

GETTING STUDENTS WRITING

HOW TO SUPPORT TWICE EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS AND OTHER RELUCTANT WRITERS

Austina De Bonte

austina@smartisnoteasy.com

Consultant, Smartisnoteasy.com
 President, WA Coalition for Gifted Education
 Past President, NW Gifted Child Association
 Past President, Northshore HiCap Parents Council
 Advisor/Partner, The G Word Film
 Doctoral Candidate, Bridges Graduate School

Download the
SnapType App
 on iphone, ipad,
 or Android

SMART ≠ easy

Agenda

- ◆ Twice exceptional & neurodiversity
- ◆ Strengths & spiky profiles
- ◆ Do they have to write?
- ◆ Root cause informs supports
- ◆ 5 causes of writing challenges
 - ◆ Root cause
 - ◆ Clues
 - ◆ Interventions
 - ◆ Accommodations
 - ◆ Supports & strategies
- ◆ BONUS: Crash Course in 2e for Educators

Slides

tinyurl.com/2ereluctantwriters

Download the
SnapType App
 on iphone, ipad,
 or Android

SMART ≠ easy

Who are twice-exceptional (2e) students?

Highly capable **AND** a disability, learning difference, mental health issue, or other challenge

“...a unique population of students who may fail to demonstrate either high academic performance or specific disabilities. Their gifts may mask their disabilities and their disabilities may mask their gifts.”

(Reis et al., 2014, p. 222)

SMART ≠ easy

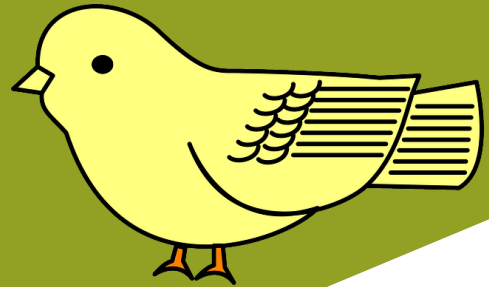
Neurodiversity, another lens on 2e

- ◆ Neurodiversity is not just about autism
- ◆ Every brain is unique, like a fingerprint (Valizadeh et al., 2018)
- ◆ 2e students' brains are neurodiverse
- ◆ Patterns of strengths and challenges
- ◆ Respect individual differences

SMART ≠ easy

Writing is hard for many

- ◆ Reluctant writers are the canary in the coal mine
- ◆ Some kids will **NEED** supports, but other students with hidden needs will benefit from supports too
- ◆ Writing is a complex, multi-layered skill



SMART ≠ easy

First, do they have to write?

“Don’t turn everything into a secret language arts lesson.”

– Dr. Susan Baum
Bridges Academy
The 2e Center

What is the learning objective?

SMART ≠ easy

Demonstrating mastery via strengths

- ◆ Draw a diagram
- ◆ Make a poster
- ◆ Create a slide presentation
- ◆ Draw a comic strip
- ◆ Record a podcast
- ◆ Make a video
- ◆ Build a model
- ◆ Give choices...

