

Supporting the Struggling OT Student

Building Effective Remediation Plans | Plans for Success

Olivia Freeman, OTR, MBA & Meghan Rödier, OTR, M.Ed



This handout summarizes the key takeaways from today's session. Use it as a quick reference when supporting students in your fieldwork setting.

DIAGNOSIS

Identify the Root Cause First

Before intervening, determine whether the student is struggling due to a **skill deficit**, **anxiety**, or a **learning style mismatch**.

- ▶ Reduce pressure → big improvement = anxiety
- ▶ Still poor in low-stakes setting = true skill gap
- ▶ Consistent across all contexts = foundational deficit

EARLY WARNING

Recognize Common Red Flags

Watch for these indicators that a student may need additional support:

- ▶ Clinical reasoning deficits
- ▶ Documentation issues (vague or non-measurable goals)
- ▶ Professional behavior gaps (communication, time management)
- ▶ Safety concerns

PROACTIVE SUPPORT

Build a Success Plan from Day 1

- ▶ Increase the frequency of feedback
- ▶ Catch them doing it right — name and reinforce positives
- ▶ Be direct about end goals and ensure the student understands them
- ▶ Reference the Fieldwork Manual and 12-week objectives as a roadmap
- ▶ Discuss learning style and how skills are best taught for *this* student

STRUCTURED SUPPORT

Use Remediation with Fading Support

Effective remediation requires structure *and* a clear trajectory toward independence:

- ▶ Daily wrap-ups: review diagnosis and intervention plans
- ▶ Weekly review of areas for growth
- ▶ Gradually reduce support as competency builds
- ▶ Agreed-upon goal: increasing student independence

SCAFFOLDING

Consider Compensatory Strategies

Temporary tools to scaffold performance *without* replacing true competency:

- ▶ Smart phrases / templates for documentation
- ▶ Scripts or checklists for evaluations
- ▶ Site-specific accommodations (note FERPA considerations)
- ▶ Consistent use of safety equipment (e.g., gait belt)

EMPATHY

Lead with Empathy

Reflect on your own transitions — new job, new EMR, new protocols. What helped you learn?

- ▶ Did you tie new learning to existing anchor skills?
- ▶ What emotional and physical responses did you experience?
- ▶ Use that insight to meet your student where they are

▼ Quick Diagnostic Reference

Root Cause	Key Signs	First Steps
Anxiety	Variable performance (worse when observed), self-aware of the gap, physical/behavioral tells (rushed speech, freezing)	Normalize uncertainty; redo session slowly; reduce observation pressure and observe improvement
Skill Deficit	Consistently poor across ALL contexts, cannot self-identify the gap, foundational knowledge missing	Have student plan sessions ahead and verbalize to you; review measurable goals before each session
Learning Style Mismatch	Strong understanding in one format but struggles in another; content knowledge exists but application varies	Explore whether kinesthetic practice, written references, or repeated review is needed for this skill



When to Use a Fieldwork Learning Contract

When questions and practice are not enough, a **Fieldwork Learning Contract** is the next step. A strong contract includes: specific performance concerns · measurable goals · targeted strategies · clear timelines · signatures from both FW Educator and student. **Always collaborate with the AFWC** and use objective language aligned with FW Level II evaluation items. Remember: the student deserves explicit feedback and a genuine opportunity to improve — not merely a record of deficiency.

🔗 **AOTA Resource:** aota.org/education/fieldwork — Weekly Student/Supervisor Meeting Template & more.

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