



5 Top Tips

For supporting students on the autism spectrum

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition which is associated with differences in communication, social interaction, flexibility of thought and sensory perception.

The number of autistic students in Higher Education continues to grow, with students studying at all levels, and across all subjects. Here are some tips to help academic staff teach and support autistic students effectively.



Get to know your student

- **See the student**, not the disability
- **Talk to your student** – and **listen**. They are the expert on their disability, learning style and expectations
- Understand what **motivates** your student to learn
- **Understand, accept and embrace** novel learning styles
- Be **responsive, flexible, proactive and empathic**
- **Learn about autism** – ask your student what autism means to them, or ask Disability Services for additional training and information



Adjust your communication techniques

- Check the **sensory environment** to avoid or minimise distraction
- Use a **show and tell** approach
- Use **visual aids** and written information
- **Summarise** meetings by email and identify **action points**
- Be **clear, concise, unambiguous and logical**
- Give **time to respond**
- Give **limited options** rather than ask open questions
- Use your **student's name**, especially in group settings
- Do not force **eye contact** – try sitting side by side



Anticipate and prepare

- Provide detailed **information in advance** (e.g. course requirements)
- **Be explicit** about expectations and explain consequences
- Plan **familiarisation** activities at key points and in times of **transition**
- Do not assume your student has understood **subtext**
- Establish a **routine** and use 'what if' planning
- **Limit key contacts**: create a 'who to contact when' list
- Identify **safe spaces** within the School or on campus

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Make your teaching autism friendly

- Check the sensory environment in your teaching space
- Use a multi-sensory teaching approach
- Provide detailed information in advance (e.g. reading lists, handouts)
- Be clear and explicit in assignment briefs and questions
- Give clear, constructive, timely, written feedback
- Assist the student with contextualising learning
- Manage group work: role assignment and ground rules
- Manage practical sessions: written instructions, additional familiarisation, protocols for the unexpected, a named person for questions or reassurance

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Remember your ABC

- **Anticipation:** transitions, changes, challenges, unfamiliar activities, ideas or terminology. Unpick assumptions, uncover subtext and implied meaning.
- **Boundaries:** define roles and relationships, identify start points and end points, explain expectations and limitations.
- **Consequences:** identify immediate and long-term consequences and explain using clear, logical explanations ('this means that...')

REMEMBER

Every experience of autism is unique.

What works for one student may not work for another student. If in doubt, talk with your student about their requirements, and think about how you can adapt your teaching and assessment methods to enable your students to meet the learning outcomes of your course. Or contact Disability Services for additional advice or guidance, either generally, or about specific students.

Want to know more?

- Read the **Autism & Uni Project Best Practice Guidance** available from <http://www.autism-uni.org/bestpractice/>
- Check out the University of Leeds **Inclusive Teaching & Learning Guides** available from <https://www.sdduonline.leeds.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/>
- Follow **Disability Services** on Twitter [@UoLDisability](https://twitter.com/UoLDisability) and on Facebook [@UoLDisabilityTeam](https://www.facebook.com/UoLDisabilityTeam)