Flexible assignments

Encourage creativity

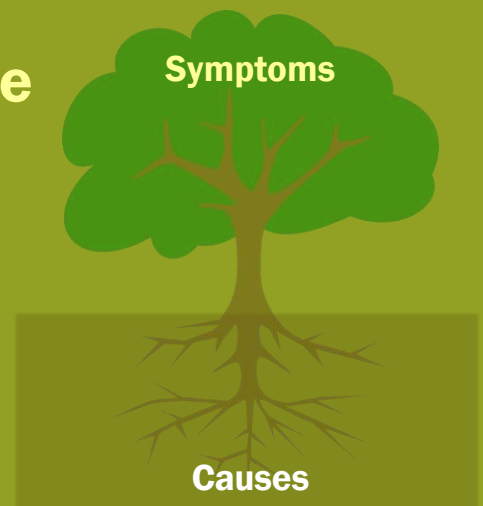
Build on student strengths

The point is communication
of ideas

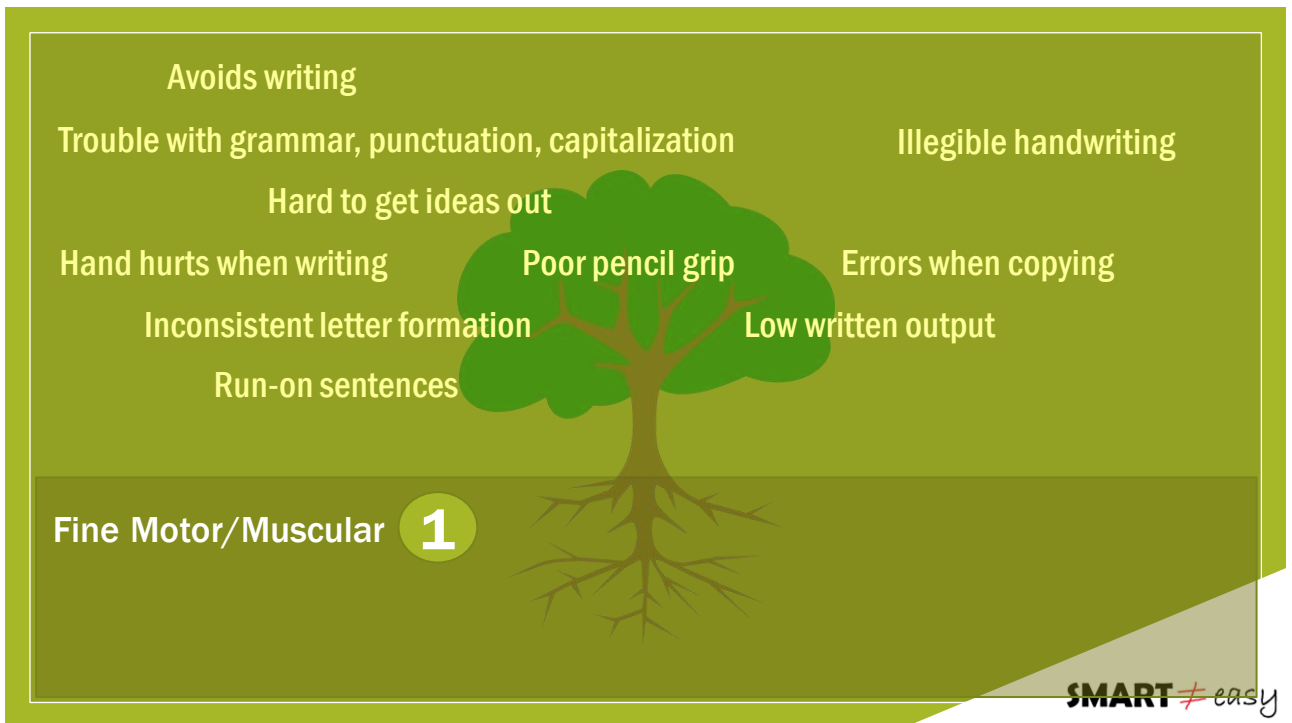
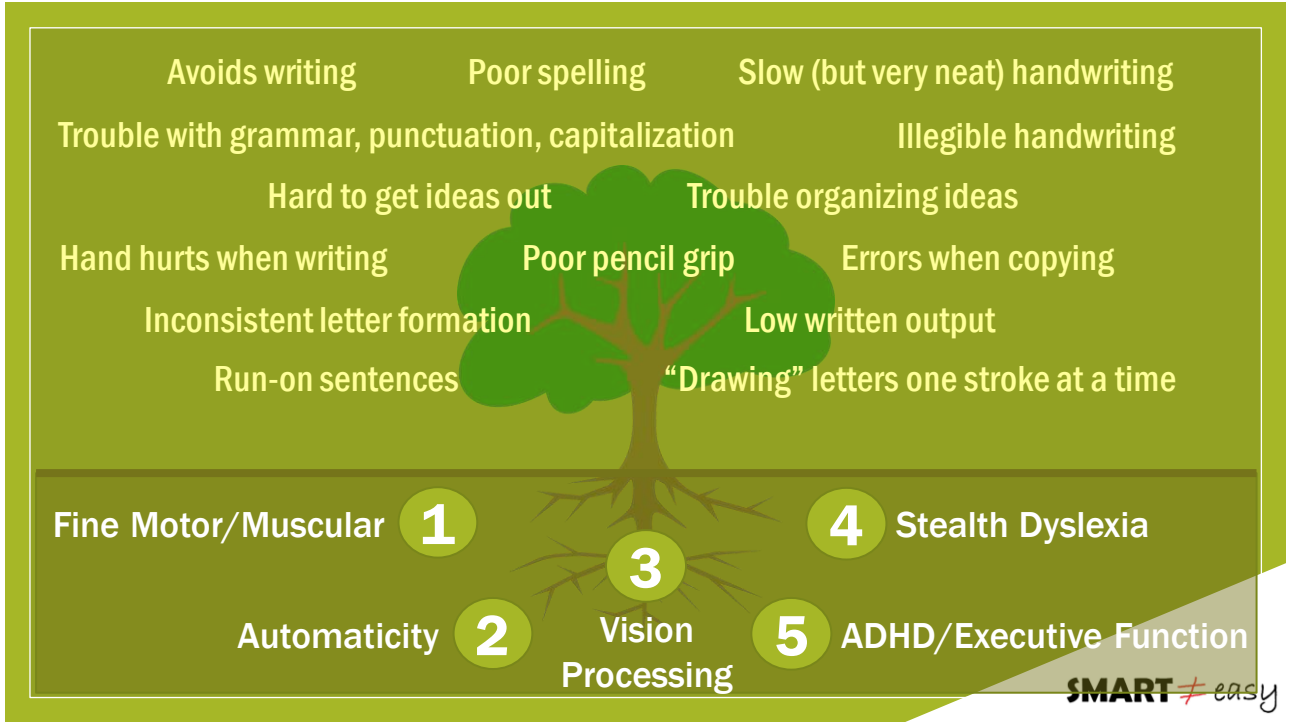
SMART ≠ easy

