



Autism Specific Study/Exam Guide

The aims of this guide is to help you:

- Lower the young person's anxiety**
- Help the young person study effectively**
- Consider the young person's sensory needs when studying**
- Maximise the young person's ability to concentrate**

The study environment

For a young person to get the most out of their study time, a safe environment that meets their sensory needs should be found to help them concentrate and be comfortable.

Think about what works for the young person, where and what makes them feel safe, calm and comfortable.

Their study environment should have little distractions and stimuli to allow for better concentration, e.g. having their favourite game nearby may be too distracting.

Think about the noise within the study environment. Consider what is best for the young person, e.g. noise cancelling headphones, white noise tracks or relaxing background music that isn't distracting.

Being close by when the young person is studying may help them focus and stay on task.

Think about how you are positioned when working with the young person, being alongside them rather than across from them can encourage collaboration and reduce the social demand.

Studying at a desk may be too uncomfortable and distracting for a young person with autism. Consider what is comfy and relaxing for them, e.g. lying on the ground with pillows.

If the young person needs some form of sensory input to concentrate in class, this will be the same when studying. Allow them to have a fidget toy or something that brings them comfort to give sensory input and lower their anxiety. This may also involve physical movement, e.g. jumping/swaying to help remember numbers.

Keep potential sensory stressors to a minimum – e.g. if they are studying before dinner time, the food being cooked could cause distracting smells.

How does the young person study?

Finding out what kind of learner the young person is can help you cater their learning resources to best suit them.

Search "What kind of learner am I?" on the internet to find various online tests that can assess what kind of learner the young person is.

Consider if the young person has auditory processing problems or visual processing problems in order to identify the best way for them to learn.

The usual learning types are:

- Tactile learners (learn best by touching and doing e.g. hands on projects)
- Auditory learners (learn best by hearing)
- Visual learners (learn best through seeing e.g. written or pictures of demonstration)

Study ideas:

- Mind maps
- Post its
- Asking them questions/getting them to explain information to you
- Repetitive writing/listening
- Study groups
- Visualising or taking a video of doing the task (e.g. making the recipe, doing the experiment)

Organisation is key!

Having an organised plan for the young person can help reassure and lower anxieties.

Make a study timetable for the young person in a way that is easiest for them to understand and stick to. There are mobile apps that can help do this (MySQA and My Study Life) or a hard copy may be better for the young person.

Think about when is the best time for the young person to be studying. Is it before or after school? Before or after meal times? It may be best to schedule study time for before a preferred activity.

When making a timetable, it may be a good idea to schedule in enjoyable activities for the young person to help reduce their anxieties and know when they are doing things that are important to them.

The young person may not grasp how long to spend on each topic so making this clear within the timetable will help with this. Allocating 25 minutes maximum per topic followed by a break will help maximise concentration. Using the visual below may help.



Choose what task is being done



Set a visual timer to 25 minutes



Work on the task until the timer runs out



Take a 5 minute break



Repeat until the study session has finished

Consider how the young person is using breaks between studying. If the young person struggles to come off video games, this may be best left for once studying has ended for the day. Movement within the breaks may be a good idea for sensory input.

If the young person is struggling to start new tasks, make a time to start it yourself, then ask them to join in and start it collaboratively.

Break down topics as much as needed for the young person, as looking at a subject as a whole can be overwhelming. Colour coding subjects can help with this as well as help the young person be more organised. The study timetable, jotters, folders etc could all be colour coded.



Study Timetable

As mentioned in the organisational section of this guide, a study timetable can help lower the young persons anxiety and visualise their schedule. Below is an example of a study timetable created by a parent using Microsoft Excel. Mobile apps such as MySQA and My Study Life could also be used.

w/c 6th May 2019

STUDY LEAVE	10.00-11.00	11.30-12.30	12.30-1.30	1.30-2.30	2.30-3.30	3.30-5.00	5.00-6.00	6.00-7.00	7.00-8.00	8.00-9.00	9.00-10.00	10.00-11.00
Monday								Dinner	Youth Theatre	Shower		No tech
Tuesday	English	English	Break/Lunch	Chemistry	Chemistry			Dinner	Gym	Shower		No tech
Wednesday		Chemistry	Break/Lunch	English	English			Dinner	Chemistry			No tech
Thursday (Shower in am)	ENGLISH	EXAM						Dinner				No tech
Friday (shower in am)				CHEMISTRY	EXAM		Dinner	Social Group	Social Group			
Saturday				DRIVING LESSON								
Sunday												No tech

w/c 13th May 2019

STUDY LEAVE	10.00-11.00	11.30-12.30	12.30-1.30	1.30-2.30	2.30-3.30	4.00-5.00	5.00-6.00	6.00-7.00	7.00-8.00	8.00-9.00	9.00-10.00	10.00-11.00
Monday								Dinner	Youth Theatre	Shower		No tech
Tuesday	Physics	Physics	Break/Lunch	Physics	Physics			Dinner	Gym	Shower		No tech
Wednesday				PHYSICS	EXAM			Dinner				No tech
Thursday (Shower in am)								Dinner				No tech
Friday (shower in am)							Dinner	Social Group	Social Group			
Saturday			Gym									
Sunday												No tech

