

**Accessible**

Learning Services

# Teaching Students with Autism (ASD) Faculty Guide

The information provided is to support a students with ASD in your course and is supplemental to the student’s Confidential Academic Accommodation Plan. The impact of disability varies in severity for each student. Therefore, the strengths and challenges associated with ASD cannot be broadly applied to all students.

# Definition

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological disability which impacts social communication and social interaction to varying degrees. Persons with ASD may have difficulty with:

* Reciprocity in conversations
* Initiating and responding to social interactions
* Understanding nonverbal communication
* Developing, understanding, and maintaining relationships

Persons with ASD may also have restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, and activities which may include:

* Insistence on sameness with routines
* Highly fixed interests
* Sensitivity to sights, sounds, touch

# Strengths of ASD

Many students with ASD:

* Have an accurate and detailed memory for information and facts.
* Have excellent visual recall, especially when manipulating data for useful purposes.
* May be able to concentrate for long periods of time on a task.
* Strong inclination to be truthful and honest with others.

# Challenges of ASD

Many students with ASD may:

* Have difficulty with social situation and finding interactions with others challenging.
* Find understanding and use of certain nonverbal aspects of communication challenging (e.g. eye-to-eye gaze, facial expressions, body postures, gestures, proximity to speaker.)
* Speak with little inflection or emphasis; voice may be monotone, too loud, or too soft.
* Find spontaneous, reciprocal sharing of information with others challenging (e.g. conversations about interests or hobbies.)
* Have difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships.
* Have echolalia (repeating what is heard). The repeated words/phrases may be spoken aloud or only lip movements.
* Have a tendency to become preoccupied with topics or ideas that others may see as irrelevant.
* Have difficulty with idioms and other abstract forms of language.
* Think in ways that are divergent and abstract- “deep thinkers”.
* Depend heavily on routines and want things to “stay the same” so that there are no “surprises”
* Have unusual sensitivity to sights, sounds, smell, tastes.

# Teaching Strategies

The following strategies may be helpful when teaching a student with ASD. Offer additional explanation of abstract concepts and providing students with opportunities to clarify any misunderstood content.

* Provide both verbal and written explanations for assignments/projects.
* Ensure that you have his/her full attention and ask the student to summarize what has been discussed.
* Gently remind or redirect the student if they are not making eye contact, speaking to loudly, too softly, or standing too close while talking.
* If the student is providing information that is off-topic during class discussions, a gentle reminder to focus on the discussion topic will redirect the student.
* Explain figurative language (idioms, metaphor, and simile), when possible, as mangy students with ASD find figurative language challenging.
* Provide information well in advance of changes in routine (when/if possible) is beneficial.

For example, changes in tests dates, room locations, and assignment/ project completion details can all be difficult to manage for the students if not given some advanced notice.

* Provide as much structure as possible during change in routine, as a student with ASD may experience elevated levels of stress and anxiety.
* Be explicit and verbal with feelings. Alternatively, the professor may choose to explain nonverbal language such as gestures.

For example, stating, “When I step back as you move closer to me, it means…” may help the student understand the message behind the gesture.

* It is often helpful to have a conversation with the student about any challenging behaviour and let the student know your expectations regarding behaviour.

# Additional Social Information for the Classroom

Often, students with ASD need support and guidance when attempting to establish a peer relationship. As the professor, you may wish to facilitate interaction between the student with ASD and his/her peers. For example, it can be helpful for you to locate several students who are willing to take some time to make a connection with their classmate with ASD.

Group work is one of the most challenging aspects facing students with ASD in a classroom setting. It is helpful if roles within the group are clearly defined. Also, if groups are not assigned by the professor, the student may need assistance joining a group.

# ASD and Me

If you choose to do so, you can provide your professors with additional information below on how ASD impacts you.

# Discussing this Guide with the Student

You may wish to discuss information in this guide with the student in more detail in a private, confidential manner. The student’s Accessible Learning Services Counsellor is available to assist with strategies and accommodations to support the student in your course.

# Need Help?

You are encouraged to contact Accessible Learning Services if you have any questions about this guide. You can email als@mohawkcollege.ca or phone 905-575-2211.