

Research has shown that focusing too much on grades and performance may not lead to success.

Preparation

Complete the sentences with a word from the box.

boost	do	love	learning
make	test	get	comfort

- That was a bit scary! I've never spoken in public before – it really took me out of my COMFORT zone.
- She's setting up a study with two groups of children to TEST her theory.
- You can do better than this. You've really got to MAKE more effort.
- It was quite difficult but enjoyable too – I LOVE a challenge!
- He needs to GET good grades if he wants to be accepted in medical school.
- When my story was accepted for publication it was just what I needed to BOOST my self-esteem.
- My aunt wants to DO research into attitudes to learning in small children.
- If you're having problems remembering anything, maybe you need some LEARNIG strategies.

Do you have the right mindset?

growth
learning mastery problem effort
you mindset
improvement challenge education

[1] Think back to when you were in a classroom, maybe a maths classroom, and the teacher set a difficult problem. (That could have been any time between this morning or a few years ago.) Which of the two following responses is closer to the way you reacted?

A

Oh no, this is too hard for me. I'm not even going to seriously try and work it out.

B

Ah, this is quite tricky but I like to push myself. Even if I don't get the answer right, maybe I'll learn something in the attempt.

[2] Early in her career, the psychologist Carol Dweck of Stanford University gave a group of ten-year-olds problems that were slightly too hard for them. One group reacted positively, said they loved challenge and understood that their abilities could be developed. She says they had a 'growth mindset' and are focused on what they can achieve in the future. But another group of children felt that their intelligence was being judged and they had failed. They had a 'fixed mindset' and were unable to imagine improving. Some of these children said they might cheat in the future; others looked for someone who had done worse than them to boost their self-esteem.

[3] Professor Dweck believes that there is a problem in education at the moment. For years, children have been praised for their intelligence or talent, but this makes them vulnerable to failure. They become performance-oriented, wanting to please by getting high grades, but they are not necessarily interested in learning for its own sake. The solution, according to Dweck, is to praise the process that children are engaged in: making an effort, using learning strategies, persevering and improving. This way they will become mastery-oriented (i.e. interested in getting better at something) and will achieve more. She contends that sustained effort over time is the key to outstanding achievement.



[4] Psychologists have been testing these theories. Students were taught that if they left their comfort zone and learned something new and difficult, the neurons in their brains would form stronger connections, making them more intelligent. These students made faster progress than a control group. In another study, underperforming school children on a Native American reservation were exposed to growth mindset techniques for a year. The results were nothing less than staggering. They came top in regional tests, beating children from much more privileged backgrounds. These children had previously felt that making an effort was a sign of stupidity, but they came to see it as the key to learning.

[5] So, back to our original question. If you answered B, well done – you already have a growth mindset. If A, don't worry; everyone is capable of becoming mastery-oriented with a little effort and self-awareness.



1. Check your understanding: matching

Match the headings with the correct paragraph and write a–f next to the numbers 1–6.

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------|--|
| 1..... Paragraph 1 | B | a. Two ways of responding to a problem |
| 2..... Paragraph 2 | A | b. How do you respond to a challenge? |
| 3..... Paragraph 3 | D | c. You can change the way you think |
| 4..... Paragraph 4 | F | d. The right and wrong kind of praise |
| 5..... Paragraph 5 | C | e. Staying in your comfort zone |
| 6..... Not used | E | f. Proof that brain training works |

2. Check your understanding: true, false or not given

Read the sentences and write *True* if the information can be found in the text, *False* if the information says the opposite to the text or *Not given* if the information cannot be found in the text.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Carol Dweck wanted to find out how children respond to a challenge. | TRUE
..... |
| 2. Having a fixed mindset results in students dropping out of school. | NOT GIVEN
..... |
| 3. Praising children for their intelligence has a positive impact on learning. | FALSE
..... |
| 4. Those who persist in trying to improve their abilities over time are successful. | TRUE
..... |
| 5. Knowing how the brain works has little effect on learning. | FALSE
..... |
| 6. As students, children from richer or poorer backgrounds have the same potential. | TRUE
..... |

Discussion

Do you enjoy being challenged, or do you dislike being out of your comfort zone?

What's your motivation for studying: to get good grades or to learn things effectively (or both)?