

DAILY ACTIVITY LOG

Copy this log for each business day over the next one or two weeks. Each day, record your activities in 15-minute increments. If an activity lasts more than 15 minutes, draw an arrow or shade in the total time spent. For example, if you answer emails from 8:00am to 8:45am, write "Answer emails" in the first activity line, and shade in the lines to 8:45am. Rate the priority using the following code: C = Critical (had to be done today); I = Important (specific deadline); L = Low priority (when there is time).

Date: _____

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Priority</i>
8:00am		
8:15		
8:30		
8:45		
9:00		
9:15		
9:30		
9:45		
10:00		
10:15		
10:30		
10:45		
11:00		
11:15		
11:30		
11:45		
12:00pm		
12:15		
12:30		
12:45		
1:00		
1:15		
1:30		
1:45		
2:00		

2:15		
2:30		
2:45		
3:00		
3:15		
3:30		
3:45		
4:00		
4:15		
4:30		
4:45		
5:00		
5:15		
5:30		
5:45		
6:00		

PLANNING TEMPLATE

1. Describe the goal or task: _____
Completion date: _____
2. Steps and estimated time to complete:
 - Step 1: _____
Estimated time: _____
 - Step 2: _____
Estimated time: _____
 - Step 3: _____
Estimated time: _____
 - Step 4: _____
Estimated time: _____
 - Step 5: _____
Estimated time: _____Total estimated time: _____
3. What I need to complete the task (materials, information, equipment, etc.):

4. I will work on this project from: _____

5. At the halfway point, my goal is to have the following amount of work completed:

6. *Actual* time to complete:
 - Step 1: _____
 - Step 2: _____
 - Step 3: _____
 - Step 4: _____
 - Step 5: _____Total actual time: _____

7. If the actual time to complete a step/task took longer than the estimated time:

a) What obstacles, if any, were not anticipated?

b) How can the task be handled differently next time?

SMART GOALS PLANNER

SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Reasonable, and Time-oriented. This model helps you develop realistic goals and a step-by-step plan to reach them.

Step 1: Specific goal (What do you want, by when?): _____

Step 2: Measure of success (How will you know when you've achieved the goal?): _____

Step 3: Achievable (Do you have the skills, ability and resources needed to meet your objective? If you answer "no," what skills/resources do you need to acquire? Do you need to modify your goal?): _____

Step 4: Reality check: Is the goal reasonable? (Are you willing to put in time and effort over a realistic time frame?): _____

Step 5: Time-oriented (When do you want to achieve your goal? Use this date to work backward and create an action step timeline): _____

WEEKLY GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

For the week of: _____

GOALS FOR THIS WEEK

1. _____

Specific steps I will take toward this goal:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

2. _____

Specific steps I will take toward this goal:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

3. _____

Specific steps I will take toward this goal:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

PROGRESS

Goal	Action Steps Achieved?	Results
1	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
2	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
3	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

My level of satisfaction with my progress this week:

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not satisfied

CHECKLIST OF COMMON WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

1. Communication Challenges:

- Take instructions literally and miss implied meanings
 - Unintentionally offend others with blunt/inappropriate statements
 - Unable to maintain adequate eye contact
 - Speak too rapidly, loudly or softly
 - Talk too much
 - Interrupt others often
 - Difficulty initiating or sustaining conversations with co-workers
 - Don't notice, or misinterpret, nonverbal signals, causing misunderstandings
 - Unaware of own facial expressions and body language (forget to smile; look angry when you are not)
 - Afraid or unsure of how to ask for help
 - Other communication challenges: _____
-
-

2. Executive Function Challenges:

- Unsure of how to begin tasks or projects
- Underestimate how long a task will or should take
- Become lost in details, losing sight of the purpose of a task
- Don't see options (continue to do what isn't working)
- Easily distracted
- Forget what needs to be done, or the sequence of steps in a process
- Forget verbal instructions
- Work too slowly
- Unsure of how to prioritize projects
- Difficulty multitasking (rapid attention-shifting)
- Unsure of expectations, or what a finished product should look like
- Appear not to take initiative because next steps are not clear
- Ask too many questions
- Act impulsively, based on too little information
- Resist change or the ideas of others

