

The Importance of Academic Mindset by Megan Dalton, RTW Lead Instructor

We think about many things when we are teaching or tutoring a student. For example, we focus on the objectives of the lesson and how to accomplish them. We create engaging activities for the student to work on. We make lesson plans with timed segments and reflect on what worked and what didn't work after the class. Among these many tasks, do we remember to think about our student's academic mindset, and how that impacts their learning?

According to education researcher and consultant Zaretta Hammond, nurturing a student's academic mindset is at the core of culturally responsive teaching. A student's academic mindset is their attitude and mental readiness to learn.

She outlines 4 key components of a positive academic mindset:

- Sense of belonging: Does the student feel like they are a valued, contributing member of their class community?
- Belief in success: Does the student have the confidence in their abilities to persevere through difficult lessons?
- Growth-mindset: Does the student see mistakes and misunderstandings as opportunities to learn, or as setbacks?
- Value of work: Does the student believe that the work they are doing in class is meaningful and relevant to their life?

Teachers and tutors should think about these questions for students and identify areas where an individual may need support. For example, maybe your student's goal is to become a citizen, so you are working with them to study for the citizenship test. This is high-value work for your student. But what if your student is pessimistic about passing because they are struggling to remember the right answers? A student's lack of belief in their own success makes it more difficult for them to persevere, which can create a negative cycle of low self-esteem and lack of learning success where each reinforces the other.

How can you as a teacher bolster your student's belief in their own success? There are many ways, but some may include activities or conversations where students reflect on their learning progress and identify times in the past where they **did** succeed with something difficult. During academic advising, instructors have conferences with individual students, and I use some of this time to tell my students what progress I have noticed and to congratulate them on their accomplishment. Tutors should applaud students on their progress over time, too! Make sure it is specific, not generalized, positive feedback so that it is meaningful.

For more ideas and examples of how to support your student in fostering a positive academic mindset, I encourage you to read Hammond's 2015 blog post: [Five Tips for Using the End of the School Year to Strengthen Academic Mindset](#).