



Tutor Micro-Training: Strengths-Based Language Facilitator's Guide [15 minutes]

<p>Learning Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Understand what strengths-based language is and why it matters.● Practice using positive reframing tools at every stage of a student interaction.● Gain the ability to come up with even more effective tutor strategies.	<p>Materials Needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Pencils/Pens● Volunteer activity sheets	<p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reframe common “fixed mindset” responses into constructive, strengths-based language.
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Introduction (2 minutes): What is Strengths-Based Language?

- **Share:** A time when someone (a teacher, a boss, a colleague, a friend, a parent, etc.) praised the effort you put into something and how that made you feel.
- **Ask:** When has someone in your life recognized and appreciated your effort on a project, regardless of the project's outcome?
 - For time's sake, popcorn one or two anecdotes.
- **Share:** All of these experiences are examples of **strengths-based language** in action. Strengths-based language is a way of speaking that emphasizes someone's capabilities and their ability for growth, positioning them to reach their potential (instead of focusing only on the current challenges they face). Using strengths-based language is the first step in taking a strengths-based approach when working with students—a concept you probably remember from 826 Boston's tutor training.
- **Share:** Today, we'll talk about how to use strengths-based language to reframe how we respond to students' behavior, and why it's so important that we do so.

Explanation (3 minutes): Why Does Strengths-Based Language Matter?

- **Explain:** Strengths-based language comes from our own mindsets as tutors. We can either have a **fixed mindset**, or a **growth mindset** (*Note: The following chart appears on the back of volunteer activity sheets*).

Fixed Mindset	VS. Growth Mindset
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human qualities are set in stone - Demoralizing! - Judgemental - Leads to a desire to “look smart” - Leads to avoiding challenges and giving up easily - Places blame on students <p>“He made a lot of mistakes in his essay.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effort allows us to keep growing - Motivating! - Understanding - Leads to a desire to learn - Leads to embracing challenges and persisting in the face of setbacks - Places responsibility on adults <p>“He’s attempting new things with his writing and is still learning grammar rules.”</p>

- **Explain:** Part of our role as tutors is to break down students’ own fixed mindsets about themselves and to model a growth mindset through strengths-based language when working with (and speaking about) students.
- **Explain: Why does it matter?** When we use strengths-based language, we automatically assume that students have the ability and the motivation to grow as writers, and that any behavior they may be displaying in the moment is not necessarily indicative of their ultimate capabilities. **Strengths-based language allows us to shift how we think about students and their behavior; this, in turn, allows us to shift our tutoring strategies to be more effective.**

Short Activity (10 minutes): Reframing Mindsets & Modeling Strengths-Based Language

- **Explain:** We’ll do a short activity to help us reframe common “fixed mindset” responses into constructive, strengths-based language.
- **Activity:** *Pass out the relevant activity sheet, and have the cheat sheet in hand. Volunteers can work in pairs, or stay together as an entire pre/debrief group. In the first five minutes, volunteers should (1) read the phrase in the left column and consider why the language is problematic or “fixed” in nature, then (2) write down how they would shift the wording or completely change the statement to create strengths-based language. In the last five minutes, share out and discuss.*
- **Explain:** Notice that our strengths-based phrases position us to find a solution that will effectively address the behavior—unlike the original statements, which only judged or labeled the student.

Wrap-Up: Conclusions & Questions

- **Explain:** When maintaining a growth mindset and practicing strengths-based language, keep in mind that students have just as much going on outside of this space as we do—jobs, families,

friends—and often additional stresses such as learning a new language, adjusting to a new country, or getting into college. Young students, too, have so much going on outside of this space, and factors as basic as missing lunch or staying inside for recess can greatly impact a student's behavior.

- We should always assume good intentions when assessing a students' behavior, and using strengths-based language is a great way to start.



Reframing Fixed Mindsets into Growth Mindsets with Strengths-Based Language

Instructions: Read each phrase in the first column and consider why the language is problematic or “fixed” in nature. Then, write down how you would shift the wording or completely change the statement to create strengths-based language.

Fixed Mindset Language	Strengths-Based Language
“He won’t write anything.”	EXAMPLE: “He’s brainstorming and taking time to think creatively before putting pen to paper.”
“She just can’t sit still.”	EXAMPLE: “She has a lot of energy and can focus on activities for a few minutes at a time.”
“They are so difficult to handle.”	
“He can’t focus on his work.”	
“She always gets distracted so easily.”	
“He never listens to me.”	
“They’re not very good at multiplication.”	
“She’s never going to finish this work on time.”	



Cheat-Sheet Version (For Facilitators):

Note the bolding: When reviewing, call volunteers' attention to these common fixed-mindset buzzwords.

Fixed Mindset Language	Strengths-Based Language
"He won't write anything."	"He's brainstorming and taking time to think creatively before putting pen to paper."
"She just can't sit still ."	"She has a lot of energy and can focus on activities for a few minutes at a time."
"They are so difficult to handle."	"They're learning how to regulate their emotions."
"He can't focus on his work."	"He understands self-care and is giving himself a mental break," or "We are still building a relationship."
"She always gets distracted so easily."	"She has so much natural curiosity that she can channel for this project."
"He never listens to me."	"He is independent and has his own specific vision for how he wants his assignments to turn out."
"They're not very good at multiplication."	"They're still learning and practicing math skills like multiplication."
"She's never going to finish this work on time."	"She's putting in a lot of effort and making good progress."