Neurodiversity-affirming Supervision for Graduate Student Success

YORK U

Graduate Studies at York University

A Place Where Knowledge is Made!

Contents

Neurodiversity-affirming Supervision for Graduate Student Success

Preamble

The Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Supervision Support Hub at York University strive to build a graduate community rooted in collaboration, innovation, creativity, and belonging. The success of graduate supervision depends on meaningful and open exchanges of ideas that are deepened when neurodivergent perspectives and lived experiences are welcomed and structurally centred. To support this, it is essential that members of the graduate community experience meaningful inclusion through access, affirmation, and systemic accountability. Their contributions must be recognized, their voices listened to, and supervisors must actively foster equitable, respectful dialogue. This is a shared responsibility for everyone involved in graduate education and supervision.

We acknowledge that this guide cannot encompass the full range of neurodivergent graduate students' needs and experiences. It is offered as a contribution toward greater accountability, deeper understanding and care-rooted support within graduate education and supervision. We also recognize that each student's self-advocacy and lived experience is a critical source of knowledge, and listening to and learning from this is essential to building supervisory relationships grounded in access, care and respect for neurodivergent ways of being.

The Neurodiversity-affirming Supervision for Graduate Student Success Guide aims to centre the lived realities of neurodivergent graduate students while fostering open, respectful dialogue between supervisor and student. It is offered as a companion to the Strong Start to Supervision Checklist (pdf) and the Graduate Supervision Toolkit. All resources can be reviewed at the beginning of the student-supervisor relationship and revisited throughout, especially during significant changes in research, support needs or committee membership.

In this guide, *student* refers to *neurodivergent graduate students* unless otherwise noted. The full term is used when naming specific experiences or barriers, and *student* when the context is clear. This choice affirms that neurodivergence is not a deviation to accommodate but a valuable way of being in graduate education.

Where care lives, learning follows

Definitions

- There is no single ‘normal’ or ‘right’ style of the human mind. It is vital to accept and support individual differences in the many ways of processing, understanding, and interacting with the world.
- Neurodiversity is the natural variation in how human brains function—how we think, learn, process and communicate information. It highlights the wide range of neurocognitive differences, not deficits, among individuals. Rather than defining a specific set of characteristics, the term reflects a cognitive style that diverges from societal norms and is a natural, healthy and valuable form of human diversity.
- The term for one person is ‘neurodivergent individual,’ while ‘neurodiverse’ refers to a group of people with differing neurocognitive profiles.
- Neurotypical refers to a style of neurocognitive functioning that aligns with dominant societal notions of ‘normal,’ and is the opposite of neurodivergent.
- The concept of neurodiversity discourages any *assumption* that neurodivergence is a deficit.

Neurodivergence and Intersectionality

Neurodivergent graduate students often experience multiple and compounding forms of marginalization. Those who are international students may face additional barriers related to immigration status, health care access, or housing. Black, Indigenous, and racialized students are more likely to be pathologized, under-supported, or over-disciplined within academic institutions. 2SLGBTQIA+ students, particularly those who are trans or nonbinary, may encounter gendered assumptions in supervisory relationships or in neurotypical behavioural expectations. Supervisors are encouraged to recognize how these intersecting identities shape the experiences of neurodivergent students, and to respond with approaches grounded in equity, care, and cultural humility.

Try This

- *Reflect on how neurotypical privilege and power shape supervision.*
- *Avoid assuming neurodivergence looks or feels the same for all graduate students.*
- *Support needs without requiring disclosure or explanation.*
- *Lead with genuine curiosity and relational empathy to make space where neurodivergent students can speak truthfully and safely.*

Equitable Graduate Supervision

Equitable graduate supervision must be grounded in inclusive learning environments that honour neurodivergent students’ ways of knowing, processing, and relating, not as

deficits to accommodate, but as vital contributions that enrich the scholarly community.

- Engage in reflexive praxis. Consider how your beliefs, academic training and neurotypical assumptions shape your understanding of neurodivergent graduate students. Reflect on the broader social, cultural and systemic factors impacting their experience and adjust your supervisory practices based on this critical reflection.
- Recognize and amplify strengths. Notice the specific strengths students bring and actively channel them to support their engagement, learning and scholarship.

