

# Faculty Tip Sheet

## for autistic students

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication. The following list is designed as a general overview of the autism spectrum. A student on the autism spectrum may exhibit some of the following characteristics:

### What You Might Notice

- May not make/make too much eye contact or otherwise seem disengaged despite paying attention in class
- Difficulty with changes in classroom, seating, and syllabi/course routine
- Sensory sensitivity (lights, sounds, touch, smells), avoid spontaneous loud noises or in-class yelling
- May have delayed responses to information or questioning
- May misunderstand tone of voice, jokes, facial expressions, sarcasm, and other forms of indirect communication
- May struggle to maintain an appropriate volume or tone in conversation
- May have a shorter attention span and need sensory stimulation (such as fidget toys or breaks) in longer classes
- Strong interests in a specific topic or area of study
- May come across as argumentative, rude, or monopolizing, due to strong opinions or passions in the classroom environment
- Displays literal and concrete thinking patterns
- May use calming or focusing strategies such as rocking, tapping, using a fidget toy, using headphones, or pacing
- May become easily overwhelmed in loud or complicated environments

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The following strengths and struggles are generally shared by students across the spectrum, although each individual student experiences unique strengths and challenges. Consult the strategies column for ways to better assist students to have a successful experience both in and out of the classroom. Do not assume that all autistic students are the same or could benefit from the same strategies. When in doubt, ask the student how you can best support them.

Strengths	Struggles	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Passionate commitment to ideas</li><li>• Strong sense of equality and justice</li><li>• Exceptional talents in at least one specific area</li><li>• Diligent with routine work</li><li>• Excellent memory</li><li>• Strong pursuit of knowledge within areas of interest</li><li>• Good visual and spatial learners</li><li>• Original ways of solving problems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initiating /sustaining effort</li><li>• Setting boundaries/personal space</li><li>• Working in groups</li><li>• Initiating, planning, organizing, and carrying out tasks</li><li>• Seeing others' points of view</li><li>• Understanding social norms</li><li>• Assessing priorities and performance</li><li>• Asking for clarification or assistance</li><li>• Interpreting vague instructions</li><li>• Abstract concepts and seeing the "big picture"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide direct feedback, set clear boundaries</li><li>• Allow breaks during class</li><li>• Consider allowing laptop/ipad for note taking</li><li>• Avoid cold-calling in class</li><li>• Avoid idioms, metaphors, sarcasm when unnecessary</li><li>• Consider assigning group roles</li><li>• Provide visual learning tools when possible (pictures, charts)</li><li>• Supplement oral instructions with written instructions</li><li>• Explain purpose of assignment</li><li>• Utilize syllabus and note changes as soon as possible</li></ul>