
Tutor Guide

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)

ASDs are developmental disorders with significant language and social delays that affect 1 in 110 children in the United States (CDC).

The spectrum includes Autistic Disorders, Asperger's Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, and forms of ADHD.

Characteristics

- Impairment in reciprocal social interaction
- Difficulty with verbal and nonverbal communication
- Restricted and repeated behaviors

Recognize that...

- Students with ASDs have great intellectual capabilities.
- Tutors should work with ASD writers' unique perspective on the world—social, communicative, and behavioral differences, not against their perspective.

Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)

- Teaching tool that breaks down large tasks into pieces, then works back to generalizations.
- Works with the student's unique behaviors and is the most effective treatment of ASDs.
- ABA brings out the strengths of these individuals.

Useful Strategies (Based on ABA)

ROUTINE

- Individuals with ASDs often have key obsessions and desire order and dislike change
- Consistent and structured environment. The agenda, for example, should be pretty consistent every week.
- Weekly sessions using the same room

LITERAL STEPS

- Realize that ASD students often need to work on specific problems one step at a time.
- Realize that ASD writers are often very literal.
- So tutors should emphasize literal interaction, instruction, and application. For instance, tutors should take abstract prompts and come up with literal steps for the student.
- Tutors should set up specific tasks related to a larger goal. Only focus on one task at a time, e.g., commas (don't jump into word choice even if you have time)

INDIVIDUALIZATION

- There is no typical student with autism; therefore, each session is different.
- This strategy incorporates a lot of flexibility. Each session is individualized.
- Think beyond the student's disability. The session should be student-focused based on strengths and weaknesses. Both ideas are Writing Center basics, but tutors must remember to work with the student, instead of focusing only on the writing assignment.