Key

Free Time
Maths
English
Biology
Chemistry
Physics
Gym
PAS



Understanding the Question

Gain an understanding of what the question is asking the young person to do. Here is some examples, however, more essay terms are explained in the link in the footer**.

Practice finding out what the question is actually asking. For example, many maths questions can be hidden within a social situation which can confuse people with autism, so practice with a highlighter finding the actual question.

Consider making a check list that helps the young person understand how to approach an exam question in a systematic way.

For example:

- Read the question
- Re-read the question
- Highlight the main points within the question/break the question down
- Answer the question
- Re-read the answer

Essay Term	Definition
Compare	Identify the similarities and differences between two or more things. Say if any of the shared similarities or differences are more important than others. 'Compare' and 'contrast' will often feature together in an essay question.
Define	To give in precise terms the meaning of something. Bring to attention any problems posed with the definition and different interpretations that may exist.
Describe	Provide a detailed explanation as to how and why something happens.

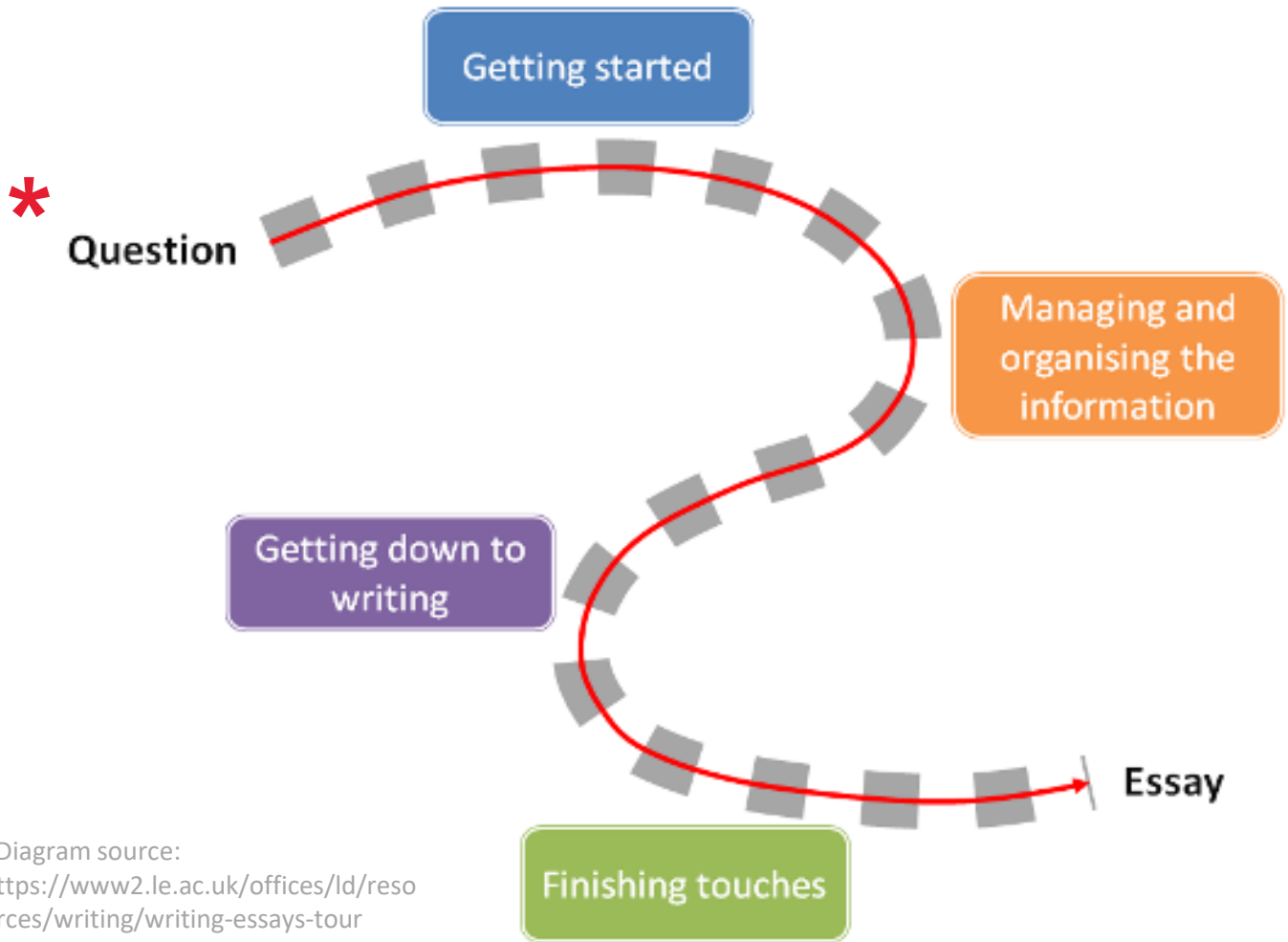
Study Skills

Helping the young person develop certain study skills will prepare them for when sitting tests or exams.

Use visual tools

Use visuals to help explain processes such as the one below. You can change the amount of detail based on how much they need.

Speak with subject teachers – find out how and what they are studying in class to have a consistent approach with home and school.



Use interests to aid learning

Use their interests as learning opportunities and build off their strengths. For example, if interested in transport, use vehicles to link French vocabulary to help them remember. E.g. the French word for library is “Bibliothèque”. Split this in to syllables and put each syllable on a train carriage.



Other tips & tricks

Here are some ideas to make studying easier for the young person.

Do not underestimate the importance of a good routine, diet and sleep! This will help the young person feel ready and more able to study.

The young person's processing speed may vary by subjects, so different time may be needed per subject. Rushing processing will only create anxiety for the young person.

Use social stories or comic strip conversations to explain what will happen before, during and after an exam.

If possible, visit where the exam will be held beforehand so the young person is familiar with the surroundings and can note any possible distractions and put strategies in place to deal with these.

Use clear visual timers e.g. a large clock timer or a sand timers to allow the young person to understand time.

Check in with the young person regularly throughout their studying as they may be reluctant to ask for help. This way you can identify what areas they are struggling in.

Identify what signs they show when they are anxious and/or what may trigger this to help manage their anxiety.

