

Writing Spaces Assignments & Activities Archive

Using a Growth Mindset and Revision Plan to Interpret and Apply Instructor Comments

Roger Powell

This assignment is a selection from the *Writing Spaces* Assignment and Activity Archive, an open access companion resource to the Writing Spaces open textbook series.

To access additional selections, visit:

<http://writingspaces.org/aaa>.

Assignment and activity selections © 2020 by the respective authors. Unless otherwise stated, these works are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) and are subject to the Writing Spaces Terms of Use. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>, email info@creativecommons.org, or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA. To view the Writing Spaces Terms of Use, visit <http://writingspaces.org/terms-of-use>.

All rights reserved. For permission to reprint, please contact the author(s) of the individual articles, who are the respective copyright owners.

Using a Growth Mindset and Revision Plan to Interpret and Apply Instructor Comments

Roger Powell

Overview

The purpose of this revision plan assignment is to help students in first-year composition courses effectively process teacher comments on their writing and make a plan to use them to revise their writing. The assignment rests on the notion that if students approach comments on their writing with a growth mindset, then they will react more positively and utilize these comments to revise their writing. Dweck developed the concept of mindsets after studying people's beliefs about their skills and intellect. She discovered that individuals tended to fall along a continuum from fixed mindsets to growth mindsets (*Mindset the New Psychology of Success*). Fixed mindset individuals believe that their skills and intellect are innate and that no amount of hard work can change the skills or intellect they were born with, while growth mindset individuals believe that skills and intellect can be developed with enough hard work, persistence, and learning from failure. Mindsets fall along a continuum because they shift given context. However, Dweck's research highlights that if an individual has a predominantly growth mindset, it leads to their success, and she lists numerous examples of successful professionals with a growth mindset such as Michael Jordan, Mia Hamm, and Bill Gates (*Mindset the New Psychology of Success*). Recent research on mindsets in writing contexts shows that approaching teacher comments with a growth mindset can help individuals learn from these comments and revise their writing effectively from comments, especially when the comments are critical of their writing (Powell and Driscoll, forthcoming).

The revision plan assignment is usually given about 3-4 weeks into a first-year composition class when students are revising

their first longer writing assignment and is repeated with each longer assignment in the course. Students will begin by learning about growth mindsets and how they relate to writing and comments. They will then read the comments and try to do so via a growth mindset. The next part of this assignment will describe how students can build off the previous activity to make a specific revision plan that talks about how students might actually make specific revisions based on comments, discusses how the individual writer develops an aspect of their writing that is not commented on, which promotes continued improvement, and thus presents a further opportunity to think with a growth mindset, and lastly, discusses how they will maintain a growth mindset on future writing projects in this class (or other classes if this is a revision plan for a final paper).

Time Commitment

1 week

Materials

The only material needed is the Mindset Works website (“Decades of Scientific Research that Started a Growth Mindset Revolution”).

Assignment Process

- Students begin by visiting the mindsets (“Decades of Scientific Research”) during class time, which can be done on their laptops or their phones. While looking at the website, they will work towards defining growth mindsets.
- The class then regroups to develop an acceptable, working definition of growth mindsets together.
- Once the class has that working definition, students go back to working independently. They are asked the following questions: How do growth mindsets connect to this class? How might we achieve growth mindsets in this

class given where we are in the semester? (They know they are going to receive comments on their writing during this class).

- The class will then build a collaborative document that lists all the various connections to this class. In the past, students have had responses such as these:
 - “Growth Mindsets help me not quit when a paper gets hard.”
 - “Growth Mindsets might help me split my paper up into more drafts.”
 - “Growth Mindsets make me think that comments on my writing are good and should be viewed as helping me and not showing me how I’m dumb.”
- If students do not make the connection organically, the instructor can pose the question “What about growth mindsets and comments on your writing? Could there be a connection here and what is it?” Students always make this connection after these questions are posed.
- Following this discussion, students are given their comments either digitally or physically, but are instructed not to look at them right away.
- Each student starts by taking a deep breath and clearing their mind.
- Students then silently tell themselves the following: “this comment is not about me personally. It is about improving my writing.”
- Next, they read and summarize to themselves what the comment is about.
- Students will then silently consider to themselves how this comment is helping them improve this paper or their writing in general.
- Next, students will consider how this comment might help them maintain a growth mindset.
- This process will be repeated for every comment on their paper.
- Finally, students will develop a 1-2-page revision plan

that responds to the following prompt:

- How might you address these comments? What revisions do you plan to make to your paper? Think about this as a heuristic, or in other words, use the comments as a guide.
- Think of one area of your draft that you'd like to improve upon that was not talked about in the comments. What revisions do you plan to make based on your own assessment?
- Why are you making these revisions? Go beyond the "I want to get a better grade." Sure, doing these revisions will help with that. What you're being asked here is how will this improve your writing? Will it help reach the audience? Help with your purpose? Help with the genre? Help with ideas? Focus? Clarity? Flow? Structure?
- Lastly, how has this assignment and its comments helped you maintain a growth mindset?
- The revision plan is meant to be reflective in nature and is therefore evaluated on how well students engage with the prompt and if they fully develop their plans or not.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this assignment will:

- Gain an understanding of how to process comments on their writing effectively
- Consider how they can adopt a growth mindset about their writing and teacher comments
- Metacognitively assess their revisions

Learning Accommodations

- For students with learning differences, I also provide Carol Dweck's TED Talk "The Power of Believing You Can Improve," that is fully captioned.

Works Cited

- “Decades of Scientific Research that Started a Growth Mindset Revolution.” Mindset Works, 2017,
<https://www.mindsetworks.com/science/Default>.
- Dweck, Carol. *Mindset the New Psychology of Success*. Ballantine Books, 2006.
- . “The Power of Believing You Can Improve” *TEDxNorrkoping*, 2014,
https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve?language=en.
- Powell, Roger and Driscoll, Dana Lynn. “How Mindsets Shape Response and Learning Transfer: A Case of Two Graduate Writers.” *The Journal of Response to Writing*, Forthcoming.

Further Reading

- Knutson, Anna. “Grace: A Case Study of Resourcefulness and Resilience.” *Developing Writers in Higher Education: A Longitudinal Study*, edited by Anne Gere, University of Michigan Press, 2019, pp. 193-216.
- Sommers, J. “Behind the Paper: Using the Student-Teacher Memo.” *College Composition and Communication* vol. 39, no. 1, 1988, pp. 77-80.