

## Why does my learner perform poorly on exams?

2020 AHSE educator's workshop

Sarah Cipriano & Janet Lindsley

Struggling test-taker subtypes	Problems, issues	Potential solutions
1. Lack of script recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriate/ineffective use of disease scripts for diagnostic reasoning</li> <li>• Offer no or incorrect interpretations of clinical data while reading the clinical stem</li> <li>• Cannot answer QRF 1-4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage the test question in terms of disease script from the START</li> <li>• Sort clinical information based on the script and change scripts if needed to accommodate new information</li> <li>• Study disease in context of clinical presentation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice questions</li> <li>• Clinical exposure</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2. Lack of script specificity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes a general disease category, but not specific clinical subtype or severity of disease</li> <li>• Gives incomplete or inaccurate answers to QRF 2-4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage the test question in terms of disease script and specific clinical scenario from the start</li> <li>• Refine disease script using the clinical information to deduce the severity and/or subtype of disease</li> <li>• Study the different diagnostic, therapeutic, and prognostic implications of disease subtypes</li> <li>• Increase clinical exposure for richer scripts</li> </ul>
3. Premature closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early decision on the diagnosis</li> <li>• Ignore or downplay information inconsistent with the diagnosis</li> <li>• May list facts that are inconsistent with the chosen diagnosis in QRF Item 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STOP after reading the question stem!</li> <li>• Note...               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features supportive of the diagnosis</li> <li>• Features inconsistent with the diagnosis</li> <li>• ALL markedly abnormal findings must be addressed</li> <li>• Can circle these when reading the question</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Prove diagnosis selected is the right one</li> </ul>
4. Underconfidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learned to distrust their clinical reasoning, even when it may be correct</li> <li>• Rate their confidence low (QRF Items 5–6, 8) even when they have identified the correct diagnosis and predicted the correct answer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the test-taking worksheet to collect data on               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accuracy of his initial answer</li> <li>• Confidence (BEFORE looking at choices)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Compare mean confidence scores on questions answered correctly vs. incorrectly</li> <li>• Over time, learner re-calibrates their own confidence</li> <li>• Overconfidence can be a problem also, but usually occurs with another learning deficiency</li> </ul>

5. Incorrect causal attribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superficial/incorrect explanations of why the right answer is correct and the wrong answer is incorrect (QRF 14)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When doing practice questions, the learner should examine each answer and explain why it is right or wrong <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bonus: Think in which situations would the wrong answers be right (compare/contrast)?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Cut back on the number of questions per study session to allow for the in-depth review required above</li> </ul>
6. Inappropriate adaptative inferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to identify knowledge gaps after answering a practice question, but are unable to articulate an effective learning plan (QRF 15)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give learner examples of appropriate learning plans</li> <li>• “Make a graph of the different serologic markers of hepatitis B and the timing of each and explain which markers correspond infection”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Mentor can help identify ways he learns best</li> <li>• Who were your most memorable teachers?</li> <li>• What concepts do you know well and how did you master those?</li> </ul>
7. Isolated knowledge deficit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the script in detail</li> <li>• Can explain why an answer is right or wrong</li> <li>• Knows how to develop a study plan</li> <li>• But hasn't spent the time to learn the material</li> <li>• Has the tools, but hasn't implemented them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore reasons why time not spent</li> <li>• Secondary causes of poor performance (the 7 Ds) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distraction (family, social, financial)</li> <li>• Deprivation (sleep, relational)</li> <li>• Disease (thyroid, etc)</li> <li>• Depression (affective disorders)</li> <li>• Drugs (alcohol, narcotics, etc)</li> <li>• Disability (learning disability, ADHD)</li> <li>• Disorders (personality disorder)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### References:

Andrews MA, Kelly WF, DeZee KJ. Why Does This Learner Perform Poorly on Tests? Using Self-Regulated Learning Theory to Diagnose the Problem and Implement Solutions. *Acad Med.* 2018;93(4):612-615.

Lucey CR, Boote R. Working with problem residents: A systematic approach. In Holmboe and Hawkins R, eds. *Practical Guide to the Evaluation of Clinical Competence.* Philadelphia, PA: Mosby Elsevier; 2008: 201-215.

### Video links of struggling learners:

- <https://youtu.be/PiEsywpmDCg>
- <https://youtu.be/nGzeO3pzXPgf>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR\\_zC5QoFLY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR_zC5QoFLY)
- [https://youtu.be/v\\_maDtOXE8Yf](https://youtu.be/v_maDtOXE8Yf)
- <https://youtu.be/WP0i3bOHCfA>
- [https://youtu.be/5-QAzP\\_sgJY](https://youtu.be/5-QAzP_sgJY)