



BUILDING A GROWTH MINDSET THROUGH LANGUAGE

There are many things that can foster a growth mindset in students. One of the most powerful is to shift what is said to students. Language permeates everything done in the classroom – from giving directions to introducing a topic to critiquing student work. When educators choose their language carefully and intentionally, they take a critical step to helping students develop a growth mindset.

Language tips

1. Have go-to statements and sentence starters ready

Because language is a habit that we do without much intention, changing language can be difficult, especially when there are so many things to focus on in the classroom. Having some growth mindset comments ready is an easy way to incorporate this language into interactions with students. Here are some ideas:

Statements	Questions	Sentence starters
I believe in you.	What other strategies can you use?	I noticed how...
You can learn how they do it.	Where are you stuck?	Have you considered...
Mistakes can help you learn.	What part is challenging you?	You've done a great job with....
Keep trying for a little longer.	What is missing?	Look how much progress you've made on/with...
	Who can you ask for advice?	

2. Harness the power of “yet”

Help students understand that, with perseverance, they can master a skill. Do this by using the word “yet!” This helps to instill the idea that people are always growing and can always learn something new. “Yet” helps students understand that success is possible with persistence and positivity.

When you hear a student giving up or hear defeat, remind them to remember that “yet” is still to come! For example, if a student says “I can never remember what hyperbole is” change their language by saying “you haven’t memorized that definition YET but you will!”

3. Praise the process

When giving feedback to students, talk about the process students took not the progress they made. Rather than saying “wow, you’re so good at math,” saying “your hard work on that problem really paid off” helps to promote the belief that our brains are able to learn, develop, and change. There is a careful balance to strike when praising the process. Focusing on work ethic and perseverance help students feel good in the moment but doesn’t promote learning. To praise the process while still promoting mastery, think about giving specific feedback about student thinking, rather than the outcome they achieved. Saying things like “I noticed that you re-read paragraph 1 twice to figure out the main idea. That’s what good readers do- they re-read to help themselves understand” rather than “good job determining the main idea.”



4. Use posters as reminders

Posters are an easy way to remind students that growth is possible and encourage positive thoughts and language in the classroom. While posters alone will not change the culture of your classroom, they will provide a continual reminder that growth is possible! Posters are especially powerful when created with students. For example, during a mini-lesson about the power of "yet", a poster could be made that is a visual anchor. Hanging this up in the classroom could be a reference point whenever re framing student language with "yet".

5. Teach students growth mindset vocabulary

Our words have power and lead our mindsets. The language students use, and the words they use to describe themselves and others, are just as important as the language they hear from adults. Teaching students (regardless of their age) vocabulary associated with growth mindset – such as perseverance, elasticity, grit, etc. – and embedding this language into the heart of the classroom empowers students to take ownership of their mindsets.

Example Vocabulary: *Resilience, Develop, Overcome, Persistent, Neuron, Challenge, Attitude, Risk, Determined, Effort, Obstacle, Relentless, Changeable, Struggle, Accomplish, Commitment,*

6. Conscious grading

Grading is a necessary part of school. However, if done without thought, grading can promote a fixed mindset. Often a grade tells a student what they did wrong and is seen as the end of the learning process for a particular skill. A growth mindset shifts to celebrate what is mastered and provides quality feedback to improve on areas that need work. Here are three things to consider when grading:

- Rather than putting how many questions a student got wrong put how many they got right
- Use a colorful pen (not red)
- Provide opportunities to correct mistakes
- Rubrics or scaled scoring

7. Encourage mistakes

Mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. However, when students make mistakes they often feel embarrassed or inadequate. It is important to normalize mistakes and make sure that students understand mistakes are part of growing. Here are some strategies that can help you “normalize” mistakes in the classroom:

- Embrace mistakes – when a student offers an incorrect answer, don't simply identify it as incorrect. Ask the student to explain their thought process and how they arrived at the answer. There may be parts of the student's logic that are sound or creative.
- Model mistake ownership – adults make mistakes all the time. When adults take ownership of these mistakes, it reinforces the notion that errors are a natural part of the learning process for all people.
- Make connections – to further reinforce the importance of mistakes, consider making connections to professions outside of the classrooms. Professional football players fumble, engineers go through many iterations of an invention before they get it right, scientists and doctors test treatments before they are available to the public, etc.