

Lectures / Seminars

Lectures can be a stressful experience for autistic students. Environmental factors, as well as the fast pace of information can lead to lectures becoming overwhelming. Lecture halls can be quite a distracting environment, with other students coming in and out and people shuffling papers. One autistic university student describes how they found the:

“Learning environment unsuitable. Constant interruptions and changing of schedules”. (Madriaga, 2006, p. 6).

Autistic students report finding it hard to keep up, often struggling to take notes and process information whilst listening.

Sensory issues can also contribute to the difficulties that autistic students experience in lectures.

“Often the projector or lights are making a noise, which only those of us who are hypersensitive can hear”. (Ridout, 2018, p.85)

The good news is that strategies that remove barriers to inclusion are helpful to all students, whether autistic or not (Madriaga, 2006).

Top tips for lecturers

- Having handouts, visual aids and recording of lectures can really help students to process information.
- One recommendation is to reduce the amount of information given verbally, giving students the opportunity to take notes. (Hastwell et al., 2012)
- Concrete, factual, information is easier to understand than ambiguous language.
- Prior notice of any changes to lecture halls is good practice to reduce the stress triggered by altered routine.
- Turn the projector off when not in use.

Top tips for students

- Seek out recordings of lectures and handouts to aid the processing of information.
- Arrive in plenty of time so that you can get prepared ahead of the lecture.
- Find a quieter place in the lecture hall that is near an exit in case you need to take a break.
- Take items with you that you find calming or that you can stim with.
- If the lights are too bright, wear a cap or shaded/tinted glasses.

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