



Greater Good in Education  
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

## BECOME AN ADMITTER

*"No one should be ashamed to admit [they are] wrong ... in other words, that [they are] wiser today than ... yesterday."*

*—Alexander Pope*

### OVERVIEW

Students or staff identify and celebrate times they were mistaken ("I was wrong")—and then focus on listening ("tell me more") to each other without arguing as they share differing opinions.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- In a classroom meeting or during an advisory period
- When group members are struggling with a fear of failure
- When group members would benefit from a listening protocol
- To cultivate stronger, more trusting relationships among students and/or staff
- To foster a more open, non-judgmental school or classroom climate

#### TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

#### MATERIALS

- Writing materials

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students, teachers, or school staff will:

- Practice verbalizing mistakes and/or misunderstandings
- Use a prompt to support curiosity and non-defensive listening skills
- Learn to model humility and vulnerability as learners
- Understand that making mistakes and being “wrong” can lead to personal growth

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Curiosity
- Humility
- Growth Mindset

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Focused Attention

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Consider a time when you were wrong or mistaken about something and you admitted it to others.
  - What happened when you acknowledged that you didn't know something—or that you were wrong? What feelings came up for you?
  - How do you view someone who is willing to admit they are wrong?
  - When you have strong opinions or preferences, are you able to listen to others as they share alternative or opposing views (even if you think *they* are wrong)? Do you have any tools to support your capacity for curiosity and open-mindedness? If so, what are they?

- Prepare to share a time when you were “wrong” in the lesson below.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Begin by asking the group the following questions:

- *What happens when you admit that you don't know something—or that you are wrong? What feelings come up for you?* [Note: If students or colleagues are uncomfortable answering aloud, ask them to note some of those feelings on slips of paper that you can collect and read to the group. They may describe feelings of shame, embarrassment, vulnerability, or weakness.]
- *How do you view someone who is willing to admit they are wrong—or don't know something? What makes them relatable?* [They may respond that “admitters” seem trustworthy, collaborative, creative, brave, risk-taking, curious, weak, vulnerable, and/or open and honest. ]

Regardless of their responses above, explain the following:

- Researchers [define](#) intellectual humility as “the degree to which people recognize that their beliefs might be wrong.” *If you are intellectually humble, you realize the possible limits of your understanding and you may be more likely to challenge your own assumptions, biases, and level of certainty about something or someone.*
- Researchers have discovered that when someone [admits they are wrong](#), people tend to consider them more friendly and approachable, not weak or incompetent. *In fact, “admitters” tend to view their strengths and weaknesses more honestly and realistically—and they also tend to be [more curious](#).*
- *And curiosity often leads to greater [learning](#) and personal growth. If you're always certain about everything you know (or think you know!), how can you learn?*

### “I WAS WRONG” ACTIVITY (10-15 MIN, DEPENDING ON GROUP SIZE)

- Explain: *One way to open up to learning and growing is to “Become an Admitter” by sharing a time when you were wrong about something. It may feel scary to do this, but we can try it together and support each other.*
- Begin the activity by sharing a story of a time when you were wrong about something. You could choose to share something minor or more significant to you (e.g., your misunderstanding of a word and/or its pronunciation, a time you taught the wrong equation or method for solving it, or when you shared a historical “fact” or scientific concept that you realized was incorrect later, or a time when you totally misunderstood or misjudged someone).
- Invite everyone to identify one “I was wrong” moment. Offer general prompts like these, if needed (e.g., they misunderstood the lyrics of a famous song; they misheard someone or something; they changed a preference for a food or a show or an academic subject after learning more about it; they made incorrect assumptions about another person; they realized that a belief they held was no longer valid based on new evidence). Next, assemble the group in a circle, if possible, and invite volunteers to do the following:
  - Describe a time you were wrong or mistaken about something (one or two sentences).
  - Conclude with the words “I was wrong!”
  - Take a bow.
- Then, the whole group claps and cheers for each volunteer.

