

Tutoring Students with Special Needs

Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind when tutoring students with disabilities. Your student is your best resource! Ask him/her what tutoring strategies work best!

Mobility Disabilities

Choose a location that is accessible for the student. The location should have tables, which are high enough for a wheelchair. The student should also be able to move around the room easily.

Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder

Students with learning disabilities or attention deficit disorder may have the following challenges:

- See letters reversed or half-there or they may hear only part of a story or word.
- Difficulty determining right from left.
- Difficulty with short-term memory or difficulty remembering names, dates, or a word that is needed to tell a story.
- Low tolerance for repetitive tasks.
- May appear in a state of confusion.
- Difficulty with pronunciation or spelling.
- Focused one day but not focused the next day.
- Take more time to start and complete tasks.
- Not successful with cramming.
- Lack self-confidence.
- Ask the same questions over and over.
- May feel lonely, rejected, isolated, shame, fear, bitterness, low self-esteem, anger.

To help students overcome these challenges during tutoring sessions, tutors may choose to do the following:

- Ask the student about his/her strengths and weaknesses.
- Use multi-sensory materials/aids.
 - Use verbal and written directions and instructions. Keep them simple.
 - Use more than one example and/or demonstration.
 - Use diagrams/visual demonstrations when teaching abstract concepts. For example: flash cards, flow charts, and maps.
 - Create mental pictures. Visualize.
 - Use mnemonic devices.
 - Use role-play techniques.
 - Create outlines with the student.
- Review material over and over.
- Highlight key points and concepts.
- Break lengthy concepts/assignments into shorter segments.
- Put one problem or one question on one piece of paper so that the student is not distracted by various items on one page.
- Pause between ideas/concepts. Allow time for processing.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Repeat directions/concepts/explanations.
- Ask questions to check for understanding. Check for understanding frequently.
- Have the student “teach” you. Allow the student to hear his/herself explain the concepts.
- Relate concepts to a similar task or procedure already learned.
- Conduct your tutoring sessions in a quiet location without distraction.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Students who are deaf or hard of hearing have preferred forms of communication. They may rely on American Sign Language (ASL) or they may use visual cues and lip read to communicate.
- When you are speaking to this student, face the student directly. Avoid blocking your mouth with your hands. If an interpreter is present, he/she will sit next to you so that the student can see both of you clearly.
- Make sure you have the student's attention before speaking. A tap on the shoulder or wave of the hand can get the student's attention.
- Speak the same way to a student who lip reads as you would to any other student.
- Use visual aids to support what was said. If you are talking about something on a page in a book, point to the page so that the student understands the context of your speech.
- Verify the student's comprehension of a concept by asking him/her to explain it to you. If a student does not understand what was said, rephrase it. Certain words can be more difficult to lip read than others.
- Since the student's first language may be ASL, the student may struggle with writing. ASL does not include many spoken English words; therefore, the student may have many of the same challenges as a student who is learning English as a second language.
- Conduct your tutoring sessions in a quiet location without distraction.
- Refrain from using sarcasm. Students who are hard of hearing may not understand it.

Blind or Low Vision

- Try to be consistent in a meeting location so that the student is able to find you easily.
- Keep in mind that many students who are blind/low vision require materials in alternate format (i.e. taped, Braille, enlarged). If you plan to provide additional information, talk to the Disability Services department about providing it in the proper format for the student.
- If the student has low vision, use big, bold letters when writing something down. Watch the contrast, too. Some students may have difficulty reading words on different backgrounds. Consider using colored paper and colored pens to figure out the best contrast for the student.
- If you refer to information that is in the book or on a sheet of paper, read the information to the student.
- Rich verbal descriptions are extremely important. Verbalize everything you write down or read. Describe pictures, illustrations, graphs in detail.
- Use very specific language. Avoid vague terms or phrases, such as, "the chair is over there". Be very specific! Encourage students to let you know if your description is too vague or if they are having difficulty understanding.
- Whenever possible, provide a tactual representation of drawings and diagrams.
- Be open to exploring new equipment with students.
- Be aware of possible problems with lighting or noisy backgrounds, so they do not interfere with the student's ability to learn.

Strategies for Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum (Neuro-atypical):

- **Structure.** These students do much better with things as a *known* quantity. Encourage schedules and guidelines. Also, as the unknown can cause stress, encourage an alternative plan if the first one doesn't work out so well.
- **Quiet and private spaces.** These students can be overwhelmed easily. Consider places on campus where they can calm down or be solo if needed.
- **Address abnormal or disruptive behavior** and ask about ways to deal with this...don't just ignore it.

- **Allow some time for “oddities”.** (E.g., a student may need to tell you ever license plate number in the parking lot before getting to the heart of the matter, especially under stress. Let them do this for some time, but cue them know when to move on.)
- **Consider alternative/calming ways of interaction:**
 - Provide information in more than one modality: verbally, visually and in writing.
 - Consider non-direct “gentle” forms of contact
 - Looking down or avoiding eye contact
 - Lower lighting in a room
 - Lower voices
 - Short, brief questions
- **Communication:**
 - These students will need you to be clear, clear, clear.
 - Be very concrete—provide specific steps for things. *“The first thing you when meeting with me is to take out your list of questions...”*
 - Check for understanding. *“Tell me in your own words or write down for me what we just discussed...”*
 - Sometimes, this population is known as being overly honest or direct. It is OK to guide students to appropriate social behavior, but also allow them a place, time where they can express themselves without restraint.