

Autistic Thinking

ISAW innovative
supports for
autistic workers

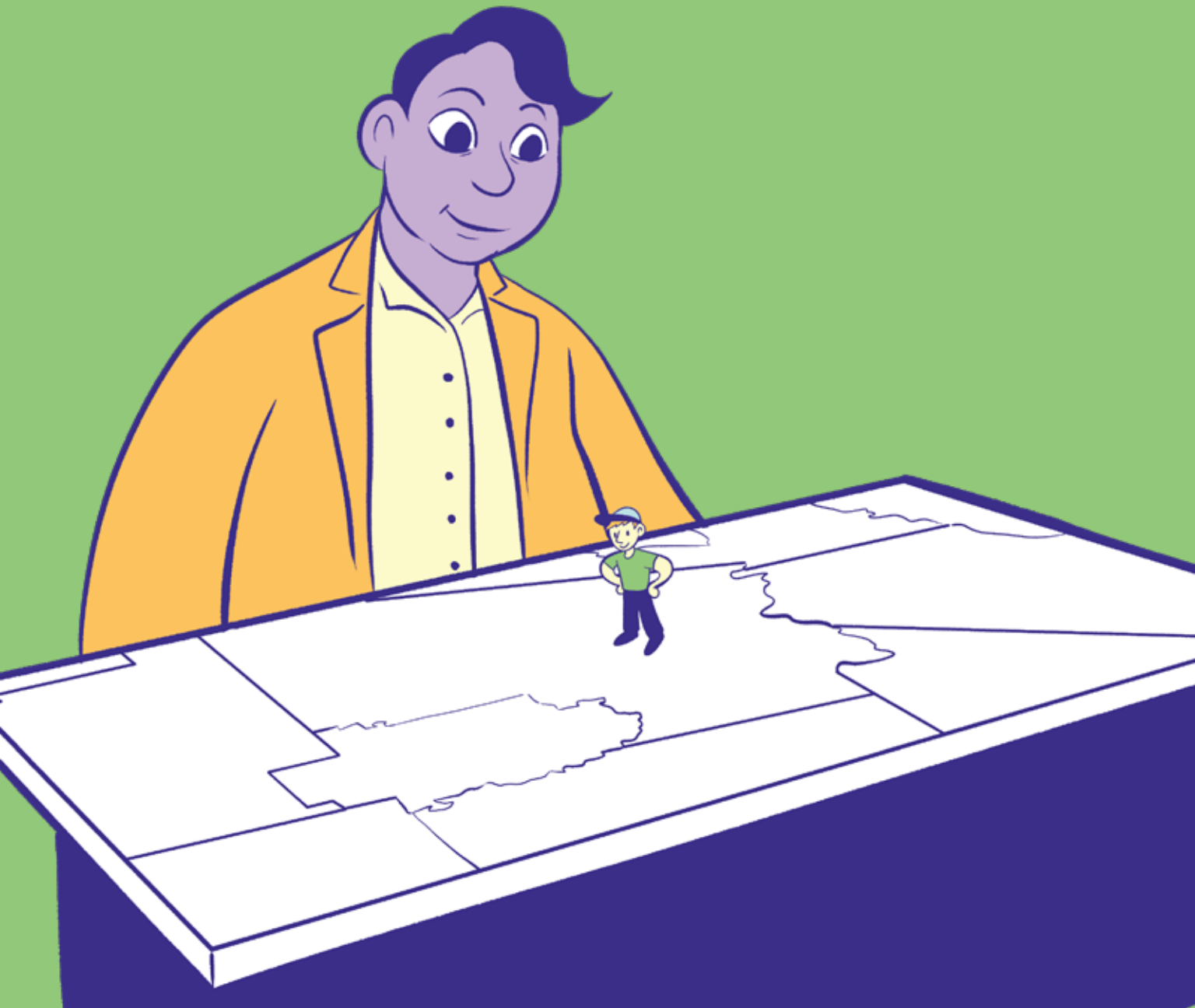
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Visit: isaw.hdiuk.org | Contact: Bev Harp at baharp2@uky.edu or Brittany Granville at bgr263@uky.edu

Bottom–Up Processing

Bottom-up processing means starting with details to understand the “big picture.” While most neurotypical people are top-down thinkers who come to each situation with a template, autistic people must often build understanding from details and context cues.

José and Ruben are looking at the same map.



Ruben is a bottom-up processor. He observes the plants and trees in the area as a clue to where he is standing.