- Insist on doing things a certain way
- Other executive function challenges: _____
- _____
- _____

3. Sensory and Motor Challenges:

- Visual sensitivity: _____
- Auditory sensitivity: _____
- Olfactory sensitivity: _____
- Tactile sensitivity: _____
- Auditory processing problems
- Fine motor problems (difficulty writing, stuffing envelopes)
- Gross motor problems (difficulty coordinating movements)
- Other sensory/motor challenges: _____
- _____
- _____

4. Emotional Challenges:

- Difficulty controlling anger or frustration
- Cry too often, or over minor difficulties
- Highly anxious
- React defensively to criticism
- Other emotional challenges: _____
- _____
- _____

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT stands for **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats. Complete the four questions below. You can also ask people who know you well for their evaluation.

1. *What are your strengths?* These include personal attributes plus resources that give you an advantage.

a) Talents and skills: _____

b) Personal characteristics: _____

c) Education (degrees, certificates, workshops, internships, self-taught): _____

d) People who can assist you: _____

e) Other resources: _____

2. *What are your weaknesses?* This encompasses personal limitations as well as external factors that can slow or derail your employment search.

a) Personal difficulties: _____

b) Missing or inadequate skills or knowledge: _____

c) External factors: _____

d) Unrealistic expectations: _____

3. *What are your opportunities?* These are the positive potentials available to you.

a) Industry trends or regulatory changes to capitalize on: _____

b) Growth industries in need of my skills: _____

4. *What threats do you face?* List the obstacles that are getting in the way of your employment goals.

a) Weaknesses or unrealistic expectations from question 2 that must be addressed: _____

b) External factors: _____

DISCLOSURE NEED AND ACTION SCALE

<i>How Serious is the Problem?</i>	<i>Possible Action Steps</i>
<p>Level 3: Immediate Action Required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Formal disciplinary action; probation or two weeks' notice to improve <input type="checkbox"/> Formal meeting with supervisor about performance problems; written warning; placed on Performance Improvement Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Disclosure and formal accommodation request <input type="checkbox"/> Engage a professional to intervene on my behalf <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ _____ _____
<p>Level 2: Corrective Action Needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Same performance problem has been mentioned more than twice <input type="checkbox"/> I am consistently redoing assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Assignments are late on a regular basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Disclosure and formal accommodation request <input type="checkbox"/> Talk to supervisor about difficulties; suggest solutions without formal disclosure <input type="checkbox"/> Ask a co-worker for ideas about improving performance <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate whether this is the right job or career <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ _____ _____
<p>Level 1: Needs My Attention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Working very long hours <input type="checkbox"/> Confused about what is expected <input type="checkbox"/> Continually rechecking work; forgetting steps <input type="checkbox"/> Told that I am asking too many questions/should know what to do by now <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious and unsure about performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ask a co-worker for ideas on improving performance <input type="checkbox"/> Meet regularly with supervisor to clarify priorities and expectations <input type="checkbox"/> Use checklists; make notes <input type="checkbox"/> Request additional training <input type="checkbox"/> Find ways to manage stress and anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ _____ _____

ASPERGER'S SYNDROME GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

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Asperger's Syndrome is a mild form of autism that affects interpersonal communication and the ability to organize information and prioritize tasks. The individual may make blunt or inappropriate comments, and have difficulty multitasking and seeing the big picture. He or she may be unusually distracted by noise, smells or physical sensations. Each individual is unique and does not share all of the traits of Asperger's Syndrome or experience them to the same degree.

While these individuals face a number of challenges, Asperger's Syndrome also confers specific strengths that make them particularly well suited to jobs requiring attention to detail and prolonged focus. Many have above-average intelligence and enter the workforce with advanced or multiple college degrees. Although represented in all types of jobs and careers, the fields of computer technology, academic and scientific research, writing, engineering, technical documentation, and academia make particularly good use of their logic and analytical skills.