Look for the Root Cause

- ◆ Several possible causes of writing challenges
- ◆ Supports and strategies are **DIFFERENT** depending on the cause
- ◆ Applying an ineffective support causes frustration
 - ◆ OT only helps with **ONE** of the 5 causes of writing trouble



SMART ≠ easy



1 Fine Motor/Muscular – Root Cause

- ◆ Small muscles
- ◆ Big muscles
- ◆ Core/trunk muscles
- ◆ Stamina
- ◆ Coordination

Clues

“My hand hurts”

Unusual pencil grip

Posture/wriggling

ALSO trouble with drawing and crafts

SMART ≠ easy

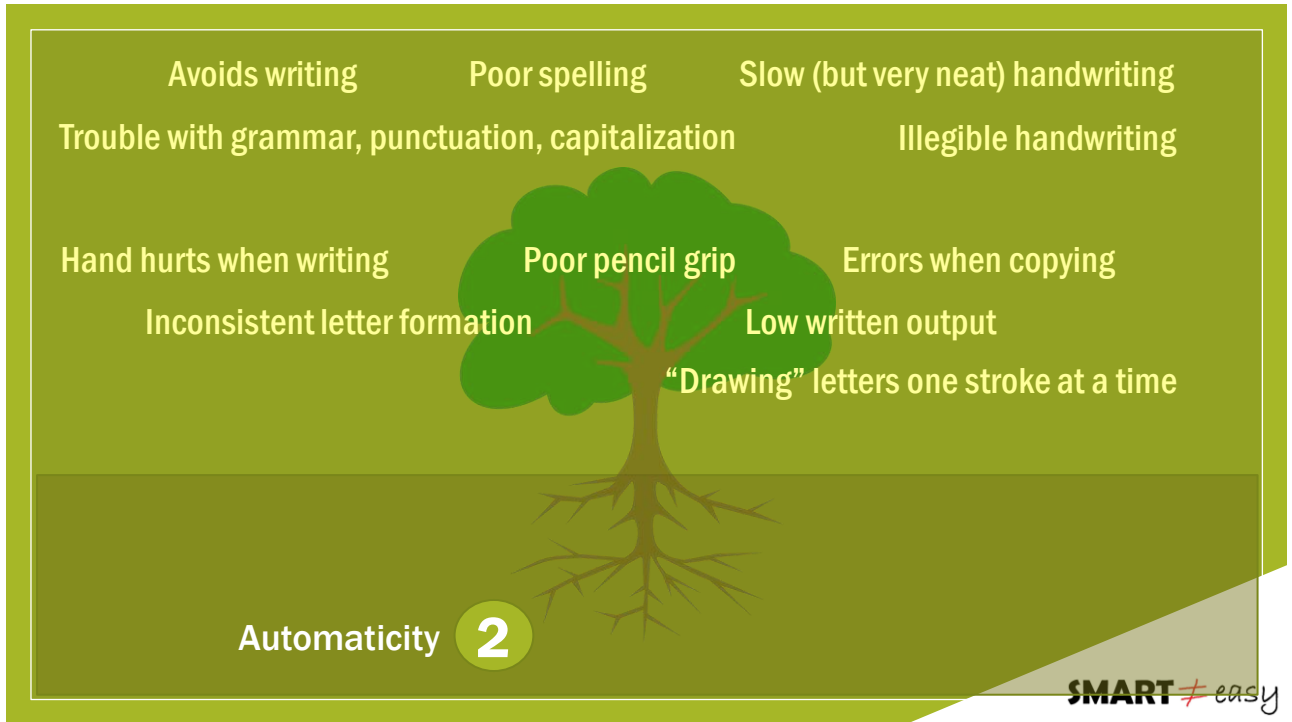
1 Fine Motor/Muscular – How to Help

- ◆ Occupational therapy
- ◆ Tiny crayons/chalk
- ◆ Playdoh/clay
- ◆ Pencil grip devices
- ◆ Perler beads



After middle elementary,
switch to keyboarding or
dictation

SMART ≠ easy



2 Automaticity – Root Cause

- ◆ Brain-based automaticity of letter formation
- ◆ “Muscle memory” for letters and numbers
- ◆ Should be automatic by 2nd or 3rd grade

