ordinary day, once. Count the in-between. Attach routines to anchors, not clock times. *Time: two minutes for the box; about ten minutes for the full page, spread across one day.*

The two-minute version. Skip everything below except this. Tomorrow morning, note the time your alarm goes off and the time you actually leave. Subtract. That number is your morning in-between. Move your alarm by that many minutes. Done. Come back to the rest of this page whenever, or never.

Alarm: _____ Left: _____ In-between: _____ minutes. New alarm time: _____

Line 1. Pick a day. An ordinary shift, not a day off. Date: _____
Shift: _____ to _____

Line 2. Set your anchors. Five events that happen on every working day no matter which shift it is. Dez used: alarm, clock in, first break, clock out, bed. If you drive, “engine on” is a good one. If you have kids, “kids out the door” is a good one. If you fall asleep on the couch, “the first time I sit down at home” is the one to use.

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

Line 3. The day. One row per anchor, filled in when its alarm goes off.

Anchor	What I planned	What actually happened	Minutes I didn't plan for
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			

Set a phone alarm for each anchor at today's shift times, labeled "write it down" (a watch alarm if the phone spends the shift in a locker). Two minutes each. If you miss a row, leave it blank. Three rows is enough. (Alarms wear out for everyone, and fast. That is why this page asks for one day, not a habit.)

Line 4. My in-between number. Look at the row that matters most (for most people it is the first one). Minutes I didn't plan for: _____. Dez's was 26.

Line 5. The one move. Do not fix the in-between. Give it its number. Which anchor moves, and by how many minutes?
_____ moves by _____ minutes.

Line 6. One anchored routine. Pick one anchor from Line 2 and attach three steps to it, each under thirty seconds. Dez's: "first time I sit down at home" → phone to kitchen, badge on hook, lunch bag out.

When I _____, I will: 1. _____
2. _____ 3. _____

If you only did the two-minute box, you are done with this module. If you did the whole page, do not do it again tomorrow. Do it again in a month, or when your schedule changes.

Where this goes next

Your anchors from the front of the book are the skeleton for every routine from here on. Module 3 is waiting mode, the hours before a late shift that vanish. Module 4 is leaving the house on a 50-minute day. Module 6 is the recovery day after nights. Next: the same trick, pointed at money you are already losing.