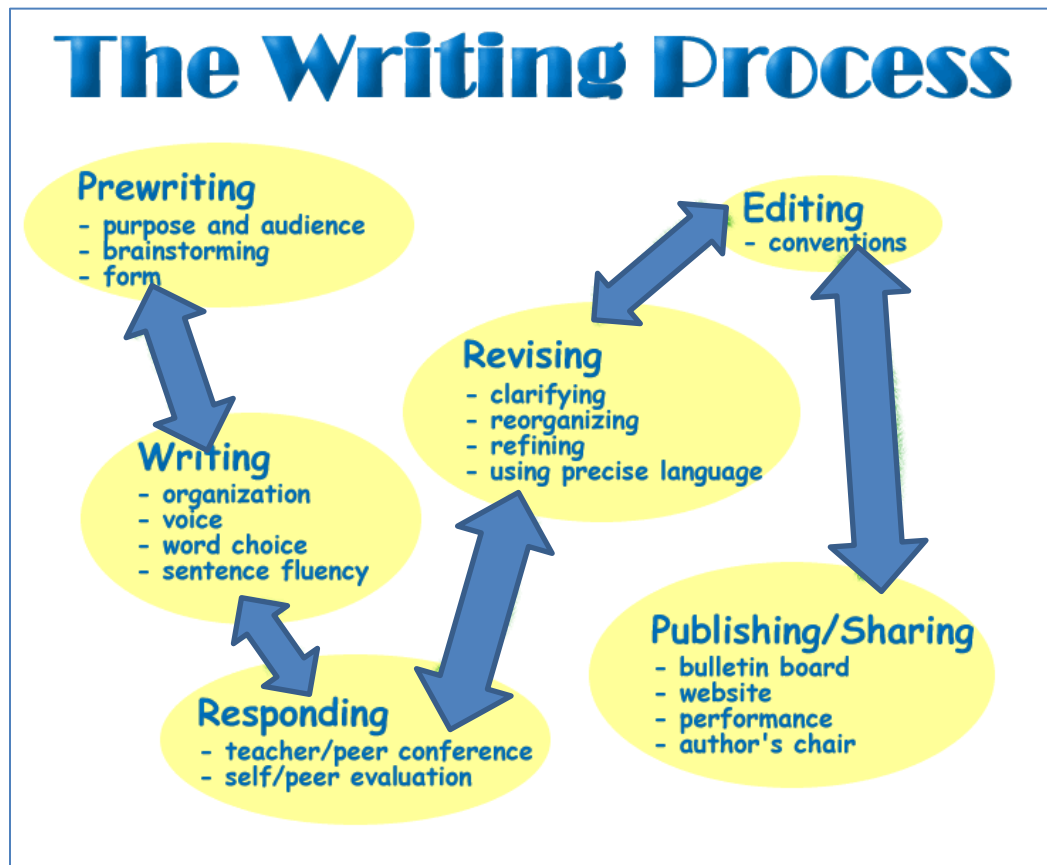




Why do Students with Autism Avoid Writing? The Bruno Hypothesis

Why they may struggle: Autism is a communication disorder that is primarily a perspective-taking disability (also referred to as Theory of Mind). This disorder inhibits the ability to interpret the nonverbal language of others; oftentimes, this means that a student on the spectrum will have trouble knowing or intuiting what another person is thinking. Students who cannot read another person's body language will likely struggle not only to know what others are thinking - but may also have gone through life thinking that *everyone* is having the same thoughts they are having. This student's default assumption is that everyone else is having "my" thoughts and seeing the world from "my" perspective, and they frequently do not recognize clues and cues that help them realize that their egocentric view of the world is not the only view.

The writing process is fraught with steps that include the need to take perspective – proving fundamentally challenging to students on the spectrum.



Fundamental challenges with some steps in the writing process:

- **Audience:** Write to help another person understand? Take their perspective?
- **Voice:** Write how it will sound to another person? Perspective?
- **Peer Evaluation:** Understand how a peer perceives your writing?
- **Clarifying, refining, using precise language:** For whose perspective? The reader's perspective?



Tackling those challenges in practical ways in the classroom:

The Bruno Hypothesis: We judge the quality of writing based on how it will meet needs from the perspective of a reader. We are using the skill of perspective-taking to teach students to refine their writing and know that it is good. As noted above, this approach is a major challenge for students on the spectrum and causes them to avoid most writing assignments. They are confused by the standard we are asking them to use because it requires a skill that is at the core of their disability. perspective-taking. Use the following approaches to help students break through their writing resistance:

- **Change the Perspective:** If you encounter writing resistance from students on the spectrum, allow them to write something from their own perspective. Allowing them to write about themselves or their preferred topics and interests often helps to overcome this resistance.
- **Use Checklists or Rubrics:** Try to modify the assignments to allow the student to write about a topic of interest or something from their perspective. Provide explicit guidelines or rules for other types of writing which will allow them to write based off of a checklist or rubric.

Excerpted from "Solving the Autism Puzzle Piece by Piece: Strategies for Teachers and Parents, Bruno & Pontello"