The business community is beginning to recognize that people with Asperger's Syndrome can be terrific assets when they are in the right jobs, and receive the needed supports. Specialisterne is a software testing company, founded in Denmark, that specifically hires individuals with Asperger's Syndrome and high-functioning autism. Its clients include Microsoft and Oracle. According to founder Thorkil Sonne, these individuals make superior software testers because, "...they are methodical and exhibit great attention to detail," and have "motivation, focus, persistence, precision and ability to follow instructions" (Sonne in Saran 2008).

Specialisterne is expanding operations throughout Europe, and in 2012 entered the United States. Thorkil Sonne established The Specialist People Foundation with the goal of creating one million jobs around the world for "specialist people" with autism and similar challenges. (To learn more, visit www.specialisterne.com.) Currently, Specialisterne has operations in Austria, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Plans are underway for Canada, Germany, Singapore, Spain, and Turkey. Other organizations in the United States have adapted this model, including Aspiritech (www.aspiritech.org); and Semperical (www.semperical.com).

The strengths of individuals with Asperger's Syndrome include:

- Attention to detail and sustained concentration.

Benefits: ability to spot errors; accuracy; not distracted from the task at hand.

- Excellent long-term memory.

Benefits: recall facts and details others have forgotten.

- Tolerance of repetition and routine.

Benefits: perform the same tasks without getting bored or burned out.

¹ Excerpted from *Asperger's Syndrome Workplace Survival Guide: A Neurotypical's Secrets for Success* © Barbara Bissonnette 2013.

- Strong logic and analytic skills.

Benefits: ability to see patterns/connections in data; objective view of the facts.

- Vast knowledge of specialized fields.

Benefits: develop in-depth knowledge and expertise.

- Creative thinking.

Benefits: different way of processing information can lead to novel solutions.

- Perseverance.

Benefits: stick with a job until it is done.

- Honesty and loyalty.

Benefits: not afraid to tell the truth; stay with an employer long term.

COMMON WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome vary widely in their abilities, challenges and need of support. Some appear awkward in their interactions with others, forgetting to make eye contact or to smile, or talking too loudly, softly or quickly. Others are charming and talkative, but may ask too many questions, or alienate others with quirky behavior or unintentional social gaffes.

Workplace challenges fall into three primary categories: interpersonal communication, planning and organization, and sensory/motor difficulties. Communication deficits typically present the biggest hurdle, since they may appear to be attitude or behavior problems.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Figuring out what the social rules are depends on the context of a particular situation, and the type of relationship you have with the person to whom you are speaking. To the degree that an individual has trouble grasping situational context, he will struggle to say and do the "right" things. It is also important to understand your audience—that others have thoughts, desires, knowledge and motives that differ from your own. This "theory of mind" ability means that you can predict how someone is likely to react to a situation, and what he expects you to do.

The ability to infer another's emotional state is another component of effective communication. This information is often communicated nonverbally, through a person's facial expression, body language, and tone and volume of voice. Research has shown that only 7 percent of what people communicate about their attitudes and feelings comes from their spoken words. The vast majority—93 percent—comes from facial expression and the way that words are spoken (Mehrabian 1981).

Many individuals with Asperger's Syndrome have trouble noticing and/or interpreting nonverbal signals. They may not realize that someone is upset with them, or understand an implied request from a supervisor. They may not understand jokes or sarcasm.

Additionally, individuals may not be aware of the nonverbal messages *they* are sending by not making eye contact, standing too close to others, or speaking in a monotone.

Difficulty with social skills and interpersonal communication can cause people with Asperger's Syndrome to behave in ways that seem willfully rude or insubordinate. They may offend others with candid remarks, which they consider to be honest and factual. The literal interpretation of language can lead to serious, sometimes comical, misunderstandings: "How come you're not using the new

scheduling software?” asks Kevin’s manager, “I told you to take a look at it two weeks ago.” “I *did* look at it,” replies Kevin, “and didn’t think it was useful so I deleted it off my system.”

