

Q & A with Eric, a Student with ADD & Anxiety Disorder



Photo courtesy of Eric.

Eric has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Anxiety Disorder. He hopes instructors will limit lecturing and infuse their courses with lots of group work and fun activities.

Could you tell me a little about yourself?

My name is Eric and I am currently a Junior in college. I am a music major with a focus on voice and business. My hobbies consist of writing music, learning songs I like on the piano or voice, and also video games when school allows it. My career path that I have in mind is to work for a non-profit arts center. I'd like to do this because I would like to help support the arts as much as I can and to help show various communities the importance of the arts and what they can do for people.

What 3 words would your closest friend use to describe you?

My closest friend would describe me as goofy, caring, and friendly.

As you know, we're creating a website to help instructors best teach students with disabilities. Could you please tell me about your disability?

The disabilities I have are Attention Deficit Disorder and anxiety disorder. I have a very hard time focusing and am very prone to anxiety. I am actually prescribed with medication that is meant to help me focus and reduce anxiety. Because of my focus issues, I am unable to process information said to me very easily as my mind can wander unconsciously. I also have trouble processing information through reading because I can lose focus while reading as well. Because of this I learn best from taking what I learn and executing it. For example, in math class I learn best by doing the problems, not watching my teacher do them. Because of my ADD I also take longer than average to take tests so I am given extra time if I ask for it. My anxiety disorder contributes to my lack of focus. It is very easy for me to get anxious which gives me more reason to lose focus and motivation.

Can you please describe how your disability has influenced your academic experience in general?

ADD has influenced my academic experience by making it nearly impossible to retain any information from a lecture based class. In order to combat this issue, I will take the best notes I can and review them later. But as I stated earlier, I have trouble retaining information from reading too so this isn't a perfect solution. Because of this I always struggle a lot in classes that are very lecture heavy or require a lot of reading for homework. I'm able to get through it because of accommodations I've received from disability services and also from the help of my parents and girlfriend who support me to no end, making sure I pass my classes. My anxiety disorder influenced my academic experience by mainly taking away my motivation. If I didn't talk to people in my class or if I had tons of work to balance, I would get anxious and depressed and generally unmotivated to continue classes.

More specifically, how has your disability affected your experience with math and statistics?

With Math and Statistics my disability has made it very hard to learn from watching the teacher explain certain equations and problems. Also, because of my anxiety being motivated enough to learn the equations was a huge issue. **I can only really learn math through trial and error. How I learned was to work backwards on problems I knew the answers to and figure out the different steps and equations that way.** How I combatted my anxiety wasn't very specific to math but what I did was change my mindset. In the end I'm going to school for my education and to achieve what I want. Thinking along these lines helped me push past the anxiety and focus on my classes including math.

What are some strategies you found helpful when learning math and statistics?

Try different problems as much as you can! Also talk with the teacher one on one and ask them to watch you solve the problem and they can correct you. Or find a couple friends to work with. **Group work is something that helped me out a ton. Having someone to puzzle out problems with you can help a lot.** Also, obviously do all the work you're assigned the more practice you get the more you'll learn. In order to push past the anxiety, you have to think about your wants. *Why am I going to school? What do I want to do with my education?* Answering questions like these can help motivate you and turn your anxiety into joy.