Insight Point

> *A student with strong attention to detail might lead data analysis, manage protocols, or finalize presentation materials in a collaborative project.*

- Be mindful of masking and mimicry. Neurodivergent graduate students may feel pressure to mask or camouflage their identities, or to mimic neurotypical norms to survive academic and social expectations. These strategies are particularly common among women and gender-diverse students who face heightened pressures to conform.
- Offer multiple, low-barrier ways for students to communicate their needs and preferences. This reduces the pressure to mask and fosters more authentic, affirming engagement.

Try This

> *Let students communicate via text, voice memo, or bullet points in an email instead of requiring formal written reports or meetings.*
> *Have a Weekly Check-in Menu (optional, low-pressure form) with questions such as: "How's your energy this week? (Emoji, word, or skip!)" or "Would you like support on anything? (If yes, how?)."*

- Name and dismantle the hidden curriculum. Unwritten rules, cultural norms and institutional expectations often exclude students who have been systemically denied access to them, including neurodivergent graduate students.

Try This

> *Proactively explain expectations, make implicit processes visible, and invite questions without judgement.*

- Design for accessibility from the start. Ensure that course content, meetings and communication methods are accessible and flexible by default without waiting for formal accommodation requests.

- Apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and strengths-based approaches to reshape academic environments, not the student. UDL recognizes that academic barriers are most often environmental and structural. Within the UDL framework:
  - Information is offered in multiple forms such as oral explanations, visual diagrams and written text (with captions or image descriptions).
  - Students can express knowledge in ways that reflect their strengths, e.g., submitting a written report instead of presenting aloud.
  - Engagement is scaffolded by offering autonomy, varying challenge levels and allowing for choice.
  - Design acknowledges that students are motivated by different factors and need varied supports over time.
  - Assessment and communication allows for different expressions of learning and different pacing. Pacing is a cognitive and behavioural strategy to support and regulate movement and physical activity.
  - Environments build in flexibility and tolerance, not as an exception, but as a standard.
  - Transitions are supported, whether between ideas in a thesis chapter or days in a week, with intentional scaffolding.

How Graduate Programs Can Provide Support

- Offer a clear, bullet-pointed list of all key administrative tasks to be completed before beginning graduate studies and during the first week on campus.
- Explicitly introduce the structure, purpose and expectations of supervisory meetings early in the program, including opportunities for students to co-design the meeting format.
- Create structured opportunities for neurodivergent graduate students to build relationships with peer mentors, faculty allies or go-to support people, ideally including neurodivergent mentors or more experienced students.
- Support graduate student-led groups that foster peer connection, shared experience, alleviate feelings of isolation and space to navigate social and academic norms collectively.
- Critically examine the defence process including how it is structured, where it takes place and how it reflects dominant academic norms. Consider how the format and environment can be made more accessible, flexible and validating for neurodivergent ways of communicating knowledge. See Appendix A and Appendix B.
- Centre what students identify as helpful to their learning by co-designing strategies through early one-to-one conversations about learning preferences and goals rather than waiting for formal documentation.
- Encourage supervisor training that includes neurodiversity-affirming practices and disability justice principles.

- Acknowledge the power dynamics embedded in graduate education. Neurodivergent graduate students must regularly contend with systems that privilege certain ways of socializing, thinking and learning. These pressures are pronounced in the supervisor-student relationship which is shaped by hierarchy and institutional culture.

How Graduate Supervisors Can Provide Support

Your role as a supervisor is to create an environment where graduate students can thrive by responding to their expressed learning needs with openness and flexibility. Trust your students' self-knowledge as students are the experts on their learning.

Accept

- Honour student privacy and autonomy as students are not required to explain the 'why' behind their needs.
- Build relationships rooted in acceptance and respect for neurodivergent ways of thinking, relating and working.

Helpful Prompts

- *"All students learn differently, and I am open to working with you in ways that support your strengths."*
- *"If you would like to explore strategies that work for you, or if you may benefit from accommodations, you are always welcome to talk with me."*
- *"Have you ever received helpful accommodations?"*
  - *"If yes, which were most helpful?"*
  - *"If no, let's think through together about what might support you best."*

- Show visible support by embedding neurodivergent creators across research, supervision, and co-learning frameworks; use symbols like the rainbow infinity symbol; or share your own accessibility story if safe and appropriate.