Clues

Unusual letter strokes

Letters on the same page look different

Messy handwriting

OR Very neat (but very slow)

“Drawing” each letter

SMART ≠ easy

2 Automaticity – How to Help

◆ Lazy 8 Exercise [Video](#)



◆ Arrowsmith Program
“Word & Tracing”

Need a LOT of repetition

After middle elementary, switch to keyboarding or dictation

SMART ≠ easy

Assistive Technology

- ◆ Enable higher order thinking without getting bogged down in the mechanics
- ◆ Keyboarding/Dictation/Scribe
- ◆ Spellcheck
- ◆ Grammar tools/Grammarly
- ◆ SnapType app in iPad/iPhone

What Has the Superhero Done Lately?
Regular-Past Tense Verbs

Directions: The superhero has been busy! Fill in each blank with a verb from the word bank. Don't forget to change it to past tense!

dance climb carry chase jump laugh

I jumped over a tall building to catch a thief.

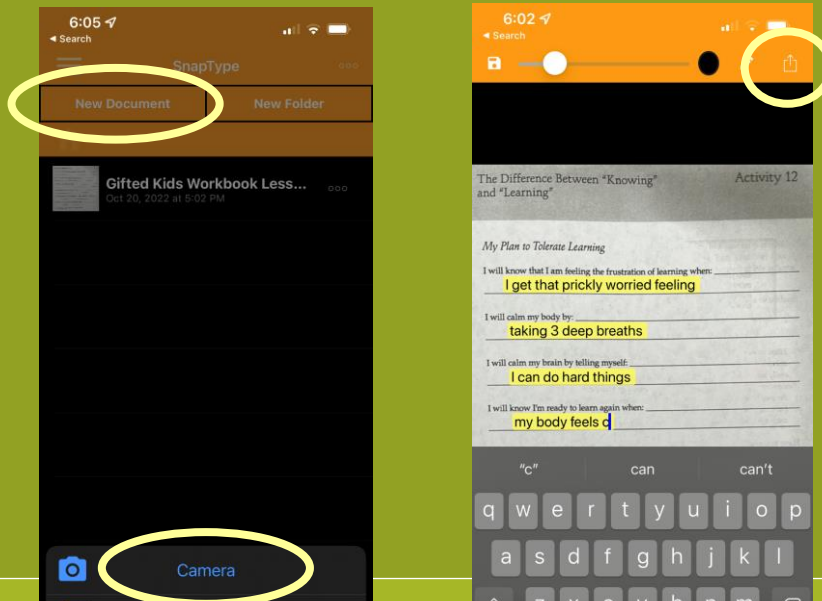
I _____ up a tree to rescue a kitty.

I _____ a bad guy out of town.

I _____ a hurt boy to the hospital.

SMART ≠ easy

Let's Try: SnapType



Download the
SnapType App
on iPhone, iPad,
or Android

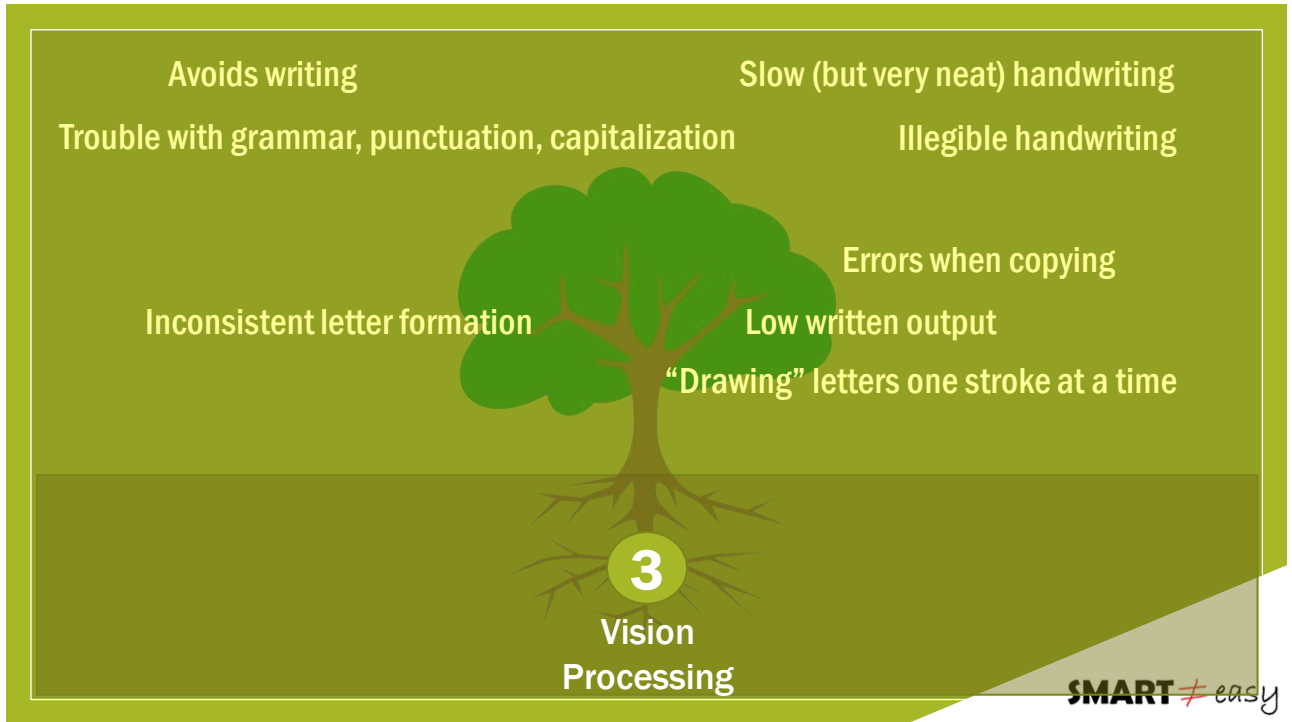
(or find a friend)

SMART ≠ easy

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- ◆ Make all learning accessible to all students
- ◆ Provide accommodations & supports to ALL students
 - ◆ Keyboarding, dictation, spellcheck, ...
 - ◆ Just like a pencil
- ◆ 2e students think accommodations are “cheating” if they are the only ones allowed to use them
- ◆ Many other students will also benefit

SMART ≠ easy



3 Vision Processing Disorders – Root Cause

- ◆ Brain-based
- ◆ Eyes working together
- ◆ Focusing and refocusing
- ◆ Trouble with 3D perception
- ◆ Intermittent blurriness
- ◆ Letters/words can move/flip

Clues

- Trouble copying writing
- Capitalization/punctuation
- Silly mistakes in math (+ -)
- Inconsistent scores on standardized tests
- Resists smaller fonts
- Clumsy/sports

SMART ≠ easy

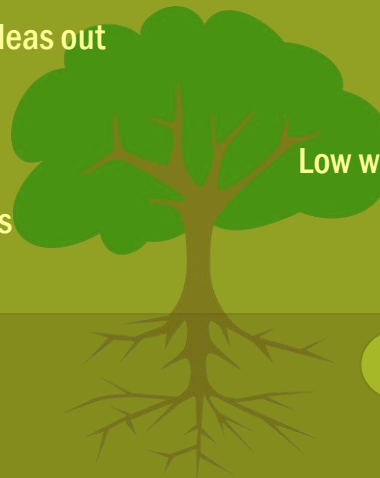
3 Vision Processing Disorders – How to Help

- ◆ Vision Therapy, www.covd.org (look for FCOVD)
- ◆ Large fonts
 - ◆ eReaders
 - ◆ Photocopy onto 11x17
- ◆ Preferential seating
- ◆ Slant board
- ◆ Reading guide strips
- ◆ Math: ½" graph paper, turn notebook sideways



SMART ≠ easy

Avoids writing Poor spelling Slow (but very neat) handwriting
 Trouble with grammar, punctuation, capitalization Illegible handwriting
 Hard to get ideas out
 Errors when copying
 Low written output
 Run-on sentences



4 Stealth Dyslexia

SMART ≠ easy

4 Stealth Dyslexia – Root Cause

- ◆ Phonological awareness
- ◆ Reads everything as a sight word
- ◆ Word -> sounds -> spelling
- ◆ Orthographic rules don't stick
- ◆ Despite this, excellent comprehension with elementary texts

Clues

SPELLING

Rhyming/Wordplay

Can't sound out words

Skips or substitutes words

Inconsistent scores on standardized tests

SMART ≠ *easy*

4 Stealth Dyslexia – Root Cause

- ◆ Phonological awareness
- ◆ Reads everything as a sight word
- ◆ Word -> sounds -> spelling
- ◆ Orthographic rules don't stick
- ◆ Despite this, excellent comprehension with elementary texts

Clues

SPELLING

Rhyming/Wordplay

Can't sound out words

Skips or substitutes words

Inconsistent scores on standardized tests

How to screen?

www.thepasttest.com

Oral manipulation of sounds

Reading nonsense words

Trouble rhyming "harder" words

(DIBELS may not catch them)

SMART ≠ *easy*

4 Stealth Dyslexia – How to Help

- ◆ Structured literacy
 - ◆ Phonics & phonological awareness
 - ◆ Wilson, Heggerty, Sonday, 95 Group, etc.
- ◆ Dyslexia tutoring (wabida.org)
 - ◆ Orton-Gillingham, Barton, All about Reading/Spelling
 - ◆ Wired for Reading
 - ◆ Lindamood-Bell
- ◆ Online reinforcement
 - ◆ treasurehunt.prenda.co, nesy.com
- ◆ Audiobooks - LearningAlly, Bookshare, Speechify
- ◆ Typing with spellcheck, or dictation

