

5 TIPS

For a more neurodiverse-friendly classroom*

***Warning: might just be beneficial to all students**

~Definition of neurodiversity: *The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population.* Neurodiverse students can experience more difficulties with studying. Below are a few tips that can increase accessibility for students if applied by teachers.

1. Provide structure + clear and explicit communication

Make sure the course is well organized: tell students how the course is structured, what they can expect, what you expect of the students (explicitly: give examples), but also for example how your Canvas is organized, how groups are formed, and when there is a syllabus: provide this. Also, provide all information on time (weeks before the course starts), so students will timely know what to expect. Last, try not to make use of metaphors, but be literal (*excuse the title of my #4 tip!*).

2. Talk and listen to your students

Ask your students about their needs, e.g. by sending an inventory form on day 1. Again, make it explicit what you want to know (give examples: "I am easily distracted/overloaded, I have a diagnosis, I have a lot of stress/fear of failure, I have difficulties with [...], etc). It is also important that you explain why it is relevant for students to share their needs. Encourage students to be proactive in this! This goes for all students, not only when having a diagnosis, as every student is different and might have different needs and difficulties.

3. Obtain knowledge on the subject

Besides knowing which of your students have different needs, it is important that you know what it means: what is ADHD, ASD, dyslexia, PTSD, or sensory overload in general? What do these students go through, and what might they need? You can search for (scientific) literature about the topic. There is also a disability handbook on ADHD/ASD you can read, or you can attend a presentation from the student psychologist about 'teaching students with ASD', or talk to students working in the UvA program 'Support for students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder'.

4. Are there 'other ways to Rome'?

If possible: try to explore possibilities for students to reach the learning goal of an assignment by using other means. For example: is it necessary for achieving the learning objective to work in a large group or can the student work alone or from home? Or can the student give an oral explanation/ reflection instead of a written one? This is a hard one, but try to be curious and look for possibilities in your course and assignments.

5. Minimize sensory input

Some settings might not directly allow for minimalization of sensory input, such as a laboratory setting where students work in large groups and lab safety is important, but try to think of possibilities where it is possible.

E.g. providing more breaks when needed, sitting at the corner of a lab table instead of in between students, working from home when possible, working outside of the classroom in a more quiet place, using earplugs or headphones etc. By applying tip #2, you have insight in what can help your students, so try to be thoughtful figuring out what might be possible. Note: if you work with many different teachers or teaching-assistants, make sure that they are also aware of the possibilities you provide and facilitate this!

BONUSTIP:

Change the font of your slides/ documents to a sans-serif font such as Verdana to increase readability.