Adapt

- Supportive supervision begins with meeting neurodivergent students where they are at—not asking them to adapt to systems not built for them. When you shift, thriving becomes possible.

Reflective Questions

- *Do I understand inclusion as a collective norm, or do I treat it as something my students must navigate alone?*

- *Do my students have flexible ways to demonstrate their capabilities?*
- *Are my students learning about themselves in ways that affirm, not pathologize, their uniqueness?*

Try This

- *Clarify your directions, preview upcoming changes and state expectations directly.*
- *Avoid overly open-ended questions, scaffold with options and clarify what kind of response you are looking for.*
- *Offer yes/no or multiple-choice prompts to reduce cognitive load or anxiety.*
- *In lab or creative settings, embrace non-linear research paths to support hypercuriosity and divergent thinking.*

Include

- Invite neurodivergent graduate students to explore campus early, creating space for orientation, pacing, and consent—letting them decide how and when to engage with new environments.
- Include a range of participation formats such as oral, written, asynchronous, visual or nonverbal to reflect multiple ways of sharing and knowing.
- Design opportunities for students to pursue passion-based learning within projects as it boosts engagement and self-worth.
- Collaborate with the students to create learning communities they belong to and shape.

Try This

- *Support peer groups, interest collectives or study spaces grounded in shared access needs.*

Recognize and Support

- Understand that neurodivergent graduate students may also be mature students (pdf) navigating the realities of family care, employment, or chronic fatigue.
- Remember that neurodivergent students are often asked to adapt to neurotypical rhythms of time, from urgency to punctuality to energy pacing. This can lead to exhaustion, lateness or overextension. Make space for time to be experienced differently and plan accordingly.
- Actively listen with curiosity and compassion. Build trust early and talk about how to navigate unexpected changes together.
- Initiate and hold ongoing conversations about learning differences and communication preferences within a post-secondary environment.
- Be aware that students may self-silence or withhold access needs to preserve a sense of academic safety especially within supervisor-student relationships.

- Support students in navigating complex, inaccessible institutional forms such as petitions, ethics submissions or course documentation. Be proactive in offering help.
- Identify potential transportation access barriers for field work, placements or conferences and design with these in mind.
- Recognize signs of sensory distress, e.g., overload from light, noise, texture or scent and offer flexible responses like movement breaks, dimmer spaces or asynchronous options.
- Co-create conditions for self-awareness and advocacy by inviting students to reflect on what works for them.

Helpful Prompts

- *"What helped you with writing this chapter?"*
- *"How did you manage test anxiety before?"*
- *"What time of day do you feel most focused?"*
- *"What study methods, tools or spaces support you best?"*

Approaches to Learning Within Supervision Contexts

Creating equitable learning environments means designing with difference in mind, not only adjusting retroactively. The approaches below aim to proactively remove barriers, affirm neurodivergent students' strengths and ways of knowing, and support thriving, not just survival, in graduate education.

Accessibility

- Ensure that all digital materials (Word documents, PDFs, PowerPoint, Google Slides and websites) are fully accessible and compliant with AODA standards.

Try This

- *Accessible Word documents are generally preferred; PDFs are least preferred unless fully remediated. But most importantly, ask students what formats work best for them.*
- *Use clear design: reduce dense text blocks, include headings and keywords and integrate visuals such as diagrams or models. Be mindful of contrast and colour choices.*

- Provide content warnings for materials that involve sudden or loud sounds, flashing or bright lights, strong smells or other sensory triggers.
- Offer materials and instructions in both oral and written formats. Ensure all instructions are well-defined, followed up on and allow for processing time, especially during discussions or when asking questions.

Communication

- Introduce the structure and expectations of supervisory meetings early. Let students know they can co-create the format.
- Share a meeting agenda (docx) at least 24 hours in advance and follow up with meeting notes (docx) and clearly defined next steps.
- Invite students to follow-up with a clarifying email to ensure mutual understanding and shared memory of decisions or discussions.
- Give explicit, constructive, factual feedback and do not rely on inference. Check in regularly about how the student is interpreting or processing your feedback.

