

## 1.6: Fixed vs Growth Mindset

### It's All in the Growth Mindset

The power of a healthy mindset cannot be overstated when it comes to college success. If you can approach challenges with both a positive mindset and a growth mindset, the easier the rough patches will be.

College is not supposed to be easy and it definitely has its own flavor of stress, but maintaining a positive mindset during the hard patches, the easier it will be to work through them. This isn't to say failure is not disappointing, but that doesn't mean we have to dwell on the negative. Most "failures" are really learning opportunities in disguise; and often, more is gained from the times we do not succeed than when we complete something perfectly.

While none of us are nor should be expected to be perfect, we all have the ability to continue to learn and grow. You are learning new ideas and skills that you will continue to grow throughout your educational journey. This is what growth mindset is all about. Allowing yourself a mindset that acknowledges you can build skills and gain more knowledge and that it is a process will help you push through the growing pains that comes with learning.

By cultivating resilience, embracing challenges as opportunities for growth, and harnessing the strength of a determined attitude, you can overcome the obstacles you're going to run into, you will maximize your potential, and you will find that you thrive in your college journey.

### Performance vs. Learning Goals

Much of our ability to learn is governed by our motivations and goals. Sometimes hidden goals or mindsets can impact the learning process. In truth, we all have goals that we might not be fully aware of, or if we are aware of them, we might not understand how they help or restrict our ability to learn. An illustration of this can be seen in a comparison of a student that has *performance*-based goals with a student that has *learning*-based goals.

If you are a student with strict performance goals, your primary psychological concern might be to appear intelligent to others. At first, this might not seem to be a bad thing for college, but it can truly limit your ability to move forward in your own learning. Instead, you would tend to play it safe without even realizing it. For example, a student who is strictly performance-goal-oriented will often only say things in a classroom discussion when they think it will make them look knowledgeable to the instructor or their classmates. Likewise, a performance-oriented student might ask a question that they know is beyond the topic being covered (e.g., asking about the economics of Japanese whaling while discussing the book *Moby Dick* in an American literature course). Rarely will they ask a question in class because they actually do not understand a concept. Instead they will ask questions that make them look intelligent to others or in an effort to "stump the teacher." When they do finally ask an honest question, it may be because they are more afraid that their lack of understanding will result in a poor performance on an exam rather than simply wanting to learn.

If you are a student who is driven by learning goals, your interactions in classroom discussions are usually quite different. You see the opportunity to share ideas and ask questions as a way to gain knowledge quickly. In a classroom discussion you can ask for clarification immediately if you don't quite understand what is being discussed. If you are a person guided by learning goals, you are less worried about what others think since you are there to learn and you see that as the most important goal.

Another example where the difference between the two mindsets is clear can be found in assignments and other coursework. If you are a student who is more concerned about performance, you may avoid work that is challenging. You will take the "easy A" route by relying on what you already know. You will not step out of your comfort zone because your psychological goals are based on approval of your performance instead of being motivated by learning.

This is very different from a student with a learning-based psychology. If you are a student who is motivated by learning goals, you may actively seek challenging assignments, and you will put a great deal of effort into using the assignment to expand on what you already know. While getting a good grade is important to you, what is even more important is the learning itself.

If you find that you sometimes lean toward performance-based goals, do not feel discouraged. Many of the best students tend to initially focus on performance until they begin to see the ways it can restrict their learning. The key to switching to learning-based goals is often simply a matter of first recognizing the difference and seeing how making a change can positively impact your own learning.

## Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

The research-based model of these two mindsets and their influence on learning was presented in 1988 by Carol Dweck. In Dweck's work, she determined that a student's perception about their own learning accompanied by a broader goal of learning had a significant influence on their ability to overcome challenges and grow in knowledge and ability. This has become known as the Fixed vs. Growth Mindset model. In this model, the *performance*-goal-oriented student is represented by the *fixed* mindset, while the *learning*-goal-oriented student is represented by the *growth* mindset.

In the following graphic, based on Dr. Dweck's research, you can see how many of the components associated with learning are impacted by these two mindsets.

