

Some tips from an ADHD producer on how to finish songs and stay productive

13 ADHD/ADD FRIENDLY PRODUCTION TIPS:

- 1. Limit yourself to 3 VST instruments.** ADHD/ADD brains are not meant for more, more means more distractions. That's why less is more is true for ADD/ADHD producers. I chose to strictly limit myself to the number 3. This means max 3 VST synths and 3 VST effect plugins. 3 gives you enough variation and rotation to not keep yourself bored.
- 2. Choose 3 VST instruments with a simple user interface, good presets banks and easy to create new sounds.** Too many buttons, options, sounds, panels etc means more distractions. Remember that ADHD/ADD brains need less distractions. So I chose to work with 3 VST synths with simple UX where you can see and tweak all buttons etc from 1 window. I chose Dune, Minimonsta and Logic Pro X Retro Synth.
- 3. Work on 3 songs at a time.** 3 gives you enough variation to not bore your ADD/ADHD brain. When you get bored on song 1, jump to song 2, when you get bored of song 2, jump to song 3. When you get bored of song 3, jump to song 1 again. When you repeat this cycle you will come further in your process with 3 finished songs eventually.

Rather than starting new song ideas every time you get bored on your song idea 1 which will lead to folders of 100s of song ideas. When you get bored on all 3 songs you are working on, take a break, do something else or take a longer break of 1 week. Whatever works for you. But stay focused on those 3 songs.

- 4. Produce deliberately with imperfections in mind.** It is easy to get stuck in 16 bar loops, intros, polishing sounds, melody notes, etc. ADHD/ADD minds are prone to get everything perfect from the start because rejection and negative criticism has hurt us in the past. However, the way to overcome this is to quickly record your sections and ideas roughly. You need to practice your mind that imperfections are fine.

After a while, you train your brain that a few notes amiss here and there is not a big deal. It is the feeling of actually looking at your DAW and seeing that your arrangement window for your song is roughly finished. That is why I record my ideas quickly, even if it is some notes off, I still know how it should sound and I can easily adjust the notes later.

I record my intro, chorus, bridges, breakdowns etc. I mark them with colors and names and place them out roughly in my arrangement window. The feeling of progress is more satisfying than aiming for endless perfection on a 2 bar loop or similar.

- 5. Aim for progress, rather than perfection.** I used to record, re-record and polish my drum patterns, or melodies before I could decide that it's good enough to start a song. I spend hours on this. With no progress. I found out that I was striving for perfection and not progress. That is why I learned to aim for progress and record ideas quickly and sketch them out in my arrangement window.

Even if they are rough it gets the feeling that it's almost done. Rather than having 16 bars loops in 100s of song projects. Make sure to color each section in your DAW for your songs parts. Example; main verse, copy-paste it 2 or 3 times instantly in your DAW. Then you already feel its getting somewhere.

6. Produce first, mix and polish later. I record my song ideas with piano or Rhodes first or generic sounds that sound almost like the sounds I want. The goal is to record rough sketches of your ideas. If you get stuck in the polishing or mixing stage in your production stage, you will get nowhere. You lose your flow. So I usually record my main melody, if it's some notes off, I fix it later. I put generic FX samples here and there, which I can replace later.

Production phase is to get the songs ideas and parts roughly recorded. Then you can come back and change the melody sounds, fx sounds etc later. If you get stuck with polishing or tweaking an EQ to aim for perfection it is easy to get frustrated and leave the song altogether. Remember, ADD/ADHD brains need to focus on 1 thing at a time. Production stage 1, Polish stage 2, mixing stage 3.

7. Perfection means you have done your best at this point according to your skills. Do not try to produce or aim for a sound that you can not produce from your heart. Understand your limitations and use them to your advantage. Do not compare yourself to others. Compare yourself to yourself. Translate your feelings into sounds the best way you can.

8. If it sounds good for you, it's good enough. Do not 2nd think about yourself. Stay with the initial feeling, it felt good, it sounds good. And go on to record the next parts. If you start second-guessing, you fall into the details traps where you will endlessly begin to edit your recorded sections and then your self-criticism will take over.

9. Create a startup template for your DAW. Each time you start a new song, all your 3 VST synths and 3 VST effects should already be preloaded in your preferred channels etc so you can get straight into making music.

10. Organize your project folders in colours and names. For example, pink for songs in progress, blue for songs to work on later, yellow for songs that are 90% finished. ADD/ADHD brains are visual and colours and descriptions like 70% finished says more than soon finished.

11. Rent a studio from a friend or a studio space outside of your home with no internet connection. This is what helped me the most in the end. Home is too distracting. I used to take my Macbook and headphones to a local quiet cafe to sketch ideas and produce.

But I finally decided to rent a professional music studio on the weekends where I could dedicate my time only for music. If I have a fixed schedule and hours in a studio I rent, I know that producing music is what I'm here for. No surfing, etc. Especially when I pay rent. Otherwise, I waste money.

12. **Diet and exercise: avoid sugar and carbs.** I strictly eat no sugar and no carbs. I prefer the Mediterranean kind of diet with a lot of beans, lentils, fish, Acevedo, nuts, tea etc. Also, make sure to exercise regularly. A walk or a run. But make sure to avoid fast-acting sugars and carbs as it just worsens your ADHD and focus.
13. **Sleep: make sure to sleep well.** Get to bed at fixed times. If you have bad sleep, your ADHD will worsen.

How I got my diagnosis?

I read this article <https://www.additudemag.com/slideshows/symptoms-of-inattentive-adhd/>

I did a Google search in my local area to find specialist or clinics who treat neurodevelopmental disorders like ADHD and Autism.

I randomly emailed clinics and specialist and asked if they have ADHD specialist who can diagnose or do tests for ADHD.

I went for private clinic/specialist for my tests and evaluation since I was pretty sure I had it according to my own research and did not want to waste any time queueing in public health clinics etc.