Try This

- *Ask your graduate student how they prefer to receive feedback and consider how you may adjust. "What's the best way for me to give you feedback so it feels supportive and not overwhelming?"*
- *Allow time for your student to read and absorb the feedback in manageable chunks.*
- *Let your student know that feedback is a resource for growth, not a personal judgment.*

- Clarify that inclusion is a collective norm, not an individual burden. Set the expectation that all group members will be meaningfully included and establish specific practices to uphold this.
- Reinforce the relevance of research milestones by connecting to larger learning or career goals.
- Use gentle, consent-based check-ins that invite honesty without assuming something is wrong.

Helpful Prompts

- *"Is there anything you would like more support with this week?"*
- *"How is your work and life energy lately?"*
- *"Do you feel like you have space for rest and breaks?"*
- *"Is anything coming up that is feeling especially stressful?"*

Flexibility

- Invite students to tell you what they need to do their work. Offer multiple modalities for communication and instruction, e.g., written, visual, audio, in-person or asynchronous.
- At the beginning of your supervisory relationship, explicitly state that it is okay to take breaks, step out, or adjust the space as needed without penalty or explanation.
- Offer flexibility with timelines and deadlines, including buffer time for navigating institutional barriers such as producing accessible versions of library or archival materials.

- Incorporate diverse assessment formats, e.g., written, visual, oral, or creative and allow students to choose how they demonstrate learning where possible.
- Make room for students to follow their interests and use their strengths, rather than forcing conformity to a singular academic path.

Language

- Initiate open dialogue with students about their language preference such as identity-first (e.g., autistic person) or person-first (e.g., person with autism) language. Honour a student's choice without assumption or correction.
- Use language that affirms, not pathologizes and reflect regularly on how language shapes inclusion. Read the Mindful Use of Language (pdf).

Reflective Questions

- *Does my language unintentionally 'other' neurodivergent students?*
- *Am I implying that neurodivergence needs to be fixed, cured, or managed?*

Insight Point

- *'Support strategy' instead of 'treatment plan'* *(recognizes people, not problems).*
- *"That's frustrating" instead of "That's crazy"* *(keeps language respectful).*
- *'Support needs vary' instead of 'high- or low-functioning'* *(honours lived experience, not imposed categories).*
- *"They experience..." or "They navigate..." instead of "They suffer from..."* *(avoids framing someone's life as inherently painful).*

Room, Studio and Lab Setup

- Supervision spaces should be consciously designed to support neurodiverse and disabled ways of being, including attention to lighting, sound, spatial configuration and movement.

Try This

- *Offer options such as dimmed or natural lighting, wearing sunglasses, using ear covers or noise-reducing headphones, low stimulation areas and a variety of seating and posture arrangements.*

- If sensory demands in a room, studio or lab cause distress, provide alternatives for participation including quieter workspaces or asynchronous engagement.

Effective Supervision Practice Guidelines

Clarity

- Clearly communicate what students can expect and what is expected of them. Review the Strong Start to Supervision Checklist (pdf) together.
- Reduce ambiguity by providing materials in advance and using examples or exemplars and explicitly stating both spoken and unspoken expectations and norms.
- Be specific about milestone components, due dates and assessment criteria.
- Always supplement oral instructions with written, accessible formats.
- Offer guidance for group work dynamics, e.g., how to divide up tasks, establish communication norms and set boundaries around sharing personal information.

Communication

- Co-create a communication agreement early in the supervisory relationship.

Reflective Questions

- *How often will I meet with my graduate students?*
- *What formats work best, e.g., visual, written, oral?*
- *Who will take notes, share summaries and next steps?*

- Model non-judgemental, one-to-one discussions that invite students to name challenges, express feelings about progress and ask for support without fear of repercussion.
- Avoid interpreting silence, eye contact, fidgeting or movement through neurotypical lenses. These are not signs of disengagement—they are valid communication modes.
- Validate communication diversity with a variety of communication options between yourself and students.

Try This

- *Allow direct messages, shared documents, forums, audio notes, asynchronous platforms and follow-ups.*
- *Encourage students to signal how and when they would like to engage.*

- Use clear, direct and literal language. Avoid metaphors, sarcasm and euphemisms unless you know they are understood.
- Regulate your nervous system before meetings. Pause, breathe, and take a moment because your calm signals safety to others.

Environment

- Limit time in overstimulating spaces, e.g., noisy, crowded, brightly lit spaces.

- Plan for breaks, task-switching and transitions to reduce cognitive overload.
- Respect nontraditional engagement methods, e.g., closing eyes, doodling, or using movement aids such as pacing or fidgets because they may support focus.

