



FAVORITE MISTAKE



Turn mistakes into moments of learning. This routine uses student thinking to uncover misconceptions, deepen understanding, and build confidence through productive struggle and deep discussion.

WHAT?

Purposefully highlight & celebrate an incorrect response that led to meaningful thinking or discussion. Analyze what was understood correctly, identify the misconception, and work together to improve the thinking, not the student.
Students learn that mistakes are respected, expected, inspected, and corrected—not something to hide.

WHY?

- Purposefully discussing mistakes helps **normalize productive struggle**, strengthen conceptual understanding, and build a classroom culture where students **feel safe taking academic risks**. Instead of avoiding errors, students learn to analyze them, explain their thinking, and revise their understanding.

WHEN?

Use this routine when students have shared an answer that uncovers a common misconception— one you know others probably made.

It works well with students of all ages:

- After uncovering a common misconception
- During lesson closure/ exit tickets
- Before reteaching a concept
- During math talks, writing conferences, or class discussions
- Anytime an incorrect response can spark rich thinking

HOW?

1. Select an anonymous (or permission-granted) student response with an interesting misconception.
2. Ask students to notice what the student understood before identifying what needs revision.
3. Facilitate discussion around the thinking not the person.
4. Invite students to revise, improve, or extend the response together.
5. Celebrate how the mistake helped everyone learn.
6. If you have a class economy or reward system, reward the student.

TEACHER TALK:

What was right about this thinking/work?

Where did the thinking get tricky?

What did we learn because of this mistake?

"The goal isn't to find who is wrong. The goal is to understand the thinking that produced the answer."
—Peter Liljedahl

GROWTH CULTURE IDEAS



"Favorite Mistakes" graffiti wall or a "Mistakes Museum"



Growth Tickets



"Great Catch" Award daily/ or weekly



"Changed my mind"—moments to share each week

WATCH OUT FOR:

- Don't praise mistakes without discussing the learning.
- Keep examples anonymous unless students volunteer.
- Avoid using the same students repeatedly.
- Focus on the thinking—not who made the mistake.
- Don't rescue too soon— let them have time to analyze.
- Select mistakes that reveal meaningful misconceptions, not careless errors.
- End with improved understanding so students leave with the correct concept.