



# The Mindset Questionnaire

## *How to Think Like a TOEFL Champion*



## What's Your Mindset?

### Introduction

Before you begin to study for the TOEFL exam, it's important to understand your own thoughts and feelings towards education. Specifically speaking, we need to see how you feel about your own potential. Once you understand your beliefs a bit better, you will be more likely to succeed in your TOEFL studies.

Look at the following ten questions and answer according to your own opinion:

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
1. Everyone has a certain amount of intelligence, and you can't do much to change it.					
2. You can learn new things, but you can't change your level of intelligence.					
3. You're born with a certain amount of talent and you can't do anything to change it.					
4. If you focus and work hard you can change the amount of intelligence you have.					
5. You can change the amount of talent you have through hard work and determination.					
6. Your IQ test says a lot about your potential intelligence.					
7. Smart people don't have to try as hard as others.					

**8. You're a parent and your daughter just failed her biology exam. She's disappointed. She feels like she just isn't very good at science. Which do you think is the best response from a parent?**

- "Biology's a hard subject. They should make the exam easier so students don't have to feel so stressed."
- "How do you expect to go to Harvard with a grade like this? If you got a bad grade it means you have to study harder. If you don't get an A next time, I'll be disappointed."
- "Some subjects are more difficult than others. If you failed, you should try to figure out why you failed and adjust your study habits so you can improve."
- "Well, I never liked that teacher anyway. I think he's doing something wrong. They should find someone else to teach you properly."



**9. You watch a friend compete in a swimming contest and he didn't do well. Which do you think is the best kind of encouragement?**

- a. "You were the best out there, I don't care what the clock said."
- b. "That race wasn't fair. I think I saw one of the girls out there get a head start. If I were you, I'd complain to the league."
- c. "I recorded the whole thing. You should watch it with your coach and you can both identify your weaknesses and figure out a way to improve."
- d. "Some people are better at swimming than others. Don't worry, you're still great at other things."

**10. Again, imagine you're a parent and your son comes back home from school and he's excited; he got a perfect score on his social studies exam without studying.**

- a. "You're such a genius. I'm going to hang this on the refrigerator."
- b. "That's great! Now try to do the same thing on your math test tomorrow."
- c. "Oh, that's great, but maybe the test was too easy. You should try a different class that is a bit more challenging."
- d. "You must have a great teacher if you did so well. Be sure to thank her for teaching you."



## Fixed Versus Growth Mindset

The Answer Key: Questions 1-7

- If you *strongly agreed* with questions 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 you have **a fixed mindset**
- If you *strongly disagreed* with questions 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 you have **a growth mindset**
- If you *strongly agreed* with questions 4 and 5 you have **a growth mindset**
- If you *strongly disagreed* with questions 4 and 5 you have **a fixed mindset**

The Answer Key: Questions 8, 9 and 10

For questions 8, 9 and 10, if you picked the letter 'C' for any question then you have **a growth mindset**. All other answers reflect the ideas of someone with **a fixed mindset**.

\*\*\*Please note that this doesn't imply that any of your answers are *wrong*. No single situation calls for a clear and simple approach every time. Life is more complicated than that. However, you should have an overall tendency to react to developments in your TOEFL studies with a growth mindset.

### Striving for a Growth Mindset

We need to strive to have a growth mindset. Many Americans are used to a fixed mindset. Personally, I grew up believing that specific people were destined for greatness while others just weren't born with enough talent. However, when you ask most successful people how they reached their current level of ability, they usually contribute it to hard work and determination. **People are not born great, they become great.**

Carol Dweck, author of the book *Mindset: The New Psychology for Success*, was one of the first researchers to discover that intelligence and talent are not products of inherent ability, but instead the result of an attitude towards learning. She writes:

*Believing that your qualities are carved in stone — the fixed mindset — creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. If you have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character — well, then you'd better prove that you have a healthy dose of them. It simply wouldn't do to look or feel deficient in these most basic characteristics. (pg. 6)*



In other words, if you have a fixed mindset, then you are afraid of being wrong. For example, if you think you're smart, you will do things that make you look smart. I used to have a fixed mindset, which is why I never wanted to learn a foreign language. As you all know already, learning a foreign language is difficult and you're going to be wrong... a lot. It's natural. But when I started learning a foreign language I felt stupid, and because I felt stupid, I got angry. I didn't see my mistakes as opportunities for growth, but instead as evidence of my own stupidity. And since I considered myself intelligent, I couldn't continue learning something that made me feel dumb.