Unlike most people, who can subconsciously process contextual clues within a fraction of a second, individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome must consciously notice and put the clues together. This takes time and mental effort (Vermeulen 2012). These individuals may not be able to figure out another person’s motive, or know what is expected, based on inferences and previous experience, in time to react to the situation. Things that are obvious to most people are not obvious to Aspergians.

Common communication challenges:

- literal interpretation of language, misses implied meaning or sarcasm
- too honest and direct, unintentionally offending others
- neglecting to make eye contact or to smile (even though the individual is friendly)
- doesn’t know how to engage with co-workers (e.g. make small talk)
- talks at length about areas of interest; doesn’t notice that others want to end the conversation
- speaks to a supervisor in the same way he speaks to a peer
- interrupts, because he can’t tell when someone is done speaking, or doesn’t want to forget a point
- speaks too quickly or slowly; too loudly or softly
- ends conversations by simply walking away.

It must be stressed that these individuals *want* to interact with others, and are often surprised to hear that they have offended someone.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

Executive function refers to a broad array of cognitive processes needed for the effective management of time and resources. These processes serve as an “inner CEO,” enabling an individual to establish goals and a realistic plan to achieve them; prioritize tasks; see options; monitor progress; and change course, if needed. Multitasking requires strong working memory, which is one of the executive functions. The ability to shift between the big picture and the relevant details is another.

Asperger’s Syndrome can impact executive functioning in various ways. The employee may not see how his tasks fit into the larger whole, unless this is explicitly explained. He may need assistance to establish priorities, and utilize written notes and checklists in order to remember multistep processes (Meltzer 2010). Co-workers, who are aware of the person’s talent and intellect, may brush aside appeals for help with comments like, “You should know what to do; it’s obvious!” or, “At your level, you should know what the priorities are.”

Common organizational challenges:

- not knowing how to begin an assignment
- difficulty estimating how long a project will or should take
- too much focus on details; loses sight of the purpose of a task

- unsure of what the finished product should look like
- forgets verbal instructions
- needs help prioritizing tasks
- difficulty with multitasking and frequent interruptions
- appearing not to take initiative, because next steps aren't clear
- asks too many questions, in an attempt to clarify assignments or expectations
- acts impulsively, or based on too little information.

SENSORY AND MOTOR CHALLENGES

Many individuals with Asperger's Syndrome experience hyper- or hypo-sensitivity to various sensory stimuli, and for some, this can interfere with job performance. The person may be able to see the cycling of fluorescent lights, or hear the sound of a co-worker's typing as a cacophony of utterly distracting noise. The smell of tobacco smoke on a colleague's clothing made one woman so ill that she had to quit her job.

It may be difficult or impossible to pay attention to input from multiple sensory channels at once. The person may not be able to look someone in the eye, *and* listen to what they are saying; or speak with a customer while simultaneously typing information into a computer database. Auditory processing problems can make it particularly difficult to follow group conversations.

Motor (muscle) problems are evidenced by messy or illegible handwriting, or an inability to write quickly enough to take notes during meetings. The person may find it difficult to fold and stuff papers neatly into envelopes. He might be clumsy or have an awkward gait.

Common sensory and motor challenges:

- over- or under-sensitive to noise, light, odors, and tactile sensations
- difficulty integrating stimulus from multiple sensory channels (e.g. cannot listen and look at someone simultaneously)
- may experience sensory overload and require a break
- not able to interpret group conversations
- difficulty with fine or gross muscle movement (e.g. difficulty with intricate tasks, poor coordination).

OPTIMAL JOBS AND WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Asperger's Syndrome exists on a spectrum and individuals can vary widely in their abilities and challenges. There is no "short list" of suitable jobs or careers. These individuals are represented in all types of occupations, as evidenced by this sampling of Forward Motion Coaching clients: technical writer, creative writer, editor, production manager, graphic artist, fine artist, teacher (toddlers to graduate students), physicist, project manager, sales manager, consultant, computer programmer/ other IT, engineer, analyst, actuary, accountant, lawyer, paralegal, administrative assistant, retail sales associate, warehouse worker, electrician, physician, nurse, librarian, library clerk, and meteorologist!

