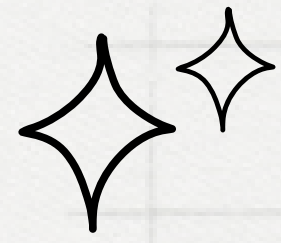# "Find Me if You're Struggling"

How the Language We Use Can Hurt Help-Resistant Students

By Lacey Brooks-Canales (she/her)
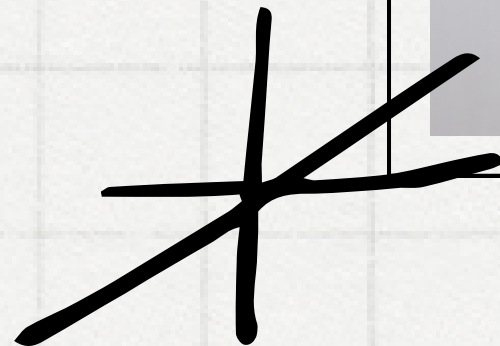
Teaching, Learning, and Research Support

Librarian at Trinity University

Asking for help is hard

- I am help-resistant, so are many of my students

- Why do certain students ask for help?

- What help-seeking factors are within my control?

Black, S. (2016). Psychosocial Reasons Why Patrons Avoid Seeking Help from Librarians: A Literature Review. Reference Librarian, 57(1), 35–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2015.1096227

Changing the language

Reflected on my own past experiences

Consulted existing help-seeking scholarship

Recommited to these changes

It's simple, scalable, sharable
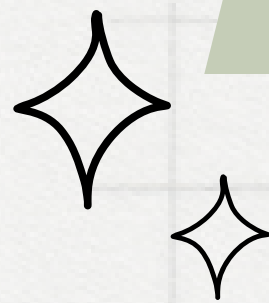
# Who makes research appointments? Who doesn't?

Help-seekers

High self-efficacy

Intrinsic motivation

Growth mindset

Mäkitalo-Siegl, K., & Fischer, F. (2011). Stretching the limits in help-seeking research: Theoretical, methodological, and technological advances. *Learning and Instruction*, 21(2), 243–246. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2010.07.002

Help-resistant

Fear of judgement

Feelings of uