

TROUBLESHOOTING GENERAL UNDERPERFORMANCE IN ECONOMICS

Students are likely to have topic-specific problems so these need to be addressed too, but the strategies below are for more systemic problems. Each of these is likely to affect other areas, so students are likely to have problems in multiple areas.

Problem	Potential causes	Signs to look for	Possible approaches
Gaps in knowledge	Missed lessons, poor attention, poor retention, not enough consolidation, not enough retrieval built into lessons, missed homework	Problems with short answer qs, especially definitions Struggling with topics because they haven't understood foundation concepts Not making connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge audit • Direct students to certain topics on Seneca/revision guide/youtube/tutor2u online lessons/Ezy/uplearn etc • Encourage some kind of accountability – sign to say they've understood/expectation of notes/screen shot of progress page on Seneca etc • Be very specific about what it is you want them to know (eg which questions)
Poor executive functioning	SEN (eg common with ADD/ASD) Never been taught effective strategies Never really needed it (eg bright students who 'didn't need to study for GCSE's'...)	Poor recall, despite spending lots of time revising (ie revision is ineffective) Poor organization, missed deadlines Notes not filed Struggling to get started with bigger tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach study skills explicitly! • Teach students to use spec, turn it into a question and then make sure their notes answer those questions • Make expectations clear – esp with revision (eg “at least 15 flashcards on pages 10-13, one question per flashcard with the answer on the back”) • Consider allowing students to make and use cheat sheets of a set size (eg ‘no more than one side of a5’) for some internal exams – encourages them to identify what they do and don't know (since space is limited) and helps you as a teacher to distinguish from what they don't understand vs what they can't remember • Scaffold tasks esp note taking and research
Weak literacy	Likely long term Not enough reading SEN (esp dyslexia) EAL Note: not always weak elsewhere (eg students doing maths, f maths, physics and econ might be strong analytically but don't get much practice at essays)	Stronger on short answer/MCQs than on longer answers/essays Avoiding writing/reading Better verbally than on paper Might not finish tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading shouldn't just be an extension for students at highest levels – find and set relevant reading practice which is shorter and uses less complex language and build from there – eg BBC, even children's sources like The Week Junior or Newsround if needs be (may need to disguise it!) • Sentence level activities (see The Writing Revolution) • Teach Tier 2 vocab explicitly if needed- see Academic Word List (Coxhead 2000) • Refer to SENCO if needed – bright students can sometimes have masked SEN, even diagnosed students might not have needed to use their accommodations before • Regular practice so essays aren't seen as scary • Teach paragraph and essay technique, consider mnemonics and structure strips but be aware of limitations and remove when necessary • Consult with subjects with essays at KS3 and 4 (eg History) • Consider textbooks carefully – some students might initially benefit from revision guide rather than detailed textbook

Problem	Potential causes	Signs to look for	Possible approaches
Weak numeracy	Likely long term Maths anxiety Dyscalculia	Calculation qs Difficulty interpreting data(or ignoring it) Sometimes struggle with diagrams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach skills explicitly • Consider running an after school/lunch time course if you have several students struggling with this • Tutor2U quantitative skills course • Provide SLOP – shed loads of practice - with answers so they can self check. One or two practice qs per skills not enough for someone learning it for the first time • Intelligent practice – build up difficulty slowly • Consult with maths dept
Poor exam technique	Not being aware of what is needed (or that they need to ‘play the game’!) Poor exam board questions/mark schemes!	Answers which don’t hit descriptors Not answering the question Imbalance between assessment objectives (usually strong knowledge and weak application) Timing issues – not writing enough or writing too much	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach command words and question types explicitly • Give timings guides for the paper (eg ‘a mark a minute’) • Use model answers • Share mark schemes • Practice different types of questions, consider doing this in timed conditions • Consider using mnemonics and answer frames, again being aware of limitations • If application is the problem, address this directly: eg make sure students know what application actually is (it’s not examples!), practice adding application eg set ‘theoretical’ essay and then set the students the task alter it to include a context, if students don’t have strong contextual knowledge either increase how you’re using it in whole-class teaching or target intervention with knowledge books (poor contextual knowledge common in students who don’t read much/EAL students who don’t recognize contexts in the exam/disadvantaged students)

Identifying reasons for lost marks

After a test, ask students to go through every mark lost and categorise it:

1 = Silly mistake:

Student can see what the correct answer should have been. Student needs to take more care.

2 = Recall issue.

Student could have got the mark if they were able to have access to their notes/textbook/internet. Students needs to revise more/more efficiently. Reteaching not required. Teacher to check study strategies.

3 = Understanding issue.

Student doesn’t understand correct answer. Student wouldn’t have got the mark even if they had access to their notes/textbook/internet. Needs reteaching.

4 = Technique issue.

Students understands correct answer but did not recognize that that’s what they needed to write. Needs review of exam techniques.

5 = Timing.

Student would have got the mark if they had had more time. Could be an exam technique issue (e.g. if they wrote more than necessary in earlier questions, didn’t know/stick to timing).

Could also be literacy (e.g. language processing time in dyslexic students, translation time in EAL students). Could be stamina issue – build up over time, teach shortcuts, reiterate timing.