

## Develop a “Growth Mindset” in Your Students

One particularly important factor influencing how students react to feedback is the way that students make sense of successes and failures in school, which has been a major focus of a forty-year research program by Carol Dweck, now at Stanford University. When you ask students about the reasons for success or failure—for example, “When you get an A, why is that?” or “When you get an F, why is that?”—their answers differ in three important ways: *personalization*, *stability*, and *specificity*.

**Personalization:** Students attribute successes and failures to internal factors (how smart they are, how much effort they put in) or external factors that are outside their control (whether the teacher likes them, good or bad luck).

**Stability:** Students attribute successes and failures to relatively fixed factors, such as being smart, while others attribute successes and failures to transient factors, such as how much or how little effort they put into that particular task.

**Specificity:** Students differ in the way they generalize from particular examples of successes and failures to other areas of experience. Some students overgeneralize success or failure, so they take success or failure in one aspect of one’s life as being indicative of the likely outcomes in completely unrelated areas. In contrast, others consciously limit the meaning of success to only the specific aspects of their experience in which they are successful.

Some samples of student attributions, showing how they differ in terms of personalization, stability, and specificity, are shown in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2:** Personalization, Stability, and Specificity of Attributions of Success and Failure

Sample attribution	Personalization	Stability	Specificity
I got an A because I worked hard on this assignment.	Internal	Unstable	Specific
I got an F because my math teacher is a tough grader.	External	Stable	Specific
I got an A because I’m smart.	Internal	Stable	General
I got an F because I find it hard to concentrate at the moment.	Internal	Unstable	General
I got an F because I’m just not very good at taking tests.	Internal	Stable	General
I got an A because I’m good at math.	Internal	Stable	Specific

(continued)