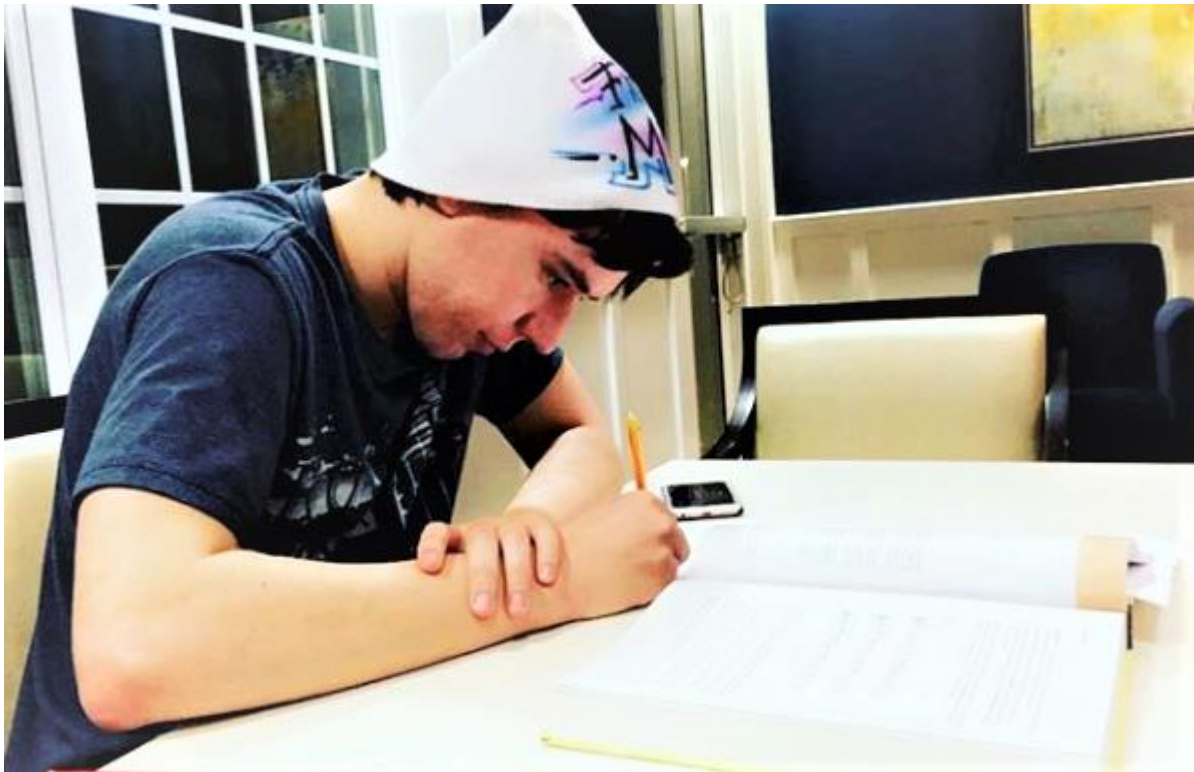


Photo courtesy of Eric.

Please describe things that a previous math or statistics instructor or instructors did that were helpful in learning the material.

I had an instructor for my Statistics class whose entire class consisted of almost all group work. There were tons of group assignments or during class the instructor would have us work with a buddy on certain worksheets and such. **I cannot emphasize enough how necessary it is to practice problems as much as you can. Having someone to talk to and puzzle it out with can help a lot and makes it more enjoyable!** Also, talking to

people made me feel like I was making friends and would generally make me feel happier which helped my anxiety a lot.

Please describe things that a previous math or statistics instructor or instructors did that were not helpful in learning the material.

I had a math instructor who would lecture for most of the class on the new equations or theorems we had to learn. Then surprisingly would have us do individual work. You could ask the teacher questions but that was it and it wouldn't be that helpful because they'd give you a brief answer as there are many other students with questions. **Lecturing first of all is not good for me. I understand that it's an easy way to dump the new material on students, but the problem with this class is I felt most of the time was spent lecturing when I needed more group work or more individual time with the teacher.** Also, because of all the lecturing we wouldn't have a lot of time to do in class practice so in turn there was a lot of homework which fed my anxiety. Because there wasn't a lot of group work, I wasn't meeting people which also fed my anxiety.

How do you suggest instructors create inclusive and accessible classrooms?

I would suggest making tables instead of keeping desks in rows. This will naturally get the group dynamic across and will allow for easy group work.

What advice would you give to math and statistics instructors who are going to work with students with a disability like yours?

Allow as much group work as possible! **People with my disability will learn best by puzzling out problems themselves and with another person. Discussing things with another person is what helps retain the information. Also, people with ADD are easily distracted so it's best to pair them with someone who you have confidence can keep them on track.** Don't pair them with their best friend in the class. Also, fun activities and games are helpful, like math jeopardy for example- anything that will get people with ADD doing the work. Long explanations and lectures are bad for them. It goes in one ear and out the other. For people with anxiety, it's important to make sure that your workload isn't too rigorous and there are plenty of opportunities to socialize while doing work because, for me, being able to socialize creates a happier environment and allowed me to push past my anxiety.