

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies

Guidelines for Documenting Autism Spectrum Disorder

1.) A **Qualified Evaluator**. Professionals conducting evaluations or assessments, diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and making recommendations for appropriate and reasonable academic accommodations must be qualified and licensed to do so. They may be individuals or serve as a member of a diagnostic team, as a multi-disciplinary approach is often crucial for diagnosis and treatment of those with ASD. Appropriate training and direct experience with adolescents and/or adults with ASD is essential. The evaluator may not be a family member. The documentation must:

- include the evaluator's name, title, professional credentials, license and/or certification number,
- be presented on the professional's letterhead, typed, dated, signed, and legible.

2.) **Current Documentation**. Reasonable accommodations are based on the current impact of a disability; therefore, it is of utmost importance for psychological documentation to address an individual's current level of functioning and present need for accommodations.

3.) **Comprehensive Documentation**. The documentation **must** include:

- A discussion of:
 - history of presenting symptoms and evidence of impairment in early childhood
 - relevant developmental, historical, familial, and psycho-social information
 - evidence of current functional impairment, particularly in an academic environment (e.g., the impact on study skills, note-taking, test-taking, and organizational skills).
 - severity of symptoms
 - co-existing conditions, if any.
- A diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder based on *DSM-V* or *ICD-10* criteria, including:
 - a clearly stated diagnosis, subtype if applicable, and diagnostic code,
 - a list of the diagnostic criteria as the basis for the diagnosis,
 - evidence of the ruling out of other potential diagnoses, dual diagnoses, and alternative explanations such as educational, linguistic, and cross-cultural factors,
 - a description of how the diagnosis substantially impacts one or more major life activities,
 - cannot include wording such as "seems to indicate" or "suggests."
- A description of current and past treatments, therapeutic techniques, assistive devices, or software medications, etc. used to ameliorate the impact of ASD.
- Recommendations for accommodations in a post-secondary academic environment can be helpful if they include a clear rationale. Each recommendation should be based on interview, observation, and/or testing and correlated with both the diagnosis and the student's functional limitations.

4.) **Psychological Instruments**. Though not explicitly required, psychological instruments may be useful in helping the evaluator render a more accurate diagnosis and, therefore, better recommendations for accommodation. Such tests might include/address: cognition, executive functioning, expressive and receptive language and communication, personality, behavior, sensory-motor integration, attention, memory, learning, visual-perceptive motor skills, and academic achievement. If such tests are used, they should be submitted with the evaluation. All tests should be current with an explanation of validity, reliability, and the purpose for which they are being employed. Scores must be reported in raw, standardized, and/or percentile ranks, if applicable.

5.) **Supporting Documentation**. The qualified evaluator's report, while necessary, is by no means the only documentation we can use to better understand and accommodate the student with ASD. Other helpful documents are: records of accommodation on standardized tests such as SAT or ACT, high school 504 plans or IEP's, previous psycho-educational evaluations, report cards, transcripts, and teacher, tutor, therapist, or employer reports. If needed for evaluation purposes, DASS may access students' SMU transcripts and records and contact current or former SMU instructors.