



SplitHomework — Product Thesis

One screen. Homework on the left earns short, metered bursts of an educational feed on the right. Built for the phone-shaped attention span — and especially for students with ADHD.

Drafted May 2026 · companion to the SplitHomework demo and the Build Plan (docs/SplitHomework-Build-Plan) · a product bet, not a clinical claim

THE THESIS

Short-form video has trained a generation's reward system to expect fast, frequent payoffs, and for students with ADHD the mismatch with slow, low-feedback schoolwork is the wall they hit every night. SplitHomework's bet: don't fight that wiring with abstinence — **channel it**. Put the instant-reward feed (YouTube) on the same screen as the homework, keep it **locked**, and let each completed problem unlock a **short, metered burst** of it. The reward is visible, immediate, and contingent on the work — the "do the hard thing, then get the easy thing" structure with the strongest evidence behind it for this population. SplitHomework is the cheapest way to put it in a kid's hands.

If yoking the feed to the work helps an ADHD student *start* and *re-engage with* homework they'd otherwise avoid, SplitHomework should exist. If it just adds one more distraction to the screen, it shouldn't — and the design is built to make that distinction testable (see below).

1 EVERY PIECE IS LOAD-BEARING

DESIGN CHOICE	WHY IT'S THERE — AND WHAT WE'D BE WITHOUT IT
Reward lives on the same screen, side by side	ADHD executive-function research is consistent that <i>immediate, salient, visible</i> incentives drive behavior far better than delayed or abstract ones. A reward in another tab or app, claimed later, is neither. In view but locked is the point. Without it: a worksheet with a promise.
The feed is locked by default; only homework unlocks it	The feed is the high-probability behavior; homework the low-probability one. Gating the first behind the second is the Premack principle / contingency management — the lever with the strongest support in ADHD behavioral interventions. Without it: just YouTube next to homework, which is worse than no app.
Small, metered, capped bursts (+1:00 right / +0:30 wrong; 10-min cap; ticks down only while a video plays)	Tight, frequent work→reward loops keep the loop going; one unbounded reward becomes the new procrastination sink. The cap forces a return to work; partial credit for a miss keeps a stuck student from rage-quitting; the tick-down means idle time doesn't bleed the bank.
Educational categories only; no grades, no accounts, low-stakes	The break is still a feed, but curated educational playlists, not infinite-scroll entertainment — the reward can't be a relapse into the exact thing the product counters. And a bad session is private and costs nothing: no friction to start, the frame stays positive ("earn more", not "you're behind"). Without it: an honest Trojan horse for TikTok, with a stick attached.
Framed as lowering activation energy, not "training multitasking"	The job is making it easier to <i>start</i> and <i>resume</i> homework — the real ADHD pain point — not building split-attention as a skill. We do <i>not</i> claim media multitasking improves cognition; the literature runs the other way. A modest claim is a defensible one.

2 THE EVIDENCE STANCE — WHAT WE LEAN ON, WHAT WE DON'T

We lean on the well-supported parts: contingency management / the Premack principle (earning a preferred activity by doing a less-preferred one is a long-standing, evidence-backed lever, including in ADHD); the steeper response of ADHD attention to *immediate, concrete* incentives; and the fact that task initiation and re-engagement are core executive-function deficits, so scaffolds that lower the cost of starting are doing real work. **We deliberately do not claim the contested parts:** that media multitasking or split attention *improves* cognition (the evidence says it *costs* attention — we lower activation energy, we don't train a superpower); that this *treats* ADHD (it's a study aid and behavioral scaffold, not a clinical intervention — it complements real support, it doesn't replace it); that it's *for everyone* (for some students any on-screen feed is too tempting — this is a tool, not a mandate); or that we optimize for *time-in-app* (the goal is homework done; the cap and tick-down are anti-engagement on purpose).

3 HOW WE'D KNOW IT WORKS — THE FALSIFIABLE VERSION

Because "it just adds a distraction" is a real way this fails, the bet has to be killable. The signals: (1) **more homework completed per session** with SplitHomework than without, for the target student; (2) **shorter time-to-start and time-to-resume** on a set; (3) **the cap actually pulls them back** — sessions end on "out of time, back to work," not "closed the app"; (4) **self-reported** "I got more done / it was less of a fight." It **fails** if homework output doesn't move, if the feed becomes the session, or if accuracy collapses because students guess-spam for banked time. Each has a design response — accuracy/streak gating, stricter caps, a hard browser-level block instead of the soft in-app one — and if none save it, the thesis as stated is wrong. (The Build Plan turns these into a real pilot.)

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING

There's a student — bright, ADHD, attention shaped by the feed — for whom "just put your phone away and focus" has never once worked. SplitHomework meets that student where their reward system already is: the feed stays on screen, but they **earn it, a minute at a time, by doing the work**. Not a productivity hack dressed up as science — the one behavioral structure the research actually backs for this kid, shipped as the simplest possible product. The Build Plan is how it goes from a one-page demo to something that could be true at scale.