

Everyday Growth Mindset Phrases

Instructional Strategy – What is it?

Instructors can use this protocol to develop authentic, well-crafted everyday growth mindset phrases that promote a growth mindset. By using well-crafted growth mindset phrases on a regular basis a teacher can help instill a growth mindset within students. These framing comments should emphasize:

- Learning takes sustained **effort**
- Using **effective learning strategies** and switching strategies when needed
- **Seeking help when needed**

Why does it work?

Everyday phrases can be carriers for powerful messages that encourage and support motivation. Many students equate success with innate ability. When they struggle they may believe it is a signal that they don't have what it takes to be successful. One common mistake is to think that the cure for students worrying about being “dumb” is to help them feel “smart.” By focusing your language on effort, strategies, and help-seeking, you will encourage students to continue to develop themselves, rather than being worried about how their ability is evaluated.

How to do it?

1. **Preparation required:** read through some of the examples of growth mindset phrases and familiarize yourself with the language that is used. Having a volunteer fill in the role of a frustrated student can help to familiarize yourself with how you react in the moment.
2. Write mindset phrases to:
 - a. **Praise** a student after success
 - b. Offer **encouragement** when faced with difficulty
 - c. Provide **critical feedback**
3. Use the phrases as needed.

Suggested adaptations:

- Use “we” in phrases, not just “you” when possible. (“We can reach the standard...”)
- Emphasize that the process can take time.

Potential pitfalls/challenges:

- Growth mindset comment feels canned/inauthentic if they are too scripted or out of character for the teacher
- Taking too long to think of something could make the comment inauthentic

EXAMPLE

Growth Mindset Phrase Examples

Below are examples of growth mindset phrases and common phrases that may unintentionally promote a fixed mindset. **These phrases should be combined with messages around the specific resources and strategies available to the students.** Please remember the growth mindset phrases given below are only suggestions. You are encouraged to craft your own based on your relationship with your students so they feel natural to you.

Praising a student after success:

- “You’re improving ... your efforts are really paying off.”
- “Great, you’ve learned so much!”

Instead of

- “See, I told you you’re naturally good at math!”

Offering encouragement when faced with difficulty:

- “Struggling on this assignment doesn’t mean you can’t get it, it means you’re learning it. Your brain is making connections that are not yet strong.”
- “This is just a measure of what you can do right now. It is not a measure of what you can ever do.”

Instead of

- “Not everybody is good at math. Just get through it.”
- “Keep trying and you’ll get it.”

Providing critical feedback:

- “This class has a high standard...to really understand the math. AND I wouldn’t hold you to it if I didn’t believe that together we could get there.”

Instead of

- “Well, you may not be good at math, but you have real strengths in _____.”