

## **How to Modify Curriculum for Students with ASD**

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### **How to Modify Homework**

#### **Possible Challenges Due to ASD:**

Many students with ASD take significantly longer to complete homework assignments than their typical peers due to the challenges they often have in the areas of communication, fine motor skills, language processing, and executive function, to name a few. Modifying homework expectations can support the content you present in your lessons and increase learning, while decreasing the level of stress and frustration which often occurs at home with students on the Spectrum.

- Change the number of questions to be completed, i.e. only even problems.
- Think quality over quantity: Identify and assign a handful of questions that you feel cover the most important content or main ideas to support your lessons.
- Allow option of not completing essay questions.
- Accept alternative forms of presenting understanding, i.e. drawing illustrations of 5 scenes from a book that include short captions, rather than a book report.
- Do not penalize for spelling and language mechanics for all homework, rather focus on mastery of concepts.
- Provide word banks for worksheet completion.
- Allow student to type answers or audio record them.
- If you are confident a student has mastered the concept the homework is supporting, consider allowing him to skip it for the night.

### **How to Modify Writing Assignments**

#### **Possible Challenges Due to ASD:**

Writing is a common area of difficulty for students with ASD. They often attempt to avoid having to participate in writing assignments by demonstrating inappropriate behaviors. Frequently the students have individual skills (ideas, fine motor skills, organizational skills) but cannot pull them all together to meet the high level skill of writing down their own thoughts and ideas on a sheet of paper. They may not know where to begin, how much to write, what they are supposed to write about, know how to form sentences or paragraphs, etc. This

usually causes an overwhelmed feeling which results in behavioral outbursts. There can be a breakdown in any one, many or all of these individual writing skills making these intelligent students feel inferior.

- Sometimes let him write about his favorite topics. He knows a lot about his topics so he has the information and now can just concentrate on the writing process of getting his ideas down on paper.
- Use semantic maps, diagrams, and story webs to help him create a clear path for his writing and what information is important. Most students with ASD find any and all facts to be important so have difficulty with main ideas and supporting details. This would be a good area to focus your instruction beginning at a very basic level.
- Use a template at the beginning to get the student started. This strategy also gives him concrete information about what your expectations are for his written work. A Daily Journal template for a 1st grader may look like “Today we \_\_\_\_\_ at school. I learned about \_\_\_\_\_. I liked \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Provide an example of what you want it to look like. This will help him understand what expectations are also.
- Be specific (how many paragraphs with how many sentences in each paragraph) for each assignment given so the student knows exactly what he needs to do and when he will know he has the assignment accomplished.
- Reinforce him for attempting to complete written assignments. Assess what the student is actually able to do without assistance, then slowly build upon his skills using a very concise step by step process.
- Allow the student to use a word processor to complete assignments of length. Help him to learn to use spell check and other word processing tools if the actual mechanics of writing is very difficult for him. Computer processing will probably be an accommodation he will need for the rest of his life. Learning to type using correct finger position is important and will need to be discussed with his special education team to determine when to introduce it and who will provide keyboarding instruction.
- Set up a relaxation activity for the student to participate in prior to writing instruction within the classroom. Learning relaxation strategies will help the student release anxiety and can be engaged in again if you notice his anxiety increasing as you introduce or engage in the writing assignment.
- Give sentence starters, i.e.,” The title of this painting is \_\_\_\_\_” or “The influences on the author were \_\_\_\_\_.” “In this essay I will \_\_\_\_\_.”

- Give topic words that could be used to assist in generating writing ideas, i.e. “Elements of art: line, shape, color, form, etc.”
- Suggest words that help make sentences flow and appear more complex, i.e. “next,” “in addition to,” “the similarities are,” “finally,” etc.
- Highlight or underline the main idea in essay questions, such as, “Describe steps of the water cycle.” Consider keyboard training, or computer programs which teach keyboarding skills.
- Provide various adjustments of writing tools for students to address their specific needs. To address grasp challenges – pencil grips, for students who tend to press lightly when writing – fine tip markers, for example.
- Allow various forms of showing knowledge on a topic:
- Completing a “fact sheet” rather than an essay.
- Answering test questions by making audio recording of by “interviewing the student.”

## **How to Modify Reports and Long-Term Projects**

### **Possible Challenges Due to ASD:**

Many students with ASD have difficulty with the executive functioning skills that are involved in organizing oneself to complete long-term projects. Often, they need assistance in knowing where to start, what it needs to look like, and how to plan over the long-term to complete a project or report.

- Break down project into smaller components and assign “check in” due dates where students must show their progress on those identifying components.
- Allow various methods for students to show their knowledge other than, i.e. making a brochure about a country, video, rather than oral report in front of classroom, Power Point presentation, illustrated book, concept maps, story boards.
- Consider teaching project management skills to your class, it may benefit many other students in your classroom!
- Offer worksheets that students can use to organize the steps for their projects and set timelines for themselves.
- List the type of resources that students may use to get started on doing research. Also, list resources that are not acceptable for the project.
- Have examples of past projects students may see or check out.

- If the student is receiving pull-out services for academic support, communicate with the special educator about the project or report. He or she may be able to offer assistance and/or work with your student on his project during their time together.
- Many students with ASD have difficulty in forming essay-type writing. If this is a barrier for the student, allow them to instead make a “Fact Sheet” on a topic as a way of indicating their knowledge and understanding.
- When parents know, they are likely to help their child. Make a call or send an email home to inform parents about the project or report.
- If motivation is a factor, consider allowing the student to work on a topic that is of special interest.
- Provide descriptive rubrics to illustrate expectations.