Flexibility

- One-size-fits-all supervision does not work. Flexibility and co-designed approaches are essential for neurodivergent thriving.
- Recognize that self-care is a boundary, not disengagement. It may look like withdrawal, quietness, mindfulness, sensory downtime or guided imagery.
- If attendance fluctuates, respond with compassion and openness.
- Consider hybrid or blended modalities, flexible deadlines, opportunities for movement and reduced-pressure participation.
- Accept deadline extension requests without requiring disability disclosure or justification. Invite conversation where students identify adjusted timelines and learning strategies that work for them. These conversations focus on how the student will complete the work successfully, not why they need flexibility.

Structure

- Provide predictable routines in supervisory settings so students know what to expect and can plan accordingly.
- Understand that the hidden curriculum can be inaccessible, so make expectations explicit.
- Provide scaffolding for independent or group work.

Try This

- *Share agendas in advance.*
- *Begin meetings with goals and close with summaries and share next steps.*
- *Use templates, outlines and exemplars to clarify deliverables.*

- Offer structural clarity across multiple dimensions.

Try This

- *Maintain the shared supervision plan, and revisit it together when things change.*
- *Share weekly plans and timelines.*
- *Preview content at the beginning of sessions and review it at the end.*
- *Offer timely, specific, non-euphemistic feedback.*

Hear This...Try That

Examples of what students say and how supervisors can respond with care.

Graduate Student Says...	Graduate Supervisor Can Try...
“I process information better when I can read it first rather than just hearing it."	• Provide meeting agendas 24 hours in advance. • Follow up verbal instructions with written summaries. • Share notes/slides before meetings/seminars. • “That is helpful to hear, and I’m happy to adjust how I share things.”
"I need more time to organize my thoughts in meetings."	• Send discussion questions ahead of time. • Do not interpret silence as lack of engagement. • “I appreciate you telling me that.”
"I struggle when there are last-minute changes to schedules."	• Provide advance notice of any changes when possible. • Maintain consistent meeting times. • Send reminders before meetings. • “Thanks for helping me understand this more.”
"I work better at certain times of day."	• Offer flexible meeting times. • Recognize energy patterns in a deadline setting. • “Good to know and we can build that into how we schedule things.”
“I do better when I have a clear structure or outline for what’s expected.”	• Check in collaboratively to co-create structure when needed. • “Would it help if we looked at example past theses together?” • “Here’s how we can break it down step by step.”

Referrals

Referrals should be made with student consent and framed as connecting students with resources they might find useful, not as corrections to perceived deficits. Supervisors should respect student autonomy and not pressure students for disclosure or documentation. Respond to what students tell you about their learning, not to paperwork or labels. Many neurodivergent students cannot access formal assessment due to an intersection of financial, cultural, or institutional barriers, or choose not to disclose due to stigma or past harm. Do not attempt to identify or diagnose students yourself.

Reflective Questions

- *Do I create a supervisory environment where students can share needs without fear of judgement?*

- *What statements do I use at the beginning of supervision to communicate openness to different learning needs and communication styles?*

Helpful Prompts

Ask early questions about learning preferences, listen to the answers and adjust accordingly.

- *"What conditions help you do your best work?"*
- *"What's gotten in the way of your learning in the past?"*
- *"I'm open to learning about what I need to do to support you."*

Student Accessibility Services (SAS)- York University. Neurodivergent graduate students may choose to register with SAS for individualized academic accommodations. SAS also offers consultations for students who suspect they may have a disability but do not yet have a formal diagnosis. These consultations can explore options for assessments, referrals or informal supports.

Graduate Student Wellness Services (GSWS)- Faculty of Graduate Studies. GSWS provides confidential consultations and counselling tailored to the needs of graduate students, including support with supervisory relationships, academic pressures and mental well-being.

Student Counselling, Health & Well-Being (SCHW)- York Unviersity. SCHW offers strategies and support for managing stress, test anxiety, performance challenges and navigating university life. SCHW also offers workshops on mental health and resilience.

Resources

Legal and Policy Frameworks

Graduate students in Ontario are protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code, which prohibits discrimination based on actual, perceived, or suspected disabilities which means students are entitled to support based on their needs, not on formal diagnostic documentation. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) reinforces this by requiring proactive accessibility in education.

