

# Adopting a Growth Mindset

## Objective

To become aware of when you have a fixed mindset and practice adopting a growth mindset through your thoughts and actions.

## What to Know

Psychologist Carol Dweck (1999) coined the terms *fixed mindset* and *growth mindset* to describe the beliefs people have about their intelligence and abilities. If you have a fixed mindset, you assume qualities such as intelligence, character, and ability are stable and cannot be changed. If you have a growth mindset, you believe these qualities can be improved with effort. You view challenges and obstacles as natural and part of learning.

Having a growth mindset is beneficial because you are more likely to succeed academically, you tend to be more motivated to learn, and you are less discouraged by challenges. In contrast, if you have a fixed mindset, you might avoid challenges and feel like a failure because you believe you lack the ability to succeed. Fortunately, mindset can change, and the key to changing your mindset lies in self-awareness. The following steps will help you move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.

- 1. Listen to your mindset “voice.”** Become aware of the internal commentary that happens when you face challenges or difficulties—including mistakes, setbacks, or when you receive criticism.
- 2. Identify whether your thoughts represent a fixed or growth mindset.** You have a fixed mindset if your internal voice tends to say things like “I can’t do this,” “I’m not good enough,” “I’m not smart enough,” or, “I failed before so I’ll probably fail again.” If you have a growth mindset, your internal voice is encouraging and optimistic.
- 3. Choose to change.** When you are aware of your mindset voice, you can choose differently. If you notice discouraging fixed mindset commentary, you can shift to a growth mindset. You can mentally shift your perception of your abilities and the challenge you are facing. In other words, respond to your fixed mindset commentary with growth mindset commentary; for example, “I’m really having a hard time with this situation, but I have the tools to overcome it,” or, “Everyone experiences failures along the way, and if I use my available resources I will likely succeed.”
- 4. Take actions that reflect a growth mindset.** Imagine what types of actions you can take that reflect a growth mindset. For example, you can approach challenges or obstacles with enthusiasm and curiosity, interpret failures as learning opportunities, learn from setbacks and try again, or receive criticism with an open mind. As with many activities, the more you practice acting in line with a growth mindset, the more natural it becomes.



Date	Situation	Thoughts after setback or failure	Fixed or growth mindset?	Growth mindset thoughts	Growth mindset actions

**Reflections on This Exercise**

What did you learn from this exercise? Did you notice patterns that triggered a fixed mindset? Explain.

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Why do you think these situations cause a fixed mindset to emerge? Explain.

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Were you able to replace thoughts reflecting a fixed mindset with growth mindset thoughts? Why or why not?

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When you had difficulties adopting a growth mindset, what do you believe caused these difficulties? Could you have done anything differently? Describe.

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What else can you do to strengthen your growth mindset?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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