José, a top-down processor, sees the overall map.
He can identify Ruben's exact location, but cannot
describe the landscape.



Associative Thinking

Associative Thinking uses pattern recognition and approaches problems in a non-linear way. The associative thinker often draws from different fields or areas, combining them in unique ways.

Associative thinking is allowing one thought to flow from another. For example, here, Ruth is trying to think of a setting for her character. She hears someone say about her, "She can't see the forest for the trees." She thinks about a tree in her mom's yard that reminds her of broccoli. Before long, she has created a broccoli forest!

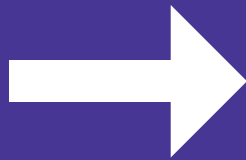


Systems thinking

Systems thinking is a process for understanding complex situations by evaluating relationships between things in multiple ways.

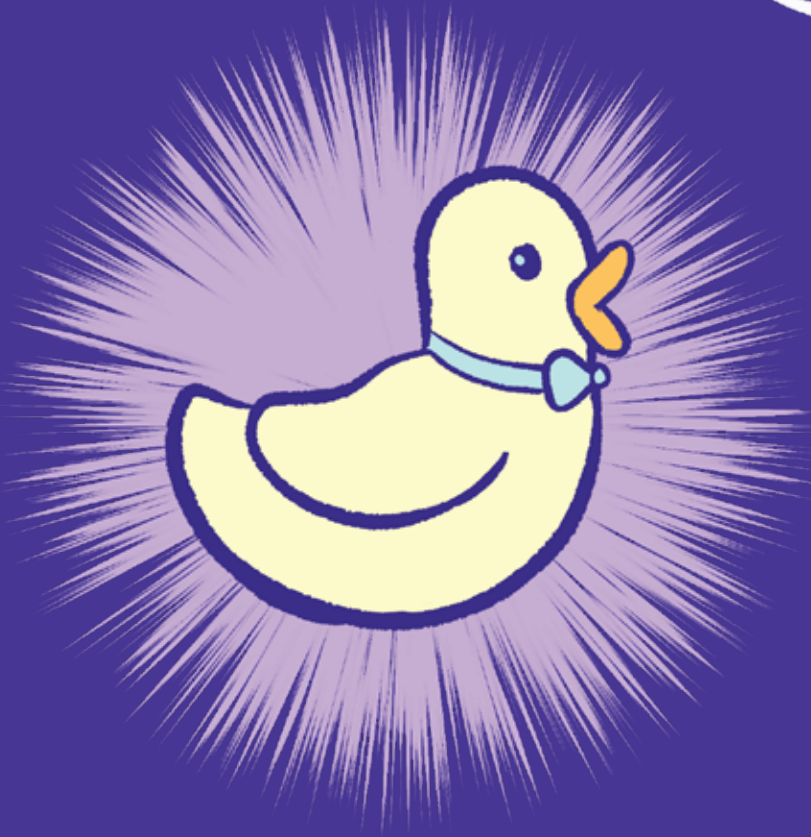
Linear Thinking

“I will take this item back to the stockroom.”



Systems thinking

“I will take this item back to the stockroom. If it is damaged, it will go to the 605 room”



“If not damaged, it will go upstairs.”

Systems thinking



“On the way there, I’ll straighten up any messy shelves I see so I don’t have to do that later.”

“I will avoid going between 12 and 1:00 when the stockroom manager is at lunch.”



Monotropism

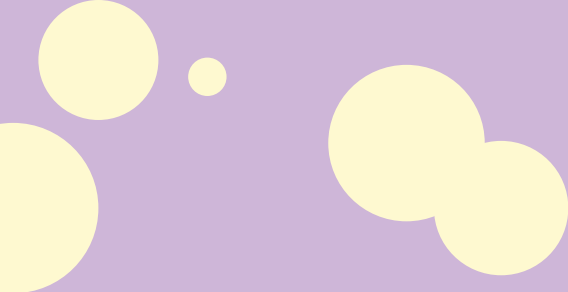
Monotropism means paying attention to one thing at a time. Autistic people often work best this way.

Freya LOVES the video game franchise “The Legend of Zelda”, and can spend hours replaying games. Sometimes they get so absorbed that they lose track of time and don’t process basic needs like hunger or the need to use the bathroom for extended periods of time.



At work, Freya's tendency to focus intently allows her to work efficiently at tasks her coworkers might find boring, like creating PowerPoint presentations.





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