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# Growth Mindset vs. a Fixed Mindset

Understand the benefits of adopting a Growth Mindset rather than a Fixed Mindset

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## Purpose

When it comes to realizing your potential as a writer, nothing is more important than embracing a Growth Mindset as opposed to a Fixed Mindset.

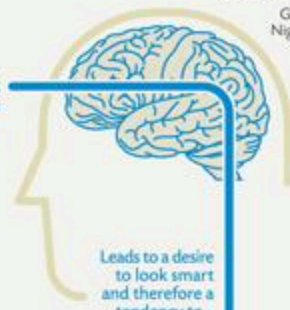
## TWO MINDSETS

CAROL S. DWECK, Ph.D.

Graphic by  
Nigel Holmes

### Fixed Mindset

Intelligence is static



Leads to a desire  
to look smart  
and therefore a  
tendency to...

#### CHALLENGES

...avoid  
challenges

#### OBSTACLES

...give up  
easily

#### EFFORT

...see effort as  
fruitless or worse

#### CRITICISM

...ignore useful  
negative feedback

#### SUCCESS OF OTHERS

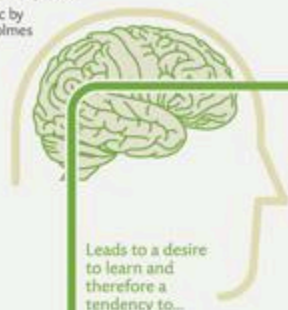
...feel threatened  
by the success  
of others

As a result, they may plateau early  
and achieve less than their full potential.

All this confirms a **deterministic view of the world.**

### Growth Mindset

Intelligence can be developed



Leads to a desire  
to learn and  
therefore a  
tendency to...

...embrace  
challenges

...persist in the  
face of setbacks

...see effort as  
the path to mastery

...learn from  
criticism

...find lessons and  
inspiration in the  
success of others

As a result, they reach ever-higher levels of achievement.

All this gives them a **greater sense of free will.**

Source: <https://fs.blog/2015/03/carol-dweck-mindset/>

## Theory & Research on Mindset

Carol S. Dweck, a psychology professor at Stanford, conducted foundational research regarding the effects of a mindset on academic performance. Dweck's research, conducted in the late 1980s to the present, explores the hypothesis that students' attitudes about learning and talent dramatically predict their success or failure:

"In a fixed mindset students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it" (Dweck qtd in

### **Fixed Mindset**

People with a "Fixed Mindset" assume people's intelligence and talent are static. They assume these traits a product of one's birth and zip code. You have probably heard people say, "I'm just no good at writing" or even more commonly "no good at math." This is a fixed mindset.

Dweck's research found people with a fixed mindset "spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them" (<https://mindsetonline.com>.)

### **Growth Mindset**

People with a "Growth Mindset" assume that traits such as intelligence and talent are a product of hard work, grit, determination.

When they are critiqued or face failure, they take it as a challenge to improve: they try new strategies, set goals, or seek help in learning. This leads them to engage in learning activities.

Writers who adopt a *Growth Mindset* are more likely to succeed long term in their efforts to research, write, collaborate, revise, and effectively communicate.

Over the past twenty years, a tsunami of books have been published on mindset, grit, and motivation. In the genre of self-help books, Mindset is now a popular theme. For instance, *Duckworth's Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* was on the New York Times best seller list for 20 weeks. You can now buy apps that are intended to help you transform your thinking so it's more positive, more growth orientated.

Dweck's theorizing about a Growth vs a Fixed Mindset sparked considerable academic research in psychology and educational theory. Mindset has been a vigorous domain of research by STEM educators, learning theorists, and cognitive psychologists.

Recently, for example, after conducting an extensive review of research published in peer-reviewed journals, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) concluded mindset and self-efficacy are correlated with success in school:

1. Academic self-efficacy—a student's belief that he or she can succeed in academic tasks.
2. Growth mindset—a student's belief that his or her own intelligence is not a fixed entity, but a malleable quality that can grow and improve (2017).

(For a discussion of this research, see [Research on Mindset & Intrapersonal Competencies](#).)

**EMBED HER VIDEOS HERE**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0mg00SpLU&feature=youtu.be>

<https://youtu.be/-71zdXCMU6A>

## Criticism of Research on Mindset

the The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. And, to be totally frank, the idea that you need self-efficacy and a growth mindset makes sense to us. In the Writing Studies community, esteemed theorists such as Peter Elbow have argued that aspiring writers need to *Play the Believing Game*—i.e., set aside doubt and believe in themselves. Trust the process.

Still, in the science, social science, and education communities, we are aware there is some disagreement about the importance of Mindset, Grit, and Self-Efficacy. For instance, while it makes intuitive sense that students need to believe they can succeed in academic writing, as writing teachers it is not uncommon to come across students (particularly early in the semester before they have received critical feedback from peers and instructors) who believe they are terrific writers. Thus, it's not all that uncommon for writers to decrease in their self-efficacy as they work their way through increasingly more difficult, new writing tasks. And there's nothing wrong with that.

## The Effects of a Growth Mindset on Writing Processes

As explored at [Writers Start Here](#), becoming an effective communicator empowers personal, academic and professional success. Writing is a powerful tool for memory, learning, and connectedness. There are innumerable reasons for focusing on improving your communicative competencies.

Nonetheless, writing is an incredibly difficult competency to master (see [Writers Start Here](#)). After all, writing well isn't dependent on one simple competency but instead it requires the development of multiple intertwined competencies, including [Invention](#), [Genre](#), [Collaborate](#), [Research](#), [Focus](#), [Style](#), [Revision](#), [Editing](#). Writing isn't a simple activity. Unlike learning to ride a bike at age 4 or 5 and then carrying that ability along forever as muscle memory, writing requires a longer apprenticeship. For instance, Ernest Hemingway, speaking on his craft as a fiction writer, wrote

**"We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master."**

Experienced writers may disagree with one another regarding how long an apprenticeship needs to be served before someone is really proficient as a writer (10,000 hours? a lifetime? High School? College? Graduate School?). And ultimately different people may have different timelines when it comes to mastering writing. Yet everyone agrees learning to write well is an incredibly time-consuming and emotionally-charged enterprise.

Unfortunately, many people never realize their potential as writers. School writing is often brief—a few pages—written to the audience of *teacher as examiner*. Tweets, snapchats, and emails also tend to be brief. Hence, many people just haven't had a lot of practice with writing, particularly long-form, research-based writing.

Perhaps because of a lack of practice or the innate difficulty of writing, we believe it's remarkably common for people to adopt a *Fixed Mindset* when it comes to writing. As writing teachers, we often meet students who say they find writing to be aversive. This extends to professionals: lawyers, accountants, and engineers. A remarkable number of people we have met over the years say they are not creative or capable of writing well. They allow procrastination to overwhelm them. They often are unfamiliar with how frequently writers revise so when they get negative feedback

based on a second or third drafts they assume they are a bad writers without really understanding what's missing is hard work, openness, and a willingness to persevere.

The bottom line is learning to write well is tough. It requires a growth mindset.

Having a *Growth Mindset* rather than a *Fixed Mindset* is incredibly important when it comes to writing well. After all, the writer is at the very heart of the writing process. The reverse--being preoccupied with negative thoughts--can make writing extremely aversive.