

# MINIMIZING MISCOMMUNICATION

NEURODIVERSITY @ MINES

## and fostering neuroinclusivity

### Purpose

This guide provides actionable suggestions to members of the Mines community who wish to communicate more inclusively across the neuro-divide. Whether you identify with the neurotypical majority or the neurotypical minority, there's always more to learn about the rich diversity of human brains and behavior. The goal of this informational flyer is to foster understanding across neurotypes and provide tips that minimize the potential for miscommunication and misunderstandings.



### Neurotypical communication styles

In the neuro-majority, in both conversations and written communication, there is often a strong emphasis on unspoken social norms.

Words do not necessarily align to the person's meaning or intent. Instead, the message is subjective, and may be interpreted through more subtle factors, such as facial expressions, intonation, eye contact, and other unspoken social norms.

While neurotypical individuals instinctively learn the norms behind these communication styles through social input, neurodivergent people often struggle to emulate this style of communication, or to interpret it with accuracy.

### Neurodivergent communication styles

Neurodivergent people often communicate a little differently. While certain traits are associated with certain neurotypes or clinical diagnoses, remember that every individual is unique.

Autistic people tend to communicate directly and literally. The message is aligned to the language itself; social norms generally don't affect the meaning of the message. In conversation, some autistic people are uncomfortable with eye contact.

In conversation, people with ADHD may tend to communicate quickly, due to their ability to process information quickly. They may be able to predict their partner's next statement, and jump ahead in conversation, sometimes interrupting their partner.

### How to signal neuroinclusivity and minimize miscommunication

Research has shown that people that share the same neurotype (e.g. autism, ADHD, etc.) communicate effectively with each other. Miscommunication is common when people with different communication styles interact with each other. This phenomenon, well-known in the neurodiversity community, is commonly called the *double empathy problem*."

Signaling neuroinclusivity is an important first step. When we normalize talking about neurodiversity, we signal that we are a safe person that can be trusted. This also signals awareness of the challenges that neurodivergent people face.

It's also critical to challenge the expectation that it is solely the responsibility of the neurodivergent individual to cross the neuro-divide. No one has the ability to change their neurochemistry or their brain behavior. We can only change our openness and acceptance of people who are different than we are. It's on all of us to make things better:

- Recognize that no communication style is better than any other.
- Learn as much as you can about the communication styles most unfamiliar to you.
- Be aware of how others may misconstrue or misinterpret aspects of your own communication style.
- Be proactive about expressing your communication style, and invite others to share theirs.
- Listen carefully, assume good intent and summon radical empathy.

### In summary

Neurotypical or neurodivergent, we all have something in common: we all study and work at a beautifully neurodiverse campus! The more we can learn about the *double empathy problem*, the more we can foster neuroinclusivity at Mines.

<https://www.mines.edu/diversity/neurodiversity>