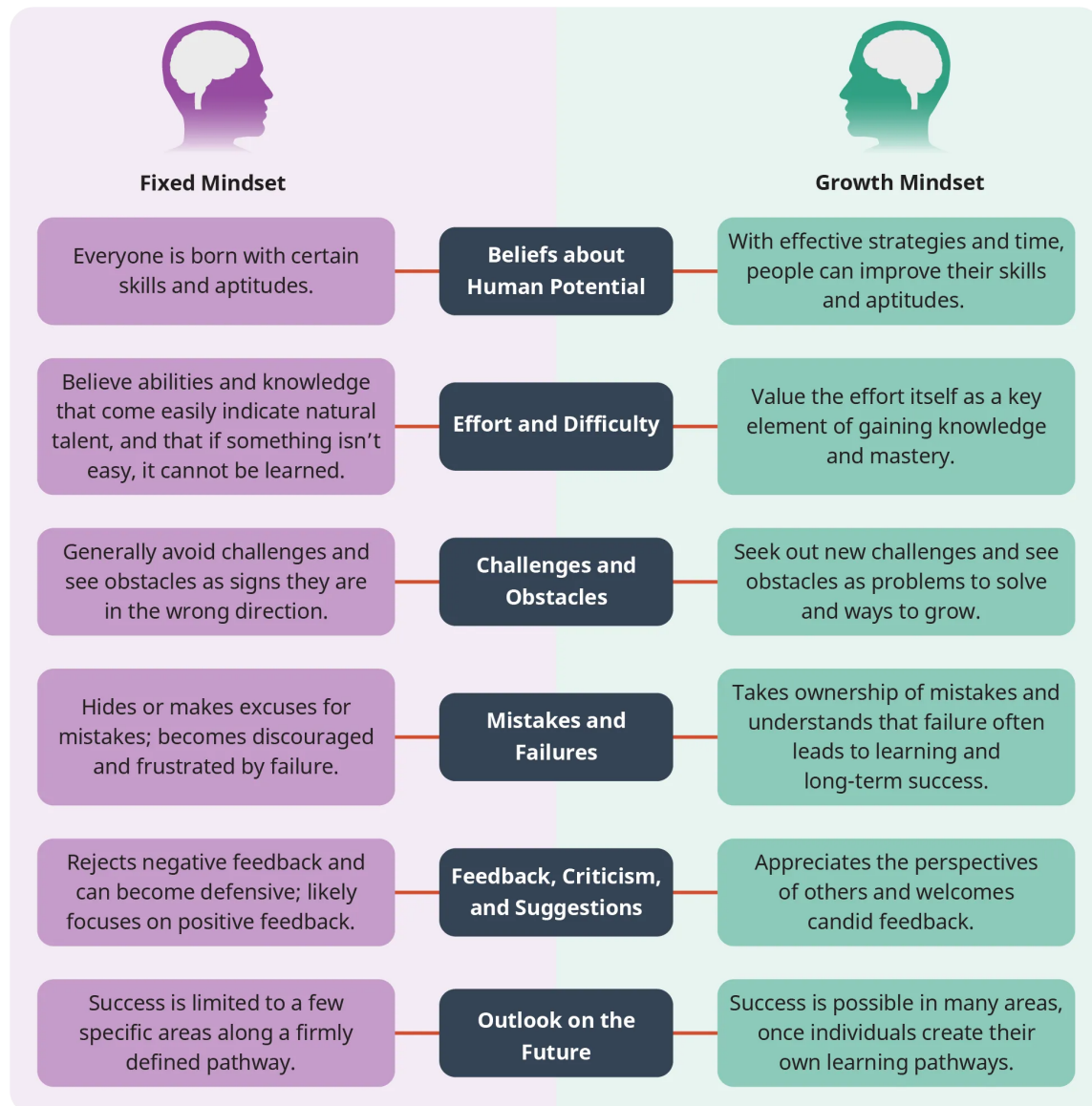


Figure 9.5 The differences between fixed and growth mindset are clear when aligned to key elements of learning and personality. (Credit: Based on work by Dr. Carol Dweck)

## The Growth Mindset and Lessons About Failing

Something you may have noticed is that a growth mindset would tend to give a learner grit and persistence. If you had learning as your major goal, you would normally keep trying to attain that goal even if it took you multiple attempts. Not only that, but if you learned a little bit more with each try you would see each attempt as a success, even if you had not achieved complete mastery of whatever it was you were working to learn.

With that in mind, it should come as no surprise that Dweck found that those people who believed their abilities could change through learning (growth vs. a fixed mindset) readily accepted learning challenges and persisted despite early failures.

### Improving Your Ability to Learn

As strange as it may seem, research into fixed vs. growth mindset has shown that if you believe you can learn something new, you greatly improve your ability to learn. At first, this may seem like the sort of feel-good advice we often encounter in social media posts or quotes that are intended to inspire or motivate us (e.g., *believe in yourself!*), but in looking at the differences outlined between a fixed and a growth mindset, you can see how each part of the growth mindset path can increase your probability of success when it comes to learning.

Source: "[Stay Positive](#)"

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