# My Brain Is A Stick Of Butter

A solo game by Adam Bell

# *ADHD*

This is a game that you play with yourself about what it's like living with a brain like mine in a world like ours. I'm not a psychiatrist, but one did diagnose me with ADHD-PI about 7 years ago. I was a college student struggling to get through my classes in pursuit of a degree I had totally lost interest in. With the amount of student debt I was accruing, I didn't want to switch my major to something more enjoyable at that point. With the help of many patient friends (thank you Zack, thank you Rhi), I ended up graduating with a B.S. in physics. I don't remember most of the details of the higher level courses, but I'm glad I finished.

The diagnosis re-contextualized a lot about my life, from the yearly parent/teacher conversations where I got to hear how much of a procrastinator I was, to the fact that "Pulling a Bell" was a phrase that meant that you lost something or left it in someone's car within my group of friends. In the years since, I've developed various ways to cope to wildly inconsistent degrees of success. Medication works, but it makes my jaw clench and my food taste bad, so I don't like to take it very often, but the various other tricks and methods you can find online usually work for a little while, but nothing will "fix" the problem permanently. It's just the way my brain is wired.

ADHD is often portrayed by way of a hyper child who can't sit still for a minute, or an easily distractable person chasing a squirrel, which isn't very helpful for

understanding what it actually is. The best explanation I've come across is that ADHD simply restricts a person's agency when it comes to choosing where to apply attention. I might want to do my job, clean my apartment, or cook dinner, but there's a stick of butter in my skull that would rather slip over to something else.

In an ideal world, this would be fine. There's so much to do, after all, so having people that excel in floating between multiple tasks could be really handy if everyone was working together to ensure that material needs were met across the board.

But in a world held in the jaws of capitalism where everyone needs to sit still and be an obedient worker for the brunt of their waking hours and still somehow find time for chores, socializing, and personal enjoyment, being unable to choose what you focus on can lead to a lot of shit stacking up over time.

This probably isn't a fun game, but I hope it can be an illustrative one. My experience is by no means universal, but it's certainly not unique either. Feel free to let me know your thoughts, or share with me your playsheet so I can see how many people can do all this shit in a week. I'm on twitter, @adamebell.

# Character creation

Grab the playsheet from adamebell.itch.io, a d6 to be your Brain Die, a deck of cards, and a pencil. The default is to play as yourself, but you can play a fictional character if you wish. Fill out the information for your character.

- Name/pronouns
- A small portrait
- Your current job or career
- Two important friends or family members
- A new hobby and an old hobby
- What you do to relax

Finally, write on the Whiteboard the last thing you did for each of the four tasks. The four tasks are:

- ♠ Work
- ♣ Chores
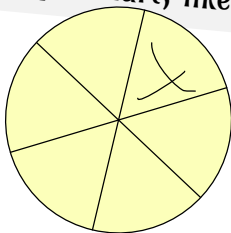- ♥ Socializing
- ♦ Enjoyment

This can be as simple as writing "Sent an email. Did my dishes. Called my mom. Watched TV."
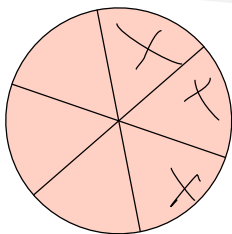
# *What's a clock?*

The playsheet has different pie charts on it for each of the days and tasks. These are referred to as "clocks". When a rule instructs you to tick a clock, fill in in the next segment of the corresponding pie chart, like you see here:
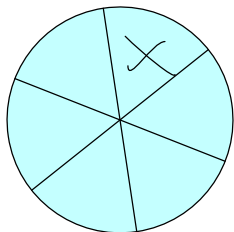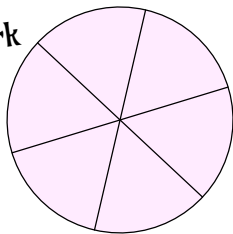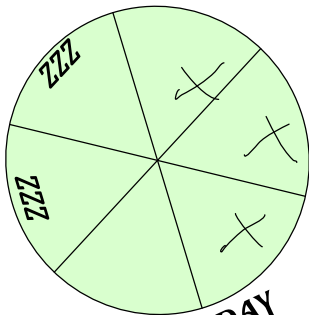
Chores ♣

Enjoyment ♦

Work ♠

Socializing ♥

zzz zzz TODAY

# *How to play a day*

A day in this game is represented by the Today clock. There are six rounds per day, two of which will ideally be spent sleeping.

ZZZ
ZZZ

TODAY
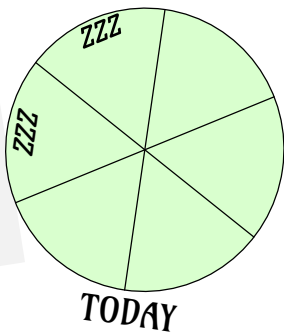
To start your day, review your task clocks and decide what task you'd like to start on. Search the deck for a card of that suit and put it on top of the discard pile, then reshuffle the deck. Generally, I start weekdays at work, so I set my opening task to ♠ Work here.

Then, for each round, follow the rules for "How to play a round" and then tick the Today clock.

# *Days, nights, and weeks*

The first four rounds take place during your waking hours, but the final two are when sleep beckons.

You may choose to continue acting during these hours. Each time you do, mark off a box on the sleep debt tracker. This won't have any mechanical effect in the week that you'll play out in this game, but the accumulation of sleep debt does catch up with you.

Sleep Debt

Once the day is over, mark off its box on the week tracker and clear the ticks on the day clock. Begin the next day. Once the week is over, that's it! The "In Closing" section talks about what to do when the game is over.

