

A neurodiversity-inclusive guide to graduation

for University of Surrey students





Graduation is an important milestone, but it can also be overwhelming, sensory-intense, and unpredictable.

This guide is designed to help neurodivergent students (including autistic students, students with ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, and other neurodivergent identities, with or without formal diagnoses) understand what to expect at a Surrey graduation ceremony, what support is available, and how to request reasonable adjustments.

The guide follows best practice highlighted by UK universities and student-led research, which stresses choice, predictability, and dignity rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Before the day: Planning and preparation

Graduating your way

There is no single “right” way to graduate. Attending the full ceremony, attending with adjustments, leaving early, or choosing a quieter alternative are all valid choices.

At Surrey:

- Attendance is optional
- You do not have to attend to receive your degree
- You can request support without disclosing a diagnosis publicly

Requesting support in advance

Graduations involve large crowds, bright lights, loud applause, long periods of sitting, and unfamiliar routines — all common sensory stressors.

Contact the Ceremonies Team ceremonies@surrey.ac.uk to request:

- Seating near an aisle or exit
- Permission to leave and re-enter
- A support person to accompany you
- Clear step-by-step instructions for the ceremony

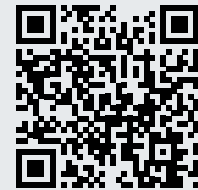
Knowing what will happen

Clear expectations reduce anxiety for many neurodivergent students.

You can read ceremony schedules in advance and watch previous graduation videos.

We offer detailed guidance on what to expect, including:

- Processions
- Name reading
- Stage crossing
- Exit routes
- Photography



On the day:

Sensory and social considerations

Venue and environment

Surrey graduation ceremonies are held at Guildford Cathedral, a large, visually striking space that can be:

- Loud (applause, music)
- Echoing
- Heavily populated
- Brightly lit

If you experience sensory overload:

- Ear defenders or noise-cancelling headphones are acceptable
- Sunglasses or fidget tools are acceptable
- Sitting near the edge of seating is often helpful

Movement, and leaving early

You are allowed to:

- Stand up quietly if sitting becomes uncomfortable
- Use movement or stimming to self-regulate
- Leave the ceremony early or step outside and return

Your name, the stage, and alternatives

At Surrey you can submit name pronunciation guidance in advance.

You can request clarity on:

- Where to walk
- When to stand
- Who will signal you

If crossing the stage feels overwhelming, please ask about alternative arrangements (handled discreetly by ceremonies staff).



Guests, family, and social pressure

Guests can request:

- Accessible seating
- Support with mobility or sensory needs

Managing expectations

Graduation often comes with external pressure from family or peers. Many neurodivergent students report stress around:

- Performing happiness
- Social interaction
- Long days with little downtime

You are allowed to:

- Bring fewer guests
- Decline receptions or photos
- Leave immediately after the ceremony

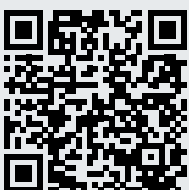
Your achievement is not measured by how long you stay.

Key things to remember

- You belong at graduation, exactly as you are
- Adjustments are normal, not special treatment
- You are not required to endure distress to “earn” celebration
- Choosing not to attend is also valid



MySurrey
Graduation Hub



Equality, diversity and
inclusion at Surrey

✉ ceremonies@surrey.ac.uk

