

Tips for Working with Academically Underprepared Students

- Provide structure. Help organize and sequence tasks. Below-level students need predictability, consistency, and clearly stated expectations.
- Directions: Give directions in two or three different ways. Have students repeat directions to you, or have another student check for understanding. Limit the number of directions. If multiple directions, have student do the first 1-2 things and then check with you or a buddy before continuing on to the rest of the directions.
- Build self-esteem. Keep samples and charts of work so students can see progress. Remind them that everyone has problems with something – tell them a few things that are hard for you or other students. It is reassuring for a child to learn that even adults and “good” students have trouble getting it together.
- Remember that most students laugh at others’ mistakes because of their own insecurities or because they have learned this response from their own experience. Teach them an appropriate response, such as prompting or helping.
- Mark correct responses instead of only those that are incorrect. This will increase the feelings of success for the student who is used to having all of their failures pointed out.
- Use volunteers – college students, grandparents, community members, or students from a higher grade level to tutor and mentor students.
- Chart progress – make a private folder with a chart that shows # right in each area. The student should be competing only with him/herself.
- Programmed, self-checking, supplementary materials can be used sometimes to provide immediate feedback while reducing the need for continuous teacher attention.
- Using a green dot, mark the place on the paper where the student is to begin.
- Use study carrels. Some students are highly distracted. Do not isolate entirely – students can choose, or be helped to choose, when to use it.
- Break larger tasks into mini-steps. Know the essential learnings for the student to grasp or produce.
- Preteach difficult skills or concepts. Utilize parents for exposing a concept/skill before you introduce it to the class. Then they can follow along better and say, “Oh, I’ve heard that before!”

- Allow students to use reference charts such as ABC order, #1-100, math formulas, vowel pictures, multiplication matrix, etc. This teaches him/her where to go to find help.
- Use visual prompts such as underlining or highlighting key words in the content or in the directions.
- Remember: Students with learning problems learn more from a model than from their mistakes.