Week | S | M | T | W | Th | F | S |

# How to play a round

First, decide if you'd like to divert your attention to a different task than the active one. The active task is always the one corresponding to the suit of the card at the top of the discard pile. If you are switching, choose the task you're switching to and pull a number of cards equal to the unfilled ticks in that clock.

♠ Work   ♣ Chores   ♥ Socializing   ♦ Enjoyment

- If one of the cards drawn matches the suit of the task you're trying to switch to, then you can do so, no problem. Discard all the cards with that one on top.

  - Otherwise, determine the task most represented by the drawn cards. You choose how to break ties. That task becomes the active task, unless you erase one tick from its clock; you can then continue to the task you were trying to switch to. Write on the whiteboard what you noticed and ignored about the task you erased.

# OK now where was I?

Once you've established which task clock you're working towards, think about the last thing you did to tick that clock.

If you can honestly remember where you were in the task, move to the next step.

But if it's something that you have erased from your page and you can no longer remember what was done, erase one tick of that clock to represent that you'll need to retrace your steps a bit.

Next, follow the rules for Working on Tasks.

# Working on tasks

To determine how working on your chosen task goes, roll the brain die and refer to the reference below and on the playsheet to see what you get done.

## BRAIN DIE REFERENCE

**ENDLESS DISTRACTIONS:** Erase the Whiteboard. Erase a tick in the current clock. Write what pulled your focus away.

**CAN'T DO THIS RIGHT NOW:** Erase the Whiteboard. Pull a card to switch tasks. Pull a second one if you didn't switch.

**SIDETRACKED:** Erase the Whiteboard. Pull a card to switch tasks and mark 1 tick, or stick to this task with no progress.

**SO MUCH TO DO:** Mark 1 tick on task clock. Pull to switch tasks. Write what you accomplished, and what pulled you away.

**FEELING PRODUCTIVE:** Mark 1 tick on current task clock. Write down what you accomplished.

**BIG TIME FOCUS:** Mark 2 ticks on task clock. Write what hooked you in for once.

# *Using the Whiteboard*

When writing on the Whiteboard, be as detailed or brief as you like. The important thing is to paint a clear picture to yourself of what you spent that time doing.



Use the info you wrote down during character creation as inspiration when thinking about what the different tasks are - remember your hobbies and your rolodex.



When erasing the Whiteboard, don't pause to re-read the whole thing first. Just erase it. It's gone.

That's what it feels like in my head any time an enticing enough distraction pulls me away from something I'm doing.

# In Closing

Once you've played all 7 days, the game is officially over. Take a moment to reflect on how it went - take pride in your accomplishments and consider your shortcomings. Look at the state of your four clocks, and consider what the unfilled sections represent.

Are there dishes piled up in your kitchen? Did you go out to eat more than you wanted to because you couldn't find time to clean and cook? Did you forget to call your family members or fall behind at work?

Consider how many more clocks you're juggling every day of your real life, and let yourself take a little pride in being able to tick any of them on any given day.

# A Quick Note

This goofy attempt to model my experience with ADHD only shows one of the many aspects of it. There aren't mechanics for realizing minutes into a conversation that you didn't hear anything the other person said, or for how people close to you just sort of get used to keeping track of your stuff, or for having idle hands that are constantly looking for something to fiddle with, or for random scrapes and bruises that you don't remember how or when you got, or for the sharp bursts of frustration that you can't help but feel bad about whenever someone accidentally interrupts when you're finally focusing on something for once this week, or for how you tend to ramble on whe

Life is a constant battle always juggling the clocks

Butter

# *Example Tuesday*

### Round 1

As it's Tuesday, I decide I should work. I search the deck for a ♠Work card to place on top of the discard pile, and then shuffle the deck. Then I roll the die, and get a 3. I get quickly sidetracked despite how much work there is to do, and erase the whiteboard. I pull from the deck and get an ♦Enjoyment card as my hobbies call out to me. I write "pulled away from work by video games" on the now blank whiteboard. I mark the first tick of the Day clock.

### Round 2

I should really get back to work. There are 5 unticked boxes on the ♠Work clock, so I draw five cards. 2 of them show ♠Work, so I set them on top of the discard. Fortunately I remember that the last thing I did for work was send a few emails, so I can continue where I left off. I roll the die and get a 5, so I tick the clock and write about the code I wrote. I mark the second tick of the Day clock.

### Round 3

The workday is over, so I figure I should call my brother. I pull 4 cards for the remaining ticks in the ♥Socializing clock but get no hearts. The majority of the cards show ♣ Chores, which makes sense because I have barely done any this week and there's probably a pile of dishes

# *Example Tuesday Cont'd*

somewhere. Sadly I can't remember the last thing I did for this clock, and the whiteboard is empty, so I erase a tick as I duplicate my previous efforts. I roll the die, a 4. I write down that I did some dishes and pull from the deck to see what ultimately made me stop - ♥Socializing. Right. I should call my brother. I mark the third tick of the day clock.

### Round 4

I'm sticking with ♥Socializing, and I remember that the last thing I did was grab coffee with another friend so I don't erase any ticks in the clock. I roll the die. It's a 2, so I erase the whiteboard and write that when I pulled out my phone to call my brother, I got sucked in to all of my notifications and ended up shitposting on Discord until it was probably too late to make a call. I mark the fourth tick of the day clock.

### Rounds 5 & 6

It's time for sleep. No sense in racking up Sleep Debt yet, there's plenty of time in the week left to get work done. I'll wake up in the morning and do it all again. I erase the day clock and mark off "Tuesday" in the week to show on the playsheet that time passed. Then I start it all over again to go about the next day.

this game in no way condones the consumption of dairy.