

You are what you say to yourself

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Think back to a time in school when you struggled and you said to yourself: "I don't get it!" or "I can't do this!" Just for a moment, dare to feel it again.

Do you remember what you said to yourself during that moment of panic when failure seemed certain? Do you sometimes still hear that same voice in your head?



All day, every day, we talk to ourselves.

We tell ourselves we're awesome. We tell ourselves we stink. Starting at a very young age, we spin stories about who we are, and these stories shape how we see ourselves. Once a story grooves itself into our brain, it has the power to shape how we view ourselves for life.



Inner dialogue is a powerful thing.

Just try doing something – especially something complicated like rebuilding your computer or writing an essay – without talking to yourself. That inner conversation is either a positive or a negative one.

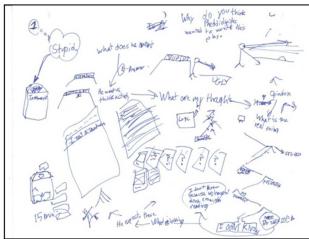
Positive self-talk helps you work through challenges and persevere for success. Negative self-talk leads you to doubt yourself or even give up in the face of a challenge that in the moment feels insurmountable.

Many students who have challenges with some aspect of learning and school are self-critical when faced with challenges. Their negative self-talk makes it tougher for them to overcome those challenges and succeed.

What students say to themselves impacts their performance — in school, and ultimately in life.

Self-talk can be imbalanced sometimes. When this happens, efficiency in learning suffers because students find themselves lost in the details, unable to see the big picture, or wasting precious time using ineffective strategies.

One my favorite students, whom I'll call Harry, really struggled with this. Writing for school was so anxiety-provoking that it paralyzed him. He routinely found himself either flooded by a zillion thoughts and ideas or worried to death that he couldn't come up with any. He just couldn't get started with his writing assignments.



I asked him one day when he was struggling what he was saying to himself. Harry gave me an instant replay of his self-talk while simultaneously drawing it.

Some of the things he said to himself included: "This is stupid....This is irrelevant...I'm better off taking an F... What are my thoughts...I DON'T KNOW!" He had to write an 8 page paper, but all he could come up with after 15 minutes of talking to himself was, "I eat a sandwich." He knew that was "garbage."

No WONDER he was failing English and History. You can't write a paper if that's what you're saying to yourself!

After a year of working together, Harry commented one day, "I'm doing better in English this year. Know why? I finally learned what to say to myself when I get a writing assignment."

Aaah, the sweet sound of success!

Over the last 30 years, Architects For Learning has developed a number of teaching methods and strategies that shape students' self-talk and, in turn, transform their approach to learning.

Whether we are working with students on writing, reading, taking notes, telling stories, studying, or managing mounds of homework, we know that effective strategies and a positive inner dialogue make all the difference.

Our vision is that students view themselves as confident and capable learners who know how to tackle what comes their way in school and in life.