Don't Wait

Intervention in 1st or 2nd grade is twice as effective as intervention in 3rd grade (Lovett et al., 2017)

SMART ≠ easy

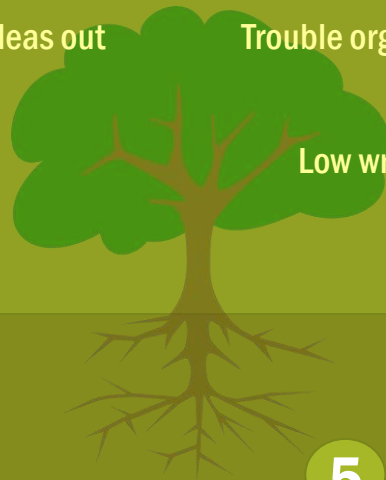
Avoids writing

Trouble with grammar, punctuation, capitalization

Hard to get ideas out

Trouble organizing ideas

Low written output



5 ADHD/Executive Function

SMART ≠ easy

5 ADHD/Exec. Function – Root Cause

- ◆ Not a lack of attention, but trouble regulating attention
- ◆ Can focus when INCUP:
 - ◆ Novel
 - ◆ Interesting
 - ◆ Challenging
 - ◆ Urgent/Pressure
 (Dodson, 2018)
- ◆ NOT: rote, boring, easy, even if very important
- ◆ Perfectionism makes it harder

Clues

Trouble getting started

Trouble staying on task

Time management

Breaking down big projects

Can produce when interested in the topic

SMART ≠ easy

5 ADHD/Exec. Function – How to Help

Novel - Interesting - Challenging - Urgent/Pressure

- ◆ Something unusual to spark excitement
- ◆ Align with interests
- ◆ Give choice in topics, formats
- ◆ Authentic projects for real audiences
- ◆ Make it more complex or more challenging
- ◆ Create time pressure (sometimes)

SMART ≠ easy

This is a tough transition



Lots of interconnected ideas in brain



First, ●. Then ●, ●, and ●.

●. ●. ● because ●.

Linear writing, one word at a time

SMART ≠ easy

How to Help

1. Get ideas out of brain in a messy way
2. THEN organize where you can see it

How?

- ◆ Sticky notes
- ◆ Mind map
- ◆ Drawing
- ◆ Dictation
- ◆ Scribing
- ◆ Walk & talk

Topic/paragraph
graphic organizers
WON'T HELP

Why? They impose
order too soon

Help each student find what works for them

SMART ≠ easy

The mind map is centered on the word "person" and "elderly". Key branches include:

- Person:** purse - coins, honest, begging, dumpster boxes lining up, money, little, how much per week?, THE PENSION (with a drawing of a person).
- Elderly:** glasses, hair, shoes, coats/hats, retirement, \$, old, read, donate, children, charity, Dreamy & retirement?, FREE CAST (with a drawing of a person).
- Adopt-A-Pensioner:** Africa, death, support, walt, ADAPT-A-PENSIONER, ADAPT-A-GRANNY, ADAPT-A-GRANNY (with a drawing of a person), parents' law, pensioner's law.
- Other:** legal, angelines, RFP, grandpa, adopt, adopt a granny, adopt a grandpa, adopt a.

Additional notes include "personer = poverty = poor" and "FREE CAST" with "spresso hot (revised)".