The duty to accommodate is needs-based, not documentation-based. Students can request support based on their expressed learning needs without providing diagnostic proof. Some students may choose to register with SAS for formal accommodations, while others may work directly with their supervisor—both pathways are valid and should be supported.

Supervisors are encouraged to prioritize accessibility and respond to expressed needs early through flexible supervision design and communication practices. When

questions arise about what accommodations are reasonable within educational contexts, SAS can provide collaborative guidance.

Reflective Questions

- *Am I aware that students are legally entitled to accommodation based on need, not diagnosis?*
- *How familiar am I with AODA's education standards? What barriers in my supervision space might currently be non-compliant?*

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Outlines accessibility standards in education and mandates institutional compliance, e.g., web content, teaching materials, physical access.

Accessible Canada Act. Federal accessibility law that complements AODA by addressing systemic barriers beyond the provincial level.

Ontario Human Rights Code and Ontario Human Rights Commission: What is a disability?. The OHRC policy on accessible education for students with disabilities outlines responsibilities of faculty in responding to students with actual, perceived or suspected disabilities.

Research and Thought Leadership

Beyond the Scope with Sarah Silverman. Neurodiversity and UDL: A friendship worth fostering and Some limitations of UDL for supporting neurodivergent students.

Brixius-Anderko, Simone. (2023). Being Neurodivergent in Academia: Nothing wrong with me. *eLife* 12:e93330. https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.93330.

Dolmage, J. T. (2017). Academic ableism: Disability and higher education.

Future Skills Centre. Making the Invisible Visible: Neurodivergent Students' Experiences in Canadian Higher Education.

Hernández-Saca, D. I., Kahn, L. G., & Cannon, M. A. (2018). Intersectionality Dis/ability Research.

Lama, D. & Kafer, A. (2024). Intersectionality and Disability in Higher Education Research.

Organizations

Institute of Neurodiversity (ION) and the Institute of Neurodiversity Canada. Advocacy organizations promoting neurodivergent rights, community leadership and public education globally and nationally.

Appendix A: Relational Practices for Inclusive Defences

These practices support a caring, collaborative defence process grounded in shared responsibility.

Initial Planning (Months in Advance)
› Begin early conversations with your student about how the defence process may affect them.
› Where appropriate, invite Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to be part of these conversations.
› Document access needs or concerns raised during discussions.
› Collaboratively identify reasonable accommodations and review these with SAS and other relevant parties.
› Assess proposed accommodations for feasibility, fairness and alignment with academic integrity.
› Discuss strategies for preparation e.g., mock defences, planning responses, annotating the thesis. Explore how preparation may shape support needs on the day of the defence.
Examiner Preparation and Communication
› Inform internal and external examiners weeks in advance about approved accommodations and their rationale. Do not share medical details unless the student provides consent.
› Collaborate with the student to co-develop the language and scope of any personal information to be disclosed to examiners.
› Provide accessibility briefings or relevant resources to examiners. SAS may assist with this.
› Offer examiners space to ask questions or express concerns about accommodations ahead of time.
On the Day of the Defence
› Confirm that the venue and all accessibility measures are properly set up and functioning.
› Ensure that everyone involved understands and are prepared to implement the agreed upon support measures.
› Check in with the student to confirm that they feel supported and that the accommodations remain appropriate.

Note. Adapted from *Disability and Support Inclusion* (King's College London, 2025) and *SoRA Tool* by the Arena Centre for Research-based Education (University College London, 2024). Adapted with permission.

Appendix B: Support Practices for Inclusive Defences

These practices support a flexible, caring defence grounded in equity and access.

