

Challenges Autistic individuals may experience in the field, and potential solutions to these issues

	Challenges Experienced	Suggested management techniques
Sun Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunscreen is famous for its “slimy” feeling • Sunglasses change visual input • Hats and bandanas are a potentially novel article of clothing that takes acclimation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-trip, provide information about different forms of sun protection, show pictures, and if possible, have different options available for students to try.
Field Clothing & Shoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textures and sounds of “quick-dry” field/outdoor clothes can be extremely uncomfortable • field clothes have a different “fit” from everyday clothes worn in a classroom • Boots are heavier/more restricting than shoes • Finding clothing that is both tolerable for the student and provide appropriate levels of protection and functionality for field conditions is something best handled by the individual student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let students know what the parameters for “appropriate field clothing” are for your trip. (Do they need long pants? Why/Are jeans inappropriate in this setting? What types of cloth/materials make the best layers? Will they be getting wet, and if so, what are the options for drying off or changing clothes?). • Provide or suggest shorter opportunities to practice field activities while wearing field clothes prior to bigger trips, to experiment and learn what works best.
Bathroom Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may have to use the bathroom in situations that they have not encountered before. This is not specific to autistic students, although autistic students specifically may not have the social scripts to know how to ask. • For in-depth discussion, see Greene et al. (2019) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the trip (in lecture, course website/syllabus) discuss resources available for taking care of bathroom needs within the parameters of your trip. • Share bathroom availability information • Include relevant supplies on the packing list.
Food, Mealtimes, and Meal Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many autistic people are very sensitive to the textures and tastes of food, making it difficult or impossible to simply eat whatever food is provided. Autistic people in particular, may find that it is easier to tolerate ‘hunger’ than to tolerate the sensory input of certain foods. This can lead to restricting intake. • <u>Preparing Meals:</u> On trips where the students are responsible for their own food, autistic students may struggle to share kitchen facilities with many others, or not have a group of peers they feel comfortable joining to make meals. may struggle to buy and organize their food needs for the duration of the trip. • <u>Scheduling:</u> Without a designated period in which to eat lunch, autistic students may struggle to know when to eat or chose not to eat for fear of falling behind with work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the specific contents/plans for each meal with the class prior to the trip & solicit suggestions for food • Plan for flexible meals that let each student ‘construct’ their own final dish. • Encourage students to bring their own snacks; give examples of good and bad field snacks. This also gives the permission for students to determine whether/how they will need to supplement whatever food is being provided. • On trips where students are responsible for their own food, ensure meal plans and shopping lists are made before the trip. Provide examples • Where feasible, distribute students between multiple kitchen spaces • Designate a time in the day where the expectation is that everyone will stop working to eat lunch, drink water, etc.

Challenges Autistic individuals may experience in the field, and potential solutions to these issues (cont)

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Weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autistic students may be particularly sensitive to being wet or muddy. Being caught in unexpected or severe weather can be scary. It is common for autistic individuals to have impaired body temperature regulation or struggle to recognize when to add or remove layers of clothing in the field. Students may be too anxious to ask everyone to wait for them to adjust layers or drink water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share weather forecast ahead of time Suggest appropriate gear and clothing Provide specific information about accommodations and schedule: knowing when they will be able to get clean/dry can help an uncomfortable student stay focused on the task at hand, rather than on the fact that they are cold, wet, & muddy. Have regular, announced, 5-minute breaks for everyone to adjust layers or have a drink/ snack without concerns of being left behind.
Visual processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some autistic individuals see the world in “higher definition”, observing and recording extreme detail in outcrops whether or not those details are pertinent to the main problem they are at the outcrop to solve. Intense visual information can drive overloaded and tire the autistic student more quickly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior to arrival on the outcrop, prime students about potential observations to prepare for, what specifically to focus on, and what details can be ignored, Include these focus questions/concepts in the field guide where possible.
Noise sensitivity/ Auditory processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many autistics are hypersensitive to noises, particularly unfamiliar noises (e.g. the sound of boots scuffing over dry rocks, rushing wind, road noise, or the sound of unfamiliar fabrics rubbing on each other), which can cause significant distress, pain, and contribute to overloading and shut-down. Difficulty filtering this input may make it challenging to hear, understand or process what is being said in the field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many noises in the field are unavoidable, but an awareness of their impact will go a long way to reducing an autistic person's anxiety. When giving introductions, summaries, or having group discussions, ensure that only one person is talking at once, and pick a location that minimizes other distractions. Ear plugs or ear defenders may be beneficial (though not for everyone), and short breaks to recover from overstimulation should be allowed for.
Asking for help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anxiety or the challenges involved with starting or maintaining a conversation means that some autistic individuals hugely struggle to self-advocate, particularly in real-time: A student may not know <i>how</i> or <i>when</i> to ask for help, who to talk to, or even what to bring up to an instructor if it hasn't been asked about specifically. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign a point of contact who the autistic student is familiar with (friend, teaching assistant, professor, support person), who they can explicitly discuss any concerns, questions, or comments with, no matter how small or irrelevant they might seem. Provide ample opportunities for students to ask questions both in a group setting and individually. Make it clear that this is an acceptable and expected thing to do. Ex: have each student write down a question, and then discuss their question with their neighbor or the professor or teaching assistant.