### The TOEFL Connection

What does this have to do with the TOEFL?

Your TOEFL score is less of a reflection of what you learn in a book, and more of a reflection on how you handle challenges. I can't make you succeed, only you can do that.

Here's a conversation that comes up often when I teach TOEFL Speaking:

**Me:** I want you to try to answer the question, you have 45 seconds to speak.

**Fixed Mindset Student:** I don't want to speak.

**Me:** Why not?

**Fixed Mindset Student:** My speaking isn't good.

**Me:** That's why we are practicing!

You have to focus on **growth**.

If you have a fixed mindset I understand, it's not your fault. Most of us have been indoctrinated to feel that the most important thing is a good grade. Getting good grades is not a bad goal, but it's more important to focus on the way you achieve correct answers and high marks.

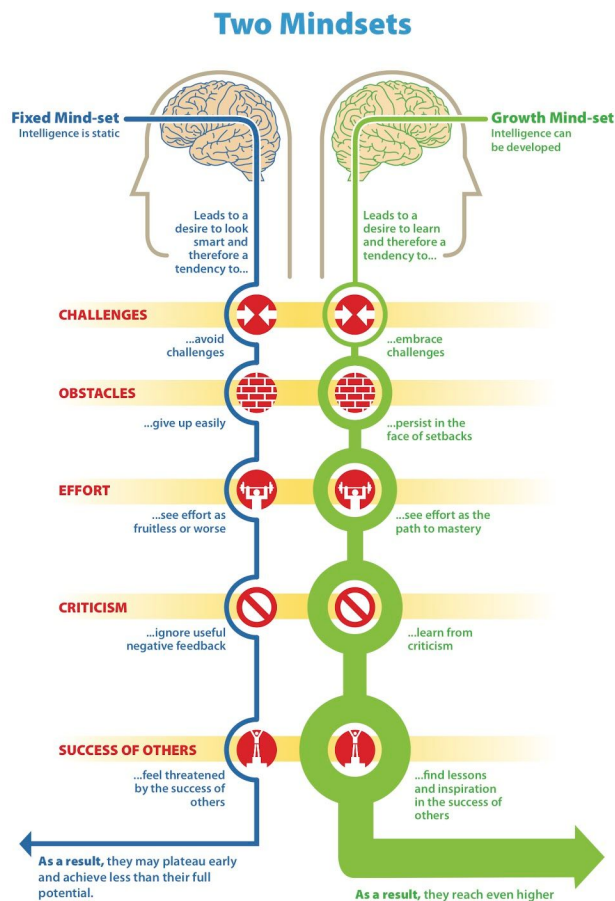
When you learn a new skill you must have a growth mindset. You need to target your weaknesses and work on those specific problems. Again, your TOEFL score is heavily influenced by your attitude. Here's a quote from Carol Dweck's book about what happens when you change to a growth mindset:



*Mindset change is not about picking up a few pointers here and there. It's about seeing things in a new way. When people — couples, coaches and athletes, managers and workers, parents and children, teachers and students — change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework. Their commitment is to growth, and growth takes plenty of time, effort, and mutual support.*

It has been tough for me to change into a growth mindset. For a long time, I've based my self-worth on the opinions of others and looking smart. When taking up a new skill, it's easy for me to fall back into my normal fixed mindset. But, when that happens, I take a step back, take a deep breath, and remind myself that a lack of skill is not an inherent weakness, only a current circumstance, and I have the power to fix it.

The growth mindset is empowering. Adopt it while you prepare for the TOEFL and watch yourself grow.



Graphics by Nigel Holmes based on research by Carol Dweck <http://dww.ed.gov> **DOINGWHATWORKS**

