SPECIAL INTERESTS & OTHER DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

- Persons with Asperger's syndrome typically develop an abnormally intense special interest, such as in knowing detailed facts or collecting examples of a specific thing.

- They easily lose track of time while enjoying the special interest. It becomes a source of relaxation and pleasure, as well as a way to gain understanding and control of the world.

- An inordinate amount of time and resources may be spent on the special interest. Conversation about the interest tends to be a monologue, without seeking others' input or reaction; and others may be required to accommodate rigid behaviors and routines surrounding the interest (e.g., always keeping a collection in a specific order).

- Strength: a special interest can be the basis for genuine expertise, potential employment, and interest-based friendships with other like-minded people.

- Besides the tendency to monologue, persons with Asperger's syndrome tend to show other unusual characteristics of speech. They struggle with *prosody*, or the inflections of voice that convey meaning and feeling; thus, their speech may sound 'robotic'. The words they choose are often 'professorial,' too formal for the context. They may have a hard time hearing when someone else is being sarcastic or using a figure of speech.

- Strength: Persons with Asperger's syndrome are exact and precise in their language, often especially in writing. They can often learn to speak a foreign language without an accent, as they tend to repeat the words exactly as pronounced by a native speaker.

- Persons with Asperger's syndrome tend to be less physically coordinated than their peers; e.g., they may be clumsy at ball games, or run oddly. They may struggle with *propioception*, or awareness of the position of one's body in space. This can contribute, for example, to anxiety when driving, especially at highway speeds or unfamiliar roads.

- Persons with Asperger's syndrome may be hypersensitive to certain sensations: e.g., a flickering bulb, a barking dog, or clothing that binds may be perceived as unbearable. They may tolerate only a limited variety of tastes and textures, which may have some connection with anorexia nervosa (though I view control as central to eating disorders).
- Strength: On the other hand, persons with Asperger's syndrome are often able to tune out some extremes of noise, temperature, etc., that would be uncomfortable to others.