

How ASD/Asperger's Syndrome Affects Learning

People on the Autism Spectrum (ASD) and Asperger's Syndrome (AS) may be just as intelligent as everyone else; however, certain issues can impact their ability to *show* what they know. Transitioning to college life can be perplexing and may impact learning efficiency. Feeling stressed, for instance, forces the brain to output additional energy in processing, retaining and retrieving information; this can be exhausting. It is good to understand how the challenges of ASD can affect learning so the student can plan for a course of action to apply when the challenges occur.



Starting college causes many students to feel a little bit lost. For students with ASD/AS, the unfamiliar campus can be intimidating. The *best way to manage* this is by **getting to know the campus**. This can start with a campus tour; however, self-guided tours should be repeated as many times as needed (with parents or friends) until the student is comfortable navigating the campus alone. The buildings to become most familiar with are: Student Services, DSPS, Health Center, cafeteria/food court, buildings in which classes are held, Instructor's offices and Campus Police.



Successful people use schedules and 'to-do' lists to help complete projects on time. Most new students need help in this area as well. **Such tools are vital** to students on the Spectrum. Daily and weekly schedules provide the structure needed for organizing & planning upcoming assignments, projects and tests.

- Your schedule *should be very specific* and should include class times and locations, preview/review/homework times, commute times, club/social times, meal times and relaxing/enjoyment times. **Ask your counselor** for a worksheet to help you get started managing your time.



Communication skills are required for learning. Teachers must check for understanding, students must ask questions when information is unclear. Reading involves *communication* between author and reader and much of college learning is presented through reading. Students with ASD/Asperger's can be reluctant to communicate their needs or ask for clarification when faced with unclear information. Likewise, text book content often requires interpretation of the author's intent and purpose and ideas may be buried in figurative or abstract language. Students with ASD/AS will need to communicate their difficulty in interpreting these less non-literal forms of language.

- While reading, it is a good practice to write down questions as they occur. Then, ask the professor in class or during office hours. This practice can help with issues related to text book reading. When in class, students should remember to not blurt out questions, raise their hand and wait to be called on to ask questions. Know that it is very likely that other students in the class are wondering about the same thing. If to communicate in class is too uncomfortable, the student should make an appointment to see the professor, take the written questions and ask them there. Also the Learning Resource Center tutors can be of help with this.



Employers today want more than just book smart/tech savvy employees; they want workers with "**soft skills**" ...traits like patience, flexibility, confidence, cooperation, resilience and a possessing a **growth mindset** rather than a fixed mindset. These skills can require concerted effort for students with Autism to develop. The best way to improve this area is to get a job on campus. Working alongside peers can allow you to improve these skills and earn money.

Your DSPS team is here to help you overcome the hurdles and challenges of learning with ASD/Asperger's Syndrome. We can also help you to **turn your differences into strengths**.

