

Supporting Autistic in Learners & Communication

Designed for students with Autism to evaluate their reading
Comprehension, communication, and learning needs.

For the Creative Teacher

LEARNING LEVELS

Ages

5-7

Ages

8-10

Ages

11+



Empowering Communication Growth

Introduction

Supporting Autistic Learners in Literacy and Communication

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) involves unique profiles of communication, sensory processing, and social interaction that directly influence how children and adolescents engage with reading and literacy. Standardized tests often fail to capture the true capabilities of neurodivergent learners. Implementing flexible, tailored literacy assessments ideas allows educators and families to look beyond traditional testing barriers and understand how an autistic student processes, interprets, and connects with text.



Why These Assessments Matter

- **For the Creative Teacher:** They provide accessible, low-pressure alternative formats that accurately gauge true comprehension and communication skills without being hindered by verbal or executive functioning roadblocks.
- **For the Learning Student:** They honor diverse communication styles—such as visual tools or tactile engagement—creating a comfortable, stress-free environment that builds confidence and positive associations with reading.
- **For the Hopeful Parent:** They offer transparent, highly practical insights into their child's strengths and processing methods, equipping families with clear ways to support communication and storytelling at home.

Assessment Ideas

1. Picture-Based Comprehension Test

Uses visual sequences and illustrations to evaluate a student's understanding of plot progression, character actions, and story events.



- **Early Childhood (Ages 5–7):** *Sequence Card Story Match.* The child reads or listens to a 3-part short story and arranges three corresponding picture cards in chronological order on a magnetic board to show what happened first, next, and last.
- **Elementary (Ages 8–10):** *Comic Strip Retelling.* After reading a short narrative passage, students choose from a selection of pre-drawn cartoon panels to sequence and match the main events, demonstrating comprehension through visual layout.
- **Middle/High School (Ages 11+):** *Infographic Interpretation.* Students analyze an informational graphic novel page or data comic and answer multiple-choice questions matching visual icons and charts to explicit text details.



Assessment Ideas

2. Social Story Retelling

Evaluates how well a child understands, internalizes, and retells a structured social narrative focusing on perspective-taking, routines, or emotional cues.



- **Early Childhood (Ages 5–7):** *Character Finger Puppet Play.* Using simple felt finger puppets matching a social story characters, the child acts out how the character solved a daily transition challenge (e.g., sharing toys or entering the classroom).
- **Elementary (Ages 8–10):** *Storyboard Speech Bubbles.* Students read a short social scenario about school interactions and fill in blank comic book speech bubbles to show what characters are thinking and saying in response to a peer.
- **Middle/High School (Ages 11+):** *Perspective-Taking Journal.* Students read a narrative excerpt involving a social misunderstanding and write a structured breakdown from two different characters' viewpoints, explaining the underlying social subtext.



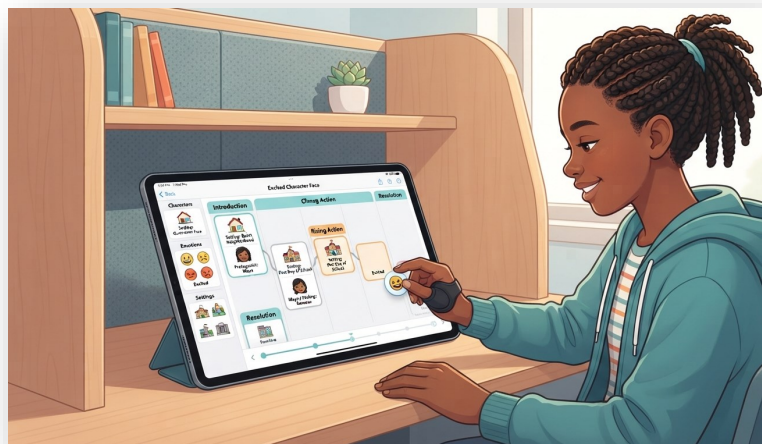
Assessment Ideas

3. Non-Verbal Reading Response



Utilizes alternative communication methods (pointing, drawing, gestures, or augmentative devices) to check reading comprehension without requiring spoken or written output.

- **Early Childhood (Ages 5–7): Touch-and-Point Board.** As a story is read aloud, the child uses a specialized interactive board or points directly to pictures on the page to answer "Wh-" questions (e.g., "Point to who found the key").
- **Elementary (Ages 8–10): Iconic Symbol Selection.** Students read a short passage and use symbol cards (PCS or Blissymbols) to answer comprehension prompts, matching concepts like feelings, settings, or main ideas without writing words.
- **Middle/High School (Ages 11+): Digital Drag-and-Drop Mapping.** Students use a tablet application to map out story elements (character traits, conflict, resolution) by dragging digital graphic icons and keyword tiles onto a structured canvas.



Assessment Ideas

4. Sensory-Friendly Letter Recognition



Assesses letter and word recognition utilizing tactile, low-sensory-overload aids (such as sand trays, textured letters, or high-contrast visual supports) to accommodate unique processing needs.

- **Early Childhood (Ages 5–7):** *Sand Tray Letter Tracing.* Children trace sandpaper letters or draw letters in a shallow tray of colored sand while matching them to words read aloud from a tactile alphabet book.
- **Elementary (Ages 8–10):** *Textured Word Scavenger Hunt.* Students search a reading passage using textured alphabet stamps or foam letter tiles to build and identify high-frequency sight words on a tactile felt board.
- **Middle/High School (Ages 11+):** *High-Contrast Digital Typography Audit.* Students with visual-processing preferences evaluate digital text readability across various high-contrast color themes and custom font settings to determine their optimal reading setup.



Assessment Ideas

5. Predictive Skills Test

Evaluates a child's cognitive flexibility and ability to anticipate narrative outcomes or logical next steps based on contextual clues in a story.



- **Early Childhood (Ages 5–7):** *What Happens Next Flap Book*. While reading a lift-the-flap picture book, the adult pauses before the climax, and the child predicts the outcome by pointing to one of two hidden picture flaps.
- **Elementary (Ages 8–10):** *Branching Narrative Choices*. Students read a short choose-your-own-adventure style story and write a single sentence predicting how the protagonist's upcoming choice will change the plot.
- **Middle/High School (Ages 11+):** *Forecasting Narrative Turning Points*. Students analyze an informational essay or complex narrative and highlight contextual clues that hint at an impending outcome or conclusion, explaining their reasoning in writing or via concept maps.

Conclusion: Empowering Autistic Learners Through Inclusive Assessment

Assessing literacy and communication needs for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder requires shifting toward creative, flexible, and empathetic methodologies. Integrating visual, sensory-friendly, and non-verbal pathways into daily routines, educators and parents encourages accurate insights into a student's cognitive capabilities. Embracing these strategies ensures that every autistic learner feels understood, supported, and capable of achieving meaningful success in literacy and beyond.