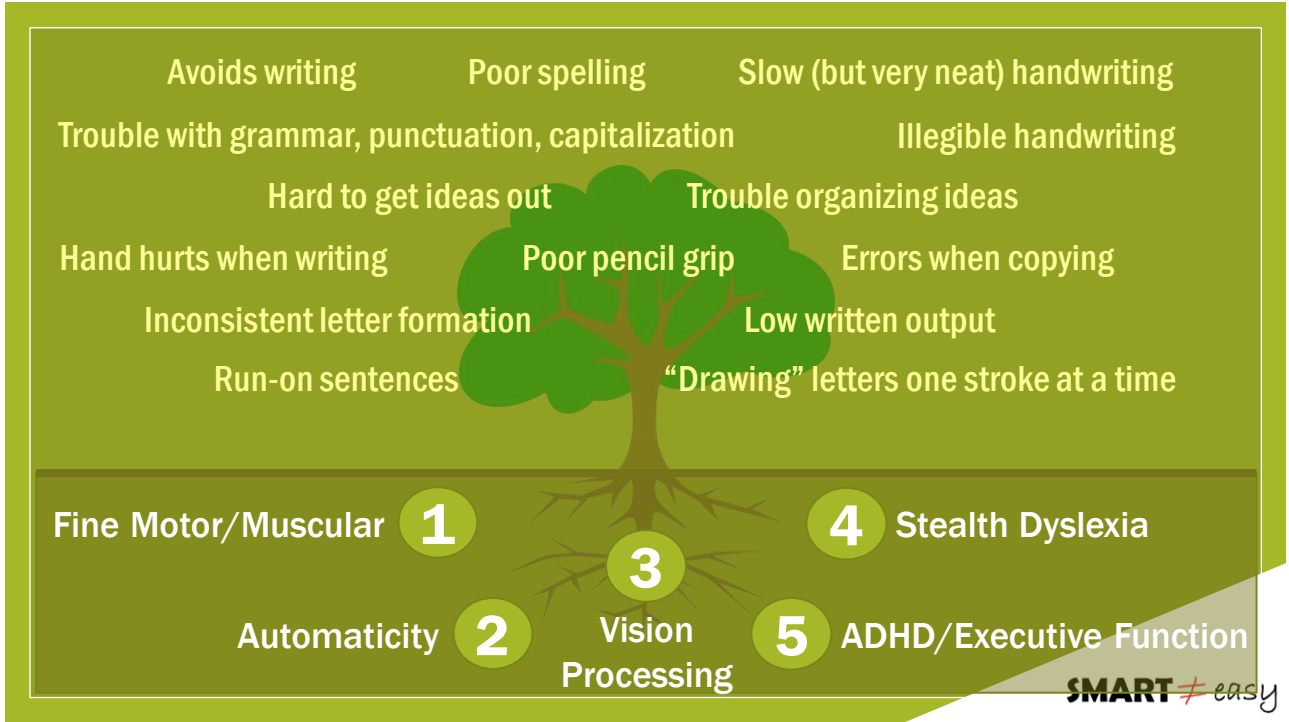
Example: Mind Map

SMART ≠ easy

Let's Practice: Sticky Note Braindump

- ◆ Work alone or with a partner
- ◆ Brainstorm ideas you might put in your essay
- ◆ Write each idea on a different sticky note
- ◆ Topic: What is your favorite kind of vacation?
- ◆ Now, organize those sticky notes into "paragraphs"

SMART ≠ easy



2E CRASH COURSE

SMART ≠ easy

Adults don't have to be great at everything

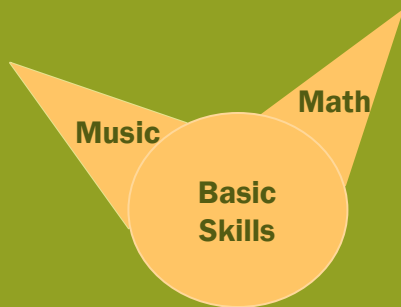


Adult careers will focus on **STRENGTHS**

“Niche” environments that support or eliminate weaknesses
(Armstrong, 2012)

SMART ≠ *easy*

Spiky Strengths



Well-Rounded



Colleges are looking for “spiky” applicants!

SMART ≠ *easy*

2e is a Form of Neurodiversity

- ◆ Neurodiversity is not just about autism
- ◆ Brain with a different “operating system”
- ◆ **Careful:** neurodiverse brains are not “worse” (or “better”)
 - ◆ they are **DIFFERENT**
- ◆ Pattern of strengths and challenges
- ◆ Many common diagnoses are better understood as neurodiversity
 - ◆ ADHD – strengths in quick response time, acting under pressure
 - ◆ Dyslexia – strengths in visual/spatial, creativity, big picture, entrepreneurial
 - ◆ Autism – strengths in spotting patterns, details, logic
- ◆ Every brain is unique - just like a fingerprint
(Valizadeh et al., 2018)

SMART ≠ easy

Giftedness is also a form of Neurodiversity

- ◆ Regional brain volume is **BIGGER** in some areas (left hemisphere, bilateral frontal cortex, phonological loop, working memory, sensory, anxiety, amygdala)
 - ◆ and **SMALLER** in others (lateral-parietal junction)
- ◆ **DENSER** connectivity between some areas (arcuate fasciculus, corpus callosum - “information highways”)
 - ◆ and **SPARSER** connectivity in others
- ◆ Brain maturation happens on a different timeline (4 year difference!)
- ◆ **High IQ brains are physically different than neurotypical brains**

gro-gifted.org

SMART ≠ easy

What Does 2e Look Like in the Classroom?