- Ask: *How did it feel to share your story, bow, and clap for another—and why might it be helpful to share this experience with one another?*
- Ask: *What are the benefits of realizing—and acknowledging—that you were wrong?*
- Ask: *How do we typically learn that we may be wrong or mistaken (or that we don't know as much as we thought)?*
- Explain: *Sometimes it's in conversation with others that we learn we are wrong—when we actually listen to understand (rather than responding with an argument).*
- *Now, we're going to play a short game in small groups where we can practice listening to someone who has a different preference than ours.*

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### “TELL ME MORE” ACTIVITY (10 MINUTES)

- Explain: *The idea behind this activity is to practice being curious and humble—rather than arguing and defending your opinion. When someone disagrees with you, use the phrase “Tell me more” to help you understand their perspective rather than defending your own.*
- Ask group members to come up with a common (somewhat benign) disagreement (e.g., cats vs. dogs, baseball vs. football, tea vs. coffee, required school uniforms versus no required uniforms, mathematics vs language arts, Mexican food vs. Chinese food), or provide one of your own that is relevant to your class and/or your community. [Note: You are welcome to choose a more polarizing disagreement than the examples listed here, but it may be helpful to start practicing “tell me more” while focusing on opposing preferences rather than opposing values or belief systems.]
- Invite group members to self-select to advocate for their position. Based on the number of people who choose Option A versus B, you might assemble pairs, groups of three or four and/or even consider a [fishbowl discussion](#)
- Once you have established groupings, provide directions:
  - Advocate for Option A (e.g., cats): Begin by saying, “Option A is better ..., and I think you are wrong.”
  - Advocate for Option B (e.g., dogs): “Tell me more.” (And listen to understand—not defend.)
  - Advocate for Option A: Share more information.
  - Advocate for Option B: Resist all arguments in response, and repeat “Tell me more” until the Advocate for A has shared their thinking. (Keep listening to understand.)
  - Switch roles and repeat.

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### CLOSURE

Ask the whole group the following questions:

- *How did it feel to only use the words “Tell me more” when someone said you were wrong?*
- *Were you able to listen to understand the other perspective? Did you find yourself wanting to argue immediately?*
- *How did it feel to hear the words, “Tell me more”? How did it feel to have someone listen to you describe your preference without being interrupted?*
- *When could we all use “Tell me more” at school? Can you think of ways that it would be useful to us?*

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did students or colleagues respond to each activity? Would you try one or both again? If so, what might you do differently next time?
- Brainstorm several ways you might draw on these two activities in other school contexts (i.e., academic, relational, etc.).

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

According to studies, people high in intellectual humility are more willing to learn about [opposing perspectives](#) and are better able to engage in conversations about [controversial topics](#). Students who are intellectually humble are more likely to acknowledge their mistakes, seek challenges, and persevere after learning setbacks. In addition, they tend to be more [open to feedback](#).

[Research](#) also suggests that intellectual humility and curiosity go hand in hand, and it makes sense—when we're [curious](#), we are open to learning more. Humble people also tend to listen with curiosity. In fact, researcher [Michael Lehmann](#) and his team recently developed a listening practice that led to greater humility. When study participants listened with curiosity and interest, then both members of the pair experienced an increase in humility.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

According to psychologist Martin Covington, a looming [fear of failure](#) can influence our sense of self-worth, a fundamental belief in our own *value*. With this in mind, we can all benefit from normalizing (and even celebrating) uncertainty as a pathway to personal and academic growth. This lesson's activities draw on both humility and curiosity to help us get a little more comfortable with being wrong while opening us up to listen to others' perspectives.

When we create a classroom or school [climate](#) where we feel safe making mistakes and not knowing the answers, we make room for humility—and a desire to learn more. Then, humble curiosity can free us up to try harder, listen to learn, and take a few more risks.

## SOURCE

This practice was adapted based on concepts (“I was wrong” and “Tell me more”) from the section “Become An Admitter” (pg. 96) in *Seek: How Curiosity Can Transform Your Life And Change The World* by Scott Shigeoka.

## TERMS OF USE

Thank you for downloading this resource! Please feel free to share it with friends, teachers, colleagues, and anyone else who might benefit from it.

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