

Steve Butnik’s article [Understanding, Diagnosing, and Coping with Slow Processing Speed](#) offers an overview of ideas but also focuses on the fact that sometimes slow learning is a result of something undiagnosed. That said, if you are simply teaching the child in front of you, it shouldn’t really matter what their diagnosis is, you just need to adapt teaching to meet their needs.

A simple table that he uses is below.

<b>Type of Problem</b>	<b>Examples of Interventions</b>
Activation	Investigate the cause. For example, see if the student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is engrossed in another activity</li> <li>• Is confused about what to do</li> <li>• Has missed the instructions</li> <li>• Is anxious about failing.</li> </ul>
Emotional factors (i.e., “It’s too much...”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage.</li> <li>• Support.</li> <li>• Provide help getting started.</li> </ul>
Cognitive factors (i.e., “I don’t even know where to begin.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a plan.</li> <li>• Break a task down into smaller chunks.</li> <li>• Use graphic organizers.</li> </ul>
Focus/attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce distractions.</li> <li>• Provide white noise.</li> <li>• Recognize on-task behavior.</li> <li>• Prompt the student when she drifts.</li> <li>• Provide incentives for completion of work.</li> </ul>
Working memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat directions.</li> <li>• Encourage questions.</li> <li>• Give gentle reminders.</li> <li>• Provide templates of completed work, written copies of directions, word banks, etc.</li> </ul>
Handwriting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine if dysgraphia is present.</li> <li>• Give advance copies of teacher notes.</li> <li>• Provide access to word processing and/or speech-to-text software (such as Dragon’s Naturally Speaking).</li> <li>• Have another student share copies of notes.</li> </ul>

Nicola Jones-Ford wrote an interesting [article](#) which outlines different ways to identify students as well as some strategies to support them. This, however, refers to slow processing rather than just learning at a slower pace.

Hawthorne School District, California, have created a very simple [document](#) outlining what a slow learner is as well as some easy strategies to follow. These approaches would by no means inhibit others in the classroom from making progress so may be very useful.

I think, in terms of a toolkit, teachers need a specific set of “here is what I do” rather than an unending list of ideas which could be challenging to create. I have tried to limit it down to a few ideas and then there can always be a, “If these don’t hit the spot, try these instead.”

1. Use examples.

Model responses and model your own process. For instance, write a response with the learner and talk through the process, going back and correcting things etc. This will help to develop the student’s confidence and know that things don’t need to be perfect first time around.

2. Change the approach.

Consider the different learning styles and find out which works best for that student. Just because 90% of a class keeps up with chalk and talk, it doesn’t mean that that is right for everyone. Switching from lecture to discussion and then to work provides the variety that slow learners need to stay engaged in the learning process. In addition to keeping their attention, variety in instructional technique offers them the opportunity to see the same content presented in different ways.

3. Groupings.

It may be that a student in your class would benefit from supporting the slower learner. This is embedding the knowledge for the “tutor” whilst supporting the slower-paced learner. I think that this one can have a huge impact if used effectively. It is simple, time efficient and beneficial to more than one student.

4. Repetition

Repeated exposure to whatever they’re trying to learn will improve their retention. I use simple things like a “Five a day” at the beginning of a lesson, which asks them to recall anything that we have studied. Each lesson has a “Recap” which draws on our learning from the previous lesson, just a few questions, and ends with a “Review,” four questions from what we have covered that lesson.