

### What Is Neurodiversity?

- Umbrella term commonly covering autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities including dyslexia & dyscalculia, anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, Tourette’s syndrome, and others
- Neurodiversity movement aims to recognize these conditions as part of natural variation ([Jaarsma & Welin, 2011](#)) with rights, recognition, and acceptance
- Significant overlap in symptoms has led to a unification of diagnoses under the “neurodiversity umbrella” or in the “neurodiversity wheel”
- Traditional DSM categorization of disorders focused on *impairment in function* (DSM-V, 2013)
  - **Autism Spectrum Disorder:** persistent deficits in each of three areas of social communication and interaction plus at least two of four types of restricted, repetitive behaviors
    - With or without language impairment
    - With or without intellectual disability
- In contrast, the neurodiversity movement may focus on emotional states and supports/accommodations over functional classification
- **Intolerance of uncertainty:** intolerance of the notion that negative events may occur and there is no definitive way to predict such events; interpreting all ambiguous information as threatening; impaired problem-solving skills, leading to inaction and avoidance of ambiguous situations ([Carleton et al., 2007](#))
- **Rejection sensitivity dysphoria:** perception — not necessarily the reality — of being rejected, teased, or criticized by important people in your life; immense emotional pain from perceived failure to meet one's own or others’ expectations ([Bedrossian, 2021](#))

### Academic and Professional Discourse Norms

- Ruby Payne (2005) calls these the “hidden rules”
- What are the hidden rules of **academic discourse**?
  - How might neurodivergent students be seen negatively whereas neurotypical students might be seen positively?
  - Apply **rules of rapport** from R. Lakoff (1977) and D. Tannen (1981)

Rule of Rapport	When Seen Positively	When Seen Negatively
Don't Impose (Distance; Independence)	Easy-going Independent	Aloof Doesn't ask for help Difficult to give feedback to
Give Options (Deference; Hierarchy)	Respectful Teachable Flexible	Indecisive Passive Lacks independence
Be Friendly (Camaraderie; Social Closeness)	“Good fit” Outgoing Rapport-building	Argumentative Disrespectful Interrupts Defensive

## Tips for Supporting Neurodivergent Students in the Classroom

### Consider your goals for each assessment.

What is the purpose of the writing assignment, presentation, in-person examination, etc. Explain the rationale behind the assignment.

### Make deadlines concrete from the first day of class.

Okay to provide extensions on assignments as needed. Consider keeping examinations on the assigned day (almost) no matter what – you don't know what the cascade effect might be.

### Provide information in multiple modalities:

written and verbal. Use “announcements” on Canvas versus email (makes it easier to find later). Reminders help!

### Avoid all-or-nothing grading on late assignments.

Consider options for late or dropped assignments. I use a 10% per day late penalty.

### Explicitly teach organizational strategies and test-taking strategies.

Consider doing this as a class. After the first exam, I always ask students to talk about what worked and what didn't work in terms of studying.

## Tips for Supporting Neurodivergent Students Outside the Classroom

### Teach the hidden rules explicitly.

How should students attend office hours (sign up/appointment vs. drop in)? What topics do students frequently talk about during office hours? How do you want students to ask for letters of recommendation? What is your (often implicit) policy on extensions? (e.g., I do not accept night-before requests for extensions – these fall under my late policy)

### Unconditional positive regard:

offering support, acceptance, and compassion to people even if they have done something “wrong” (Carl Rogers, 1956; applied to online learning in [Swan et al., 2020](#)). Antithesis to rejection sensitivity dysphoria.