- ◆ explosive behavior
- ◆ distractible
- ◆ trouble finishing work
- ◆ anxiety
- ◆ perfectionism
- ◆ trouble getting started

Easy to misunderstand as

“lazy” “unmotivated” “doesn’t care”

SMART ≠ easy

Behavior is communication

- ◆ When a 2e student is having a hard time,
you will see it in their behavior
- ◆ “Not won’t, can’t” “Kids do well when they can”
– Ross Greene
- ◆ “Shifting from addressing behaviors to trying to
understand their origins and triggers means making a
shift from managing our children to understanding
them deeply.” – Mona Delahooke
- ◆ “It’s never about lazy.” – Austina De Bonte

SMART ≠ easy

Polyvagal safety is essential

- ◆ Porges polyvagal theory
 - ◆ Dorsal – safe, connected, calm, social
 - ◆ Ventral – fight, flight, freeze, or fawn
- ◆ Relationship with the teacher
- ◆ Environmental safety in classroom
- ◆ Relational safety with classmates
- ◆ Create a neurodiversity-affirming classroom

SMART ≠ easy

Best Practices for 2e Students CHALLENGE

- ◆ See the strengths first
 - ◆ Be a talent scout, not a deficit detective
- ◆ 2e students need CHALLENGE
 - ◆ Acceleration, depth, complexity, problem solving
- ◆ Provide work at their COGNITIVE level
- ◆ Provide accommodations to ensure ACCESS
- ◆ Dyslexic HiCap students with high verbal skills need access to high level material in accessible formats

SMART ≠ easy

Best Practices for 2e Students

INDIVIDUALIZE

- ◆ Individualize for special needs
 - ◆ Allow a 2e student to use different tools than other students
i.e. Dictate, scribe, audiobooks
- ◆ Individualize for strengths
 - ◆ Allow a 2e student to show mastery using a strength area
i.e. Draw a comic or poster, make a video, 3d model...
- ◆ Individualize for interest areas
 - ◆ Allow a 2e student to customize a project to match an interest
i.e. Final project in chemistry about bladesmithing

SMART ≠ easy

Best Practices for 2e Students

ACCOMMODATIONS

- ◆ Provide accommodations universally
- ◆ Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- ◆ Most 2e kids are never diagnosed & will never have a 504
- ◆ Especially:
 - ◆ Typing
 - ◆ Dictation
 - ◆ Spellcheck/Grammarly
 - ◆ Audiobooks (learningally.com, speechify)
 - ◆ Snaptype!

SMART ≠ easy

Best Practices for 2e Students GRADING

- ◆ What are you measuring with course grades?
 - ◆ Transactions of school – assignments, points, on time
 - ◆ Mastery of subject area
- ◆ What are you trying to communicate with grades?
- ◆ Mastery-based learning is coming to WA
- ◆ Mastery-based grading can be applied to any class at any grade level

SMART ≠ *easy*

Best Practices for 2e Students FLEXIBILITY

- ◆ Flexibility in classroom seating/locations
i.e. standing desks, pacing lanes, movement breaks
- ◆ Flexibility to show mastery in many ways
i.e. comics, poster, videos, 3d models...
- ◆ Flexibility to let different students do things differently
every student doesn't have to do the same thing

SMART ≠ *easy*

Your Tips & Tricks

- ◆What works for 2e students in your classroom?

SMART ≠ *easy*

Best Practices for 2e

- ◆Challenge...acceleration, depth, complexity
- ◆Individualized...for special needs, strengths, interests
- ◆Accommodations...provided universally
- ◆Grading...by learning objectives, not executive function
- ◆Flexibility...to show mastery in many ways

- ◆Create a neurodiversity-affirming classroom
- ◆Use a strength-based approach, build a “niche”
- ◆Help kids develop a Spiky Strength

SMART ≠ *easy*

Slides

tinyurl.com/zereluctantwriters

AUSTINA DE BONTE

AUSTINA@SMARTISNOTEASY.COM

WWW.SMARTISNOTEASY.COM

SMART ≠ easy

References

Armstrong, T. (2012). *Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Strength-Based Strategies to Help Students with Special Needs Succeed in School and Life*. ASCD.

Delahooke, M. (2019). *Beyond Behaviors: Using Brain Science and Compassion to Understand and Solve Children's Behavioral Challenges*. Pesi.

Dodson, W. (2018). 3 defining features of ADHD that everyone overlooks.

https://www.additudemag.com/symptoms-of-add-hyperarousal-rejection-sensitivity/?src=embed_link

Greene, Ross. (2021). *The Explosive Child*. 6th Edition. Harper.

Lovett, M. W., Frijters, J. C., Wolf, M., Steinbach, K. A., Sevcik, R. A., & Morris, R. D. (2017). Early intervention for children at risk for reading disabilities: The impact of grade at intervention and individual differences on intervention outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *109*(7), 889–914.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000181>

Reis, S. M., Baum, S. M., & Burke, E. (2014). An operational definition of twice-exceptional learners: Implications and applications. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *58*(3), 217–230.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986214534976>

Valizadeh, S. A., Liem, F., Mérillat, S., Hänggi, J., & Jäncke, L. (2018). Identification of individual subjects on the basis of their brain anatomical features. *Scientific Reports*, *8*(1), 5611

. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-23696-6>

SMART ≠ easy