

Studying with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands



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Studying with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

If you have an autism spectrum disorder, you might find certain things difficult during your studies. For example:

- Getting used to the changes that come with studying at a university;
- Keeping a good overview and planning your work well;
- Distinguishing between the main and secondary information in your study materials;
- Working well in groups;
- Making contact with your fellow students and lecturers.

Leiden University finds it important that everyone has the same opportunities to be successful in their studies. For this reason, students with an autism spectrum disorder are entitled to request additional guidance and facilities. In this brochure you can read about the support offered by the university. You will also find study tips and information on workshops and courses that can help you to improve your study skills.



1. What is ASD?

Of course, if you have ASD, you know what it is. But if you're not sure whether you have it, or if you want to explain it to your study adviser or lecturers, the information below might be helpful. But remember that everyone is different and not everyone experiences the same difficulties.

Separate facts and details

People with ASD find it difficult to form a coherent picture from the things they perceive around them. They process stimuli differently to other people. They see the details first, then try to put together the whole picture. For them, reality is a collection of separate facts. This means they may act differently to other people and experience limitations in certain situations.

Social contact

People with ASD often have difficulties with social contact. They find it tricky to judge social situations and put themselves in another person's situation. As a result, other people's emotions can come across as difficult to understand or even threatening.

Communication

People with ASD often take things that people say very literally. They don't notice the way and the context in which something is said. As a result, they can find irony, imagery and word-play difficult to understand.

For someone with ASD, it can be difficult to start a conversation or keep a conversation going. ASD makes it tricky to understand another person's non-



verbal communication. This means that, for example, they might not realise when someone is trying to end a conversation. If you have ASD it can be hard to have a conversation that is intended purely as social contact and isn't focused on content. For example, small talk about the weather.

Predictability

Daily life can feel unpredictable for people with ASD. To find security and calm, they often stick to routines and rituals. They may also be particularly interested in a specific subject, which they really focus on.

To make sure they keep up with their studies, students with ASD often try to learn their study materials down to the tiniest detail. This might be feasible at secondary school, but it can lead to problems at university. There are simply too many materials to learn in such details.

Imagining

People with ASD can find it difficult to imagine how things might be. This makes it hard to prepare for situations or process information. But in some cases their imagination might be too vivid. This can result in them feeling scared because they have imagined so clearly that something might go wrong.

Sensitive for stimuli

ASD makes you more sensitive to stimuli. You might be bothered by things that people without ASD don't even notice, such as a noises. This can result in over stimulation. When this happens you might need a quiet space where you can calm yourself down.

Concentration

ASD can make it difficult for you to concentrate. This is because you are sensitive to stimuli and your fixed thought patterns take up a lot of your attention.

2. Guidance

Fenestra Disability Centre

ASD is a so-called disability. Leiden University has an expertise centre for students with a disability: Fenestra Disability Centre. Fenestra staff can offer you advice, help you to request extra facilities and refer you to other sources of guidance.

Intake appointment

In order to provide you with the best service, Fenestra staff need to be aware of your specific situation. You are therefore advised to arrange an intake appointment before the start of your studies or at least 6 weeks before you are due to take an exam. You can even make an appointment if:

- you are not sure whether you have ASD;
- you are unsure whether you need extra support;
- you are uncertain whether you will definitely study at Leiden University.

You are always welcome!

Study choice guidance

Are you not sure which study programme you want to follow? Or are you unsure whether a particular study programme is a good match for you? Talk to Fenestra about it. Our staff can offer advice or refer you to a study choice adviser if necessary.



Buddy

During your first year of study you can request support from a buddy. A buddy is a student from a higher year of your study programme. He or she can help you to find your way in your new programme and help you with any problems you encounter. Fenestra staff can tell you more about it.

Referral to other sources of guidance

Fenestra staff can also refer you to organisations outside the university if you need, for example, additional study, living or personal guidance. Be aware that some living and personal guidance services may not be available to non-Dutch students.

3. Facilities

As autism spectrum disorders are legally classed as disabilities, you are entitled to request special facilities. However you must be able to prove that you have ASD. For this, you require an official statement issued by an expert. Fenestra can help you to arrange this.

Request special facilities on time

You are only entitled to special facilities if you request them on time. Make sure to request special facilities right at the start of the academic year.

Binding study advice (BSA)

In the first year of your bachelor's programme you are subject to binding study advice (BSA). This means you must obtain a certain number of study credits to be permitted to continue onto the next year of your study programme. If this isn't achievable as a result of your autism spectrum disorder, you can request that your study programme takes this into

consideration when issuing binding study advice. This doesn't automatically mean that you will be allowed to continue studying despite insufficient credits. The Board of Examiners will look at the total picture, for example your abilities, determination and attitude to study.

Request a statement of hindrance

If you want the board of examiners to take your autism spectrum disorder into consideration, you must request a so-called statement of hindrance from the BSA committee. To do so, you will need a statement issued by your doctor or another professional.

Do this on time: by 15 July at the latest!

Request your statement of hindrance on time: by 15 July at the latest! Remember that it might take some time to get the necessary doctor's statement, so don't wait till the last minute.



Read more about requesting a statement of hindrance universiteitleiden.nl/fenestra.

Extra time for exams

If it takes you longer to complete exams due to your ASD, you can request extra exam time. Submit your request, accompanied by an official statement confirming that you have ASD, to universiteitleiden.nl/bsa-exceptional-circumstances.

