



An overview of Issues  
& Characteristics

## Underachievement

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### + Underachievers – Who are they?

- Students who show great academic promise but who fail to perform at a level commensurate with their ability.
- There is a change in performance
  - obvious and drastic, or
  - gradual and seen only when year to year comparisons are made, or
  - inconsistent performance that varies by venue

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### + Common Characteristics

■ Poor study habits	■ Manipulative
■ Weak skills	■ Rebellious
■ Disorganized	■ Aggressive
■ Impulsive	■ Withdrawn
■ Careless	■ Passive
■ Helpless	■ Depressed
■ Perfectionist/Procrastinators	■ Pessimistic
■ Anxious	■ Low Self-Esteem/ Concept/Efficacy

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## + Working Definitions

- The Rebel
- The Conformist
- The Stressed Learner
- The Victim
- The Distracted Learner
- The Complacent Learner
- The Single-Sided Achiever
- The Bored Student
- The Struggling Student

Heacox, D. (1991). *Up from underachievement*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Press

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## + The Rebel

- The Rebel doesn't see the relevance of classroom activities or assignments. She refuses to believe that there is any connection between school and the "real world." She has a general "I don't need this" attitude.
- May be disruptive, delinquent, hostile, or temperamental.
- "This is dumb." "Why do we have to do this anyway?" "This is a total waste of time." "I will not do that just because you want me to."

- ✓ Shift control back to student
- ✓ Use contracts
- ✓ Dose of reality

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## + The Conformist

- The Conformist has decided that doing well in school is just not worth it. Has learned early that those who finish early get more work, that working slowly filled up the time, or that doing fine (but not great) work was a way to avoid the dreaded and deadly "enrichment" projects dreamed up by his teachers.
- "I don't want to be a nerd." "If I get done early, it just means more work." "I just don't want to work that hard." "If I do well I get teased." "I won't have time for baseball practice."

- ✓ Provide a safe place to be smart
- ✓ Review assignments
- ✓ Mentorships/internships

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## + The Stressed Learner

- The Stressed Learner is also The Perfectionist. Her self esteem rises and falls depending on her most recent academic performance. Sometimes perfectionism may lead to paralysis or procrastination.
- The Stressed Learner stops trying to achieve out of fear of making a mistake.
- "It's not quite ready yet." "I could have done better if I had more time." "What if I can't do it?" "She's not a very good teacher. She gave me a decent grade on that paper I put together at the last minute."

- ✓ Relax & Reframe
- ✓ Encourage safe risk taking
- ✓ Review requirements
- ✓ Look at all strengths

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## + The Victim

- The Victim is reluctant to accept responsibility for her/his lack of school success. This student may have had adults managing her school work rather than personally taking responsibility for it. The student is able to sit back and watch everyone else work through a plan of action and own the problem.
- "The assignment was just too hard for me." "Our family wasn't home last night so I couldn't do my homework." "If you quit pushing me, I might get done." "The teacher doesn't like me."

- ✓ Return control to student
- ✓ Time management
- ✓ Encourage safe risk taking
- ✓ Allow consequences

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## + The Distracted Learner

- The Distracted Learner is the individual with personal problems or concerns that affect his school performance. This student may be experiencing stress or anxiety for very personal reasons of which the school may be unaware. Or he may be distracted because of competition for his time.
- "I worked last night until 10:00." "We had a track meet." "This was my weekend to spend with my dad." "Something came up at home."

- ✓ Relaxation techniques
- ✓ Time management
- ✓ Study skills
- ✓ Counseling

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## + The Complacent Learner

- The Complacent Learner seems basically content with how school and his learning are going. He likes himself and doesn't seem to have any academic problems that slow him down. However, the adults in his life believe that he could do better in school, if only he tried. It is the teacher or parent whose attitudes, standards, and expectations are not being met.
- "I'm doing as well as I want to do." "I'm satisfied. I don't know why you aren't." "It's important to you, not to me." "Sure I could have done better." "Quit pressuring me."

- ✓ Reality therapy
- ✓ Encourage safe risk taking
- ✓ Return control to student

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## + The Single Sided Achiever

- The Single-Sided Achiever has decided that only certain classes are worthy of her attention and energy. She chooses to achieve in some classes and to underachieve in others. She may be motivated by the subject matter, teaching style, or learning activities of the classes she achieves in. Others are dismissed as "boring" or "useless."
- "That class isn't important to me." "That subject bores me." "This class is different." "I only like certain classes." "This class doesn't teach me anything I want to know."

- ✓ Reality therapy
- ✓ Study habit check
- ✓ Learn to play the game

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## + The Bored Student

- The Bored Student may be one who truly needs more challenging activities due to her advanced skills and abilities. Students who enter school with advanced skills may wait for years until the curriculum catches up with their learning needs. By then, they have formed sloppy work habits and lazy learning patterns.
- "I learned all this last year." "When do we get to do the hard stuff?" "How many times do we have to go over this?" "When can I learn what I want to learn?"

- ✓ Study habits & skills
- ✓ Advocate for acceleration
- ✓ Find appropriate extra-curricular activities

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## + The Struggling Student

- The Struggling Student may have been the bright child who was able to slide through the elementary grades without learning much new. At some point, however, he hit the wall when the content became new and demanding enough to require study skills. Since he never had to learn how to study, he may perceive his lack of success as a loss of intelligence.
- "I don't understand." "It's too hard for me." "I used to be smart." "I thought that was what we were supposed to do."

- ✓ Study skills
- ✓ Time management
- ✓ Encourage realistic view of abilities
- ✓ Coping not blaming

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The End

### Questions & Comments?

Contact us at:  
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<http://www.ccgohio.com>

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