Help the young person get the most out of their study breaks. Try use sensory input to help calm the brain and stimulate the right hand side of the brain. Good activities for this include:

- Movement e.g. dance, yoga poses, stretches, martial art drills, circuit exercises
- Music – play or listen to
- Construction tasks like puzzles, Lego
- Chores with repetitive movements like sweeping the floor, hoovering, hanging out washing



Growth Mindset

Taking a growth mindset approach with the young person can help increase their learning potential.

Here are some examples of how to create a positive growth mindset with words:

Instead of:	I can say:
I am not good at this	I am not good at this yet, but I will learn
This is too hard	This will require effort and finding the right strategy
I am afraid I will make a mistake	When I make a mistake I will learn from it and get better
I give up	I will succeed if I put in effort and find a better strategy
I can't do this	I need some feedback and help from others

Here is a link to a website that has a guide on how to introduce growth mindset:
<https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/teach-growth-mindset-kids-activities>

Emotional Regulation

Studying can be an emotionally exhausting task for a young person and it is important to help them manage their emotions.

Naming the emotion

Some children with Autism can find it difficult to share emotions due to sensory processing difficulties. This can make it a confusing process.

Helping children to understand how their feeling can help them accept the emotion and express it in a healthy way. For example, if the child is feeling nervous before an exam, explore this by saying:

“I see that you’re tapping your feet a lot, do you think this may be because you are nervous?” naming the emotion will help them understand what they are feeling. This can be followed by explaining that “it is okay to be nervous.”

Rock Problems & Play-Doh Problems

This is an approach to help a young person look at their problems differently.



Rock problems are problems that you cannot change, fix or solve. You have to learn strategies to cope with these types of problems.

Play-Doh problems are problems that you can control and change. You can look at strategies to solve these types of problems.

Emotional Bank Account

Set up an emotional bank account like the one below. This is a visual representation of what things will emotionally challenge and emotionally re-charge the young person. For example, studying may go in to the withdrawals section if they do not enjoy it, and if playing a video game is enjoyable for the young person, that would go in to the deposits section.



Other Resources;

- <https://www.bbc.com/bitesize> - for study resources
- <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/in-education/exam-guidance.aspx> - for further exam guidance for parents and professionals
- <https://www.sqa.org.uk/> - for past papers, information on exam dates and other resources
- <https://www.mystudylife.com/> - an app for phones that helps students organise their study
- <http://enquire.org.uk/> - information for parents on their child's rights surrounding additional support in schools