If you don't yet have the necessary official statement, Fenestra can help you to arrange one.

Support for study delay

If you fall behind in your studies as a result of your ASD, and you are receiving Dutch student finance, you may be eligible to request (financial) support from DUO or the university.

- From DUO you can, for example, get a loan reduction, a one-year extension of your loan or OV card, or additional time to graduate.
- From the university you can, in some cases, receive financial assistance via the Regulations on Financial Support for Students (FOS).

Fenestra staff can tell you more about the options available.

Municipal study allowance

Are you unable to do a part-time job alongside your studies as a result of your ASD? And are you over 18 and entitled to Dutch student finance? If so, you may be eligible for municipal study allowance. You can submit your request via your local municipality. Fenestra staff can tell you more and assist you with the request.

Other facilities

Maybe you need other facilities, such as additional guidance or extra time for written assignments. Discuss this with Fenestra staff. Together you can look for the best options for your particular situation.

4. Study tips

The tips below can help you to study more effectively and keep the difficulties caused by your ASD to a minimum. Try a few of them to find out what works best for you. Give it a few weeks. Research proves that it takes 21 days to change a habit.

Before starting your studies

- Try to get used to some of the new things you're going to encounter. For example, practice the journey or visit the university buildings.
- Come to Fenestra for an intake appointment or send us an email explaining the issues you think you might encounter. We can then discuss the best support options for you.

Planning and organising

- Use a well-structured agenda.
- Make sure your workspace is organised.
- Attend all your lectures and work groups.
- Always draw up a clear and achievable plan.
- Avoid doing things at the last minute.
- Set priorities.
- Divide tasks into manageable portions.
- Monitor your own progress
- Share your planning with someone else and ask them to keep an eye on your progress.

Dealing with distractions

- Make sure your workspace is tidy.
- Switch off your phone, radio and TV.
- Close your emails or other distracting websites.
- Ask other people not to disturb you.
- Avoid places with too many distractions. For example, don't sit by a window.
- Find a quiet room. Many Leiden University buildings have one. Ask at the reception.
- Some students study better with 'white noise' in the background. This is a monotone sound that cancels out background noise. You can find free 'white noise' on various websites.
- The Pomodoro technique is a good method to help you concentrate on your studies. For periods of 25 minutes you focus intently on your studies, then take a short break and repeat. You can find out more on www.pomodoratechnique.com.

Processing study materials

- Before reading a text, first look at chapter and paragraph titles.
- Read the introduction and conclusion first, then the rest.
- Summarise longer texts into a different format such as a list or diagram.
- Study graphics, diagrams and tables carefully.
- Repeat what you have read out loud, but in your own words.

- Discuss the materials with fellow students to improve your understanding and test what you have learnt.
- Read the *study tips* on the student website to help you study more effectively.
- If you are working with a fellow student, explain your need for clarity to him/her. Make agreements about the division of tasks, contact moments and other practical matters.

Following lectures

- Find a quiet place in the lecture hall.
- Try to find out in advance what the lecturer is going to cover that day so that you can look at the materials in advance.
- Check if the sheets and notes that your lecturer will use are available in the digital learning environment. If not, ask your lecturer for them.
- Ask your lecturer if you may record the lecture.
- Don't try to include everything in your written notes. Instead, note down key words and fill in the details later.
- Ask a fellow student if you may copy his or her notes.
- You can buy study notes and summaries via SIL (silverslagen.nl) and the JoHo (joho.org).

Taking part in work groups

- Choose a quiet place in the room.
- If you don't understand one of the lecturer's questions, ask him or her to explain it for you.
- If you need to find a fellow student to work with but find this difficult, let the lecturer know and ask him/her to help you.

Taking exams

- Prepare well. Make sure you begin your revision on time and know which materials you need to learn. Find out if you will have multiple choice or open questions. Practice doing old exam papers and let fellow students test you.
- Find a quiet place in the exam room with few distractions.
- Before starting, read the instructions carefully. Check how many questions you must answer and how much time you have.
- First answer the questions you immediately know the answers to. Then do the questions you find more difficult.
- Try to remain relaxed. Take short breaks now and then and try doing relaxation exercises.
- Once you have finished your exam, go through it carefully one more time. Check you haven't missed any questions or pages.
- If you frequently run out of time in exams, request extra exam time. Read more in the 'facilities' section.
- Read the tips on *taking exams* on the student website.

Written assignments

- Divide your written assignment into smaller steps and complete them one by one. Read *how to do this* on the student website.
- If you find it hard to order your thoughts, first record your ideas on a voice recorder, then put them on paper.
- Don't try to make it perfect first time round. Make a rough version. Once you have all the basics on paper, start working on the style.

Also take a look on the website

On the Leiden University student website you can find tips on a wide range of *study skills* such as:

- Planning
- Concentrating
- Summarising
- Taking exams

5. Workshops and courses

Leiden University offers a range of courses to help you improve your study skills. Take a look at what's on offer on universiteitleiden.nl/en/courses.

Fenestra staff can also tell you more about workshops and courses that might be of help to you.



Contact

Fenestra Disability Centre

Make an appointment via: *this link*

Contact form: universiteitleiden.nl/fenestra

Telephone: 071 - 527 8025

Visiting address:

Plexus Student Centre

Kaiserstraat 25

2311 GN Leiden

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