Physical, Environmental and Sensory Accessibility
› Confirm the physical and digital accessibility of the defence location including lighting, elevators, washrooms, and Zoom or other online platforms.
› Set up adaptable seating and spatial layout based on the student's access needs.
› Include rest breaks in the formal schedule to reduce fatigue, sensory overload or cognitive strain.
› Arrange assistive technology as needed e.g., hearing loops, captioning, screen readers.
› Provide printed materials in accessible formats as specified by the student in advance.
Institutional and Logistical Coordination
› Clarify roles and responsibilities among the supervisory committee, graduate department and SAS at YorkU.
› If personal or medical support is needed, liaise with SAS or relevant provider while upholding confidentiality.
› Accommodate requests to schedule a defence during the student's peak cognitive or energy periods.
Communication and Interaction Practices
› Permit the use of cue cards or notes during the presentation and Q&A.
› Allow students to write down questions before responding to support memory and reduce processing.
› Repeat or rephrase questions upon request.
› Ask examiners in advance to avoid metaphorical or abstract language, and to use clear, direct phrasing.
Examiner Awareness and Equity Briefing
› Provide examiners with a pre-defence briefing on inclusive non-pathologizing practices. For example: • a student may avoid direct eye contact as part of their communication style. • repetitive movements, stimming or tics may occur and should not be misinterpreted as disengagement or disrespect. • a student may experience heightened anxiety beyond typical academic stress.
Supportive Prescence
› Students may request a support person attend in a non-participatory, silent capacity unless another arrangement has been approved. › Define and confirm the support person's role with everyone in advance.

Bibliography

Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2021). Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*, *3*(1), 18–29.

CAST Inc. (n.d.). *Universal Design for learning | Cast*. https://www.cast.org/what-we-do/universal-design-for-learning/

Chandrasekhar, T. (n.d.). *Supporting duke students by increasing awareness and promoting inclusion of neurodiversity in all campus spaces*. Duke Neurodiversity Connections. https://sites.duke.edu/neurodiversityatduke/

Dwyer, P., Mineo, E., Mifsud, K., Lindholm, C., Gurba, A., & Waisman, T. C. (2022). Building neurodiversity-inclusive postsecondary campuses: Recommendations for leaders in Higher Education. *Autism in Adulthood*, *5*(1), 1–14.

Elsherif, M. M., Middleton, S. L., Phan, J. M., Azevedo, F., Iley, B., Grose-Hodge, M., Tyler, S. L., Kapp, S. K., Gourdon-Kanhukamwe, A., Grafton-Clarke, D., Yeung, S. K., Shaw, J. J., Hartmann, H., & Dokovova, M. (2022, Jun 20). Bridging neurodiversity and open scholarship: How shared values can guide best practices for research integrity, social justice, and principled education. Unpublished.

Farrant, F., Owen, E., Hunkins-Beckford, F. L., & Jacksa, M. (2025, May 2). *Celebrating neurodiversity in higher education*. BPS. https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/celebrating-neurodiversity-higher-education

Grose-Hodge , M., & Hamilton, L., & Elsherif, M.M. (2023, February). *Neurodiversify your curriculum*. Unconference 2023: Open Scholarship Practices in Education Research. FORRT.

Guccione, K. (2025). *Developing neurodiversity-affirmative PhD supervision.* Supervising PhDs Blog. Available at Supervising PhDs.

Hamilton, L. G., & Petty, S. (2023). Compassionate pedagogy for neurodiversity in higher education: A conceptual analysis. *Frontiers in psychology*, *14*, 1093290.

King's College London. (2025). *Disability and support inclusion*. King's College London.

Praslova, L. (2023, January 18). Sensory Safety: A Must Of Neurodiversity Inclusion In The Workplace . *Specialisterne*.

Shaw, J., & Selman, F. (2023). (rep.). *An Asset, Not a Problem: Meeting the Needs of Neurodivergent Students* (pp. 1–19). Bristol: Unite Students.

Silverman, S. (2024, November 18). Scaffolding for in-person interactions: Thinking about how I can apply some positive conference experiences to my teaching and facilitation. *Beyond the Scope*. April 16, 2025,

Spaeth, E., & Pearson, A. (2023). Reflective analysis on neurodiversity and student wellbeing. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, *11*(2), 109–120.

Sulaimani, M. F., & Gut, D. M. (2019). Hidden curriculum in a special education context: The case of individuals with autism. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.5590/jerap.2019.09.1.03

Syharat CM, Hain A, Zaghi AE, Gabriel R and Berdanier CGP (2023) Experiences of neurodivergent students in graduate STEM programs. *Front in Psychology, 14,* 1149068.

University College London, Arena Centre for Research-based Education. (2024). *SoRA Tool*. University College London.

West, M. A., & Chowla, R. (2017). Compassionate leadership for compassionate health care. In P. Gilbert (Ed.), *Compassion: Concepts, Research and Applications* (pp. 237-257). Routledge.