### **How to Modify Worksheets**

#### **Possible Challenges Due to ASD:**

Worksheets are a way of supporting content and allowing students to practice their newly learned skills. Most students with autism can benefit from modifications and expectations being made to their worksheets. Reasons for this may include: fine motor challenges, attention issues, reading level, cognitive differences, perfectionism, and challenges with forming answers for essay or short answer questions, to name a few.

- Put fewer questions on a page and increase font size.
- For matching questions, reduce the amount of items to match. For example, have one section where there are 5 items to match and another section with 5 items to match, rather than having 10 items which must be matched.
- De-clutter worksheets by taping over extraneous pictures, blocking the page up to make expectations more clearly, fold into sections, cut in half.
- Use pictures that will support concepts and ease understanding.
- If the worksheet is not directly related to spelling, consider allowing for spelling errors.
- Eliminate essay questions and instead reword questions so the student may respond.
- Complete a few problems to be used as examples.
- Use highlighters to draw attention to important information on worksheets or to indicate the items you would like the student to complete, if you are modifying the amount of problems required.

- Circle items on the worksheet which best represent the skills or content which the worksheet is designed to support and require the student to complete only those.
- Allow student to answer questions on a separate sheet of paper or by word processing, if handwriting is the barrier to completion.
- Work with resource teacher to modify readability of worksheets.
- Mark steps on the worksheet.

## **How to Modify Books & Reading Materials**

### **Possible Challenges Due to ASD:**

Due to the wide spectrum of ability level of children with autism, reading profiles may appear very different. Some students with ASD have little to no difficulty with reading. Others are excellent at decoding, but have challenges in comprehension, differentiating details from the main idea, and understanding the complex nuances in literature. There are also students who have more significant impairments and read greatly below grade level.

- Highlight, or have student highlight, important phrases, sentences, or information in text.
- Change the layout of the book by copying the pages and blowing up the text.
- Require student to read chapter reviews and select only key parts from the chapter to be read that contain the main ideas.
- Find volunteer “readers” to record books and written materials. Allow student to read along with a audio recordings in class or check them out overnight.
- Find a high-interest, low reading level version of the book you are reading.
- Consider allowing a student to read a related short article on the topic, rather than an entire chapter or book.
- To guide students and keep them focused, create check off lists of facts students must find as they read through their books to help maintain focus.
- Have student document which page he found that information and highlight it in the book, if allowed.
- Create fact sheets of the main concepts and ideas students must know about a topic to read as an alternative to reading entire chapters.
- Check the readability of materials with Microsoft Word to see if they are appropriate for your student.

- Make a modified book for your student to use that includes simplified text and pictures.

### **How to Modify for Materials for Math**

#### **Possible Challenges Due to ASD:**

Some students with ASD prefer mathematics due to its predictable nature and general lack of abstraction in comparison to other subjects. Also, some students with ASD have strong rote memory skills, which can be helpful. That said, students with ASD typically can benefit from modifications to their mathematics materials. Some students get overwhelmed by the stressors of timed facts tests or by worksheets with many problems on them. The abstraction of word problems and algebraic work and the complex executive functioning skills involved in completing them can often lead to frustration.

- If a student is capable of getting to the correct answer by “doing it in his head” consider allowing him to not have to show his work, or only having to show work on a few select problems.
- Allow calculators.
- Minimize the amount of word problems that must be completed.
- Have visual aides to help with completion of word problems.
- Post or have index cards with procedural hints and/or formulas for students to refer to.
- Allow extra time for timed tests.
- Modify worksheets to appear less cluttered and/or cut worksheets in half to reduce stress associated with completion.
- Circle or assign specific problems that epitomize each specific problem and skill type that must be completed on a test, quiz, or homework assignment, rather than requiring a student to complete many problems.

### **How to Modify Tests and Exams**

#### **Possible Challenges Due to ASD:**

Students with ASD often face challenges when completing tests. Many get anxious

when time constraints are placed on them, especially when processing skills and/or fine motor skills may be a challenge. Other students' perfectionism may cause them to not want to try, for fear of getting wrong answers, or to spend inordinate amounts of time contemplating answers. Differences in reading level and/or writing skills may also put them at a disadvantage. Finally, executive function difficulties may hinder a student's ability to respond to more abstract-type questions, such as short-answer or essay questions which may require deeper analysis, criticism, inference, and cause and effect relationships, for example.

- Consider allowing the student to take the test in another room which is quieter and free of visual distractions.
- Remove time constraints.
- Select items on the test which best represent the skills or content you feel best captures the unit's theme for the student to complete.
- Remove essay questions and replace with questions which allow the student to respond to direct questions that require a single or two-word response.
- Make a modified test with fewer questions.
- Use word boxes for student to select words from.
- If it is not a spelling test, allow for spelling errors and grade for content value.
- Highlight or underline directions.
- Allow for student to type answers, audio record answers.
- If it is a Scantron test, allow student to write on the test and not use the Scantron, or have a classroom aide transcribe answers onto it.
- Simplify and de-clutter the appearance of the test.
- Consider allowing take-home tests.
- To reduce stress, number the parts of the test clearly, such as 1 of 4, 2 of 4, 3 of 4 and 4 of 4, so the student knows how much work is left to do on the test.
- Be creative! Open yourself up to thinking of alternative means of allowing your student to show you what he knows.