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Gerstle and Walsh’s collection of essays opens with a startling statistic, one that is repeated throughout the book: according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), up to 1 in 110 children may have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). More startling is the fact that current CDC estimates put the prevalence rate at 1 in 88 (“Prevalence”). This upward trajectory raises a host of pressing questions. Is ASD increasing or are diagnostic instruments finally mirroring prevalence? Is increased awareness of ASD leading to more diagnoses? Is the social construction of the disorder going through a radical reformulation? While these questions are undoubtedly important, Autism Spectrum Disorders in the Composition Classroom does not focus on them; rather, the collection addresses two pressing, practical consequences of increasing prevalence rates for composition instructors. First, if prevalence is increasing, then composition instructors will be working with more and more ASD students, and these instructors will have to negotiate the sometimes-choppy waters of accommodation in the effort to teach these students how to write in rhetorically nuanced ways. Second, as the subtitle of the collection suggests, the ways in which we adapt our theory and pedagogy to work with these students should ideally not only make writing more accessible for students on the spectrum, but for all writing students. And this is perhaps the most important message of the book: rather than try to “accommodate” or “include” students with ASD—verbs that can imply absorption or homogenization—we should instead look closely at Composition and ask ourselves “how can we make this better for everyone; how can we continue to reshape, grow, and enrich our notions of what it means to be a writer?” Admittedly, these are not easy questions to answer, but the authors in this collection clearly and compassionately ask them.

The collection is divided into two interpenetrating sections which each contain four chapters: “Accommodation” and “Pedagogy.” As Lynda Walsh points out in the book’s introduction, there is almost no (real) institutional or social accommodation for students with ASD at most colleges, not to mention a dearth of scholarly attention (8); in other words, there is a gaping hole where there should be theory, praxis, and support. However, this vacuum can be an opportunity. Referring to the original CCCC panel that led to the book’s creation, Walsh says
The ideal scenario painted by these papers is not one of disciplining ASD students to behave “normally”; rather, it is one in which the unique abilities of ASD students can productively transform the traditional composition classroom by breaking its margins and multiplying its perspectives in order to make writing education more accessible for all. (8-9)

In other words, the exigency created by the coming influx of ASD students can provide an impetus to continue to reconceive Composition, its ends, and its place within the academy in ways that serve all students.

The “Accommodation” section of the book broadly approaches the ways in which Composition must locally (in terms of individual students) and institutionally (in terms of practices and policies) evolve in order to meaningfully accommodate students with ASD. It is appropriate that the first chapter in this section is Marica Ribble’s “Basic Writing Students with Autism in the College Classroom,” as many ASD students will begin their composition coursework in basic writing courses. In her chapter, Ribble contextualizes many of the challenges students with ASD face in the composition classroom including the required sociability of group work, largely irrelevant institutional “accommodations,” and ignorant or undertrained faculty. Katherine V. Wills, in “I Just Felt Kinda Invisible’: Accommodations for Learning Disabled Students in the Composition Classroom,” argues that qualitative research (interviews, in particular) can give composition faculty the insight needed to better meet challenges like those that Ribble describes by rethink[ing] pedagogy as a commitment to engage disability itself and remake its social construction one student and one class at a time, minimizing the material consequences of the social construction of disability, illuminating expectations, and questioning normative subjectivity towards full educational access. (43)

April Mann foregrounds this social construction of disability in “Structure & Accommodation: Autism & the Writing Center” and clearly shows how thinking about ASD as a disability in relation to Composition can be incredibly problematic. As she points out, students with Asperger’s Syndrome (a form of high-functioning autism) can actually be hyperlexic—they can have well-above average reading and writing skills—but can be disadvantaged by disciplinary norms such as inquiry-based writing, composing for imagined audiences, and conceiving of writing as a series of choices (49-53). However, Mann contends, a number of writing center best practices may have the potential to ameliorate the stresses and difficulties that ASD students may experience as a result such classroom norms. In the final chapter of the “Accommodation” section of the book, “Recommended Approaches to the Neuroimaging Literature on Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) for Teachers of Writing,” Lynda Walsh and Cheryl Olman provide composition instructors with some context on the relationship between neuroimaging studies, autism, and what such studies may or may not say about such things as “mirror neurons,” empathy, linguistic interpretation,
and cerebral interconnectedness. In addition to uncovering the limitations of such studies, Walsh and Olman argue that what these studies can tell us implies pedagogical approaches that may benefit all composition students such as clear directions for assignments or multimodal instruction.

