Growth Mindset Strategies for the Classroom

Fourteen strategies with steps, grade-band notes and language examples

For: K-12 teachers, counselors and instructional coaches

How to use this guide

Pick two strategies, run them daily for three weeks, then add more. Each entry gives the purpose, the steps, a grade-band note and language you can use as written. Grade bands: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12.

1. Teach how learning changes the brain

Purpose: Give students a reason to believe ability grows. **Steps:** (1) One lesson: practice strengthens connections in the brain. (2) Students describe a skill they improved and what changed. (3) Revisit before hard units. **Grade band:** K-2 use a path or muscle analogy with a drawing; 6-12 students research one example. **Language:** "Every time you practice this, you are building a stronger path in your brain."

2. Praise the process, not the person

Purpose: Avoid the drop in persistence that follows praise for being smart. **Steps:** (1) Notice a strategy, decision or revision. (2) Name it specifically. (3) Skip trait labels. **Grade band:** All. K-2 one sentence; 9-12 written comments carry more weight. **Language:** "You tried two methods before this one worked." Not: "You're so smart."

3. Add "yet"

Purpose: Turn "I can't" into a statement about time and strategy. **Steps:** (1) Respond to "I can't" with "yet." (2) Mark below-standard work "not yet" with a next step. (3) Keep a visible "not yet" tray or rubric column. **Grade band:** K-5 tray or folder; 6-12 rubric language. **Language:** "You can't do this yet. What have you tried so far?"

4. Favorite mistake

Purpose: Make errors data instead of verdicts. **Steps:** (1) Choose an anonymous error from student work. (2) Project it. (3) Class finds the thinking behind it and the fix. **Grade band:** 3-12. In K-2 the teacher makes a deliberate mistake and models recovering. **Language:** "This mistake is useful. What was this person thinking, and where did it go off track?"

5. Model struggle out loud

Purpose: Show that competent adults get stuck and recover. **Steps:** (1) When stuck, narrate. (2) Name the strategy you are switching to. (3) Share a skill you are learning outside school. **Grade band:** All. **Language:** "I'm not sure. Let me break it into smaller parts and try the first one."

6. Learning goals, not just performance goals

Purpose: Shift attention from the grade to the understanding. **Steps:** (1) Each unit, students write one "I will be able to..." goal. (2) Post or collect them. (3) Check them at the end of the unit. **Grade band:** 3-12; K-2 with picture support. **Language:** "A grade tells you where you are. A learning goal tells you where you are going."

7. Strategy menu, and switch when effort stalls

Purpose: Keep effort attached to strategies that can work. **Steps:** (1) Build a visible menu for the subject (reread, draw it, smaller case, specific question). (2) When effort stalls, prompt a switch. (3) Add student-invented strategies. **Grade band:** All; the menu changes, the move does not. **Language:** "That strategy isn't working. Pick another one from the board." Not: "Try harder."

8. Revision policy

Purpose: Teach that first attempts are drafts and the standard is what counts. **Steps:** (1) Set a revision window, such as one week. (2) Require an annotation of what changed and why. (3) Regrade to the standard. **Grade band:** 3-12. **Language:** "Your first version is information. Your revision is the learning."

9. Two-level tasks

Purpose: Make choosing challenge normal. **Steps:** (1) Offer a practice version and a stretch version. (2) Publicly value the stretch choice regardless of score. (3) Track how many choose stretch over time. **Grade band:** 3-12; K-2 frame as "the just-right challenge." **Language:** "Who chose the stretch version? That choice is what growth looks like."

10. Fixed-to-growth translation

Purpose: Replace self-talk that stops work with self-talk that directs it. **Steps:** (1) Post a two-column chart. (2) When you hear a fixed statement, ask for the translation. (3) Add students' own phrases. **Grade band:** All; middle schoolers prefer their own anonymized words. **Language:** "I'm not good at this" becomes "I'm not good at this yet. What haven't I tried?"

11. Peer growth stories

Purpose: Provide believable models of improvement. **Steps:** (1) Students write about something that used to be hard. (2) Volunteers share briefly. (3) Collect stories for a class record. **Grade band:** 3-12, voluntary. **Language:** "Tell us what you used to find hard and what changed."

12. Next-step feedback

Purpose: Make feedback actionable. **Steps:** (1) Name what is working. (2) Name one specific next step. (3) Delay the grade until students act on the comment where possible. **Grade band:** All; 9-12 benefits most from delayed grades. **Language:** "Your claim is clear. Next: add evidence for your second point."

13. Tests as information

Purpose: Reframe assessment as a diagnosis, not a verdict. **Steps:** (1) Before: say what the test is for. (2) After: students sort errors (did not know, rushed, misread). (3) One action per error type. **Grade band:** 3-12; K-2 sort with a teacher. **Language:** "The test tells us what to work on next. Let's find out what it says."

14. Teacher mindset audit

Purpose: Remove fixed-mindset signals from your own practice. **Steps:** (1) Once a term, review grouping, comfort statements and opt-outs. (2) Invite a colleague to observe. (3) Change one practice. **Grade band:** Teacher practice, all grades. **Language:** Replace "Not everyone is a math person" with "This part is hard for a lot of people. Here is a different way in."

Fixed vs growth language at a glance

Students say	Help them say
"I'm not good at this."	"I'm not good at this yet."
"I give up."	"I'll try a strategy from the board, then ask a specific question."
"This is too hard."	"This will take time. Which part can I start with?"
"I made a mistake."	"What does this mistake tell me?"
"She's just smarter."	"I'll find out how she approaches it."

Three-week starter plan

- **Week 1:** Strategies 2 and 3 every day. Post the language chart.
- **Week 2:** Add strategy 4 once and strategy 5 whenever it arises naturally.
- **Week 3:** Add strategy 7. Track one indicator: how many students ask a specific question instead of stopping.

Source and updates: https://transformingeducation.org/resources/. This document may be copied and shared for non-commercial educational use with attribution.