However, generalities can be made about the type of jobs and work environments that are most conducive to their success:

- allow concentration on one task at a time
- favor accuracy and quality over speed
- offer structure and clear performance expectations
- have at least some elements of routine
- emphasize technical tasks and facts and information
- do not involve the management of others or sophisticated levels of interpersonal communication.

WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

There are many things that employers can do to help individuals with Asperger's Syndrome to be productive and successful at their jobs. If you know or suspect that someone has Asperger's Syndrome:

- Be patient during training, and break instruction into small segments. If an individual is asking an excessive number of questions, it could indicate anxiety or confusion about an assignment.
- Explain how tasks and assignments fit into the whole (the "big picture") and why particular steps or processes are important.
- Whenever possible, encourage the use of written notes, outlines, and checklists. Icons and color-coded filing systems will help with organization. People with Asperger's Syndrome are usually visual, not auditory, learners.
- Assist the individual with creating a personalized "rule book" that contains processes, procedures, and where to go for help.
- Check for understanding by asking the individual to summarize an assignment.
- Make expectations specific and quantifiable: "The draft is due in three days, and should include at least six ideas for improving efficiency" or "Thirty entries or more must be made per hour." Avoid vague, abstract directives: "Take the data and run with it" or "I want you to take ownership of the project."
- If there is a performance problem, bring it to the individual's attention using clear, explicit language. Hints, inferences, and sarcasm will not be understood. Be direct: "You must limit emails to four paragraphs;" or "There is too much detail in this presentation, what I need is..." or "The priority is to complete the data entry by noon."
- Be mindful that *what looks like a behavior or attitude problem is usually a communication problem*. Don't take blunt remarks or social gaffes personally. Clarify the individual's intentions. Be specific and matter-of-fact in pointing out inappropriate or unacceptable behavior. General statements such as "You're rude;" or "You're not a team player;" or "How could you say that?!" are confusing. Be direct: "When you tell people to 'be quiet' it's considered rude. Instead, ask them to lower their voices."

- Assign a “work buddy” or mentor to explain social norms, encourage social interaction, and answer questions. Individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome often hesitate to ask questions, fearing that they will appear “stupid,” or that the wrong question will result in job loss.
- Relax the standards for “teamwork” where possible, and allow these individuals to focus on the technical aspects of the job.
- Take sensory difficulties seriously. An individual who is hyper-sensitive to noise may require a quiet workspace, noise-cancelling headphones, or a white noise machine. Someone with an auditory processing problem may need to use a TTY (text telephone) or other assistive technology. A photo sensitivity can be mitigated by a natural light source, or lamps with incandescent light bulbs.

Olfactory sensitivities can be addressed by the use of personal air fresheners in the workspace. Consider limiting the consumption of food to the lunch room.

- Give an individual permission to take short breaks in order to avoid sensory overload.
- These individuals often experience heightened levels of anxiety, and as a result may magnify a situation. They may panic over a minor mistake, or an insignificant disagreement with a co-worker. Often, they do not know how to correct the situation. Do not dismiss concerns as trivial, or something that the individual should know how to handle. Listen, acknowledge concerns, and brainstorm an action plan.
- Educate human resources personnel, managers and employees about Asperger’s Syndrome. Increased understanding is directly proportional to increased employment success. Retaining just one employee at risk of derailing more than covers the investment in training.
- Provide a coach who is familiar with conditions like Asperger’s Syndrome to work with an employee and his or her manager. The pragmatic, goal-oriented nature of the coaching, combined with an action plan based on organizational needs, assures that performance objectives are addressed. (Although in most cases it is illegal, under the Americans with Disabilities Act, to ask an employee about a disability, you *can* discuss performance issues. Readers outside the U.S. should consult their local laws regarding discrimination.)