While the second section of the book is titled “Pedagogy,” there is still a fair degree of discussion on accommodation just as the “Accommodation” section contains a fair amount of discussion on pedagogy. That said, the chapters in this section stand apart from those in the “Accommodation” section through their grounding in concrete pedagogical practices and postures meant to materially change Composition as a field and as a constellation of practices. Kim Freeman’s chapter, “Channeling the Enthusiasm: Two Narratives of Teaching Students with Asperger’s Syndrome in Writing & Literature Classes, with Questions & Reflections,” describes her failures, successes, and strategies in working with students with Asperger’s Syndrome. Like some of the authors in the other section of the book, Freeman holds out hope that education on, and experience with, ASD can result in fundamental theoretical and pedagogical shifts in Composition. Val Gerstle’s chapter, “Reaching the College Composition Student with Autism Through the Cartoon-Enhanced Classroom,” represents such a shift. Gerstle argues that working with cartoons (particularly humorous ones) in the composition classroom can capitalize on ASD students’ (sometimes) visual strengths and help smooth social interactions while decreasing participatory anxieties. Gerstle believes that cartoons may be used not only as objects to be analyzed by the class but texts to be produced in the class. Muriel Cunningham also writes on the benefits of using visual instructional modalities when teaching students with ASD in “Helping Autistic Students Improve Written Communication Skills Through Visual Images,” arguing that carefully crafted analytic exercises can help autistic and neurotypical students alike learn how to read nuance in texts. In the final chapter of the section and the book, “‘Well, Not Exactly’: Asperger’s and the Integration of Outside Sources,” Jennifer McClinton-Temple argues that the contextually-dependent nature of plagiarism makes the incorporation of sources hard to pin down in any sort of algorithmic or procedural sense, and this can be a sometimes-paralyzing situation for students on the spectrum, many of whom may be quite literal or procedural thinkers (137-38). In addition, McClinton-Temple argues, the simple act of paraphrasing may seem like an absurdity to some ASD students—why put something in one’s own words if it was well-written to begin with (139)? McClinton-Temple’s chapter provides some workarounds for these issues, such as recasting paraphrase as summary, that may help not just ASD students but all composition students address this difficult and ambiguous facet of academic writing.

As a collection, *Autism Spectrum Disorders in the College Composition Classroom*, serves as a good introduction to a number of the challenges that composition instructors will increasingly face as more and more ASD students fill our classrooms. The book does have its blank spots, however. For example, the contributors tend to only address high-functioning ASD students.
and students with Asperger’s Syndrome. There is little mention of students who will need computer-assisted communication devices such as iPads or students who will have sensory integration issues, students who may have to disruptively “stim,” or self-stimulate. There is also sparse theoretical or empirical grounding in the book. Much of the collection reads like anecdote or “lore.” These criticisms are not, ultimately, criticisms of the book, however—they are criticisms of the field’s silences and lack of responsiveness. They are criticisms of those faculty who have received the “needs more time taking tests” notices for accommodation and left it at that, quietly letting the gates of the academy slam shut in their students’ faces. These elisions are an indictment, but the voices of this collection are a corrective; they are the first salvos in a discipline-wide discussion that must take place not soon, but now. The authors in this book are doing what the best of us do and what all of us should strive to do: they are looking at their students as individual writers with their own struggles, strengths, and talents, and asking “how can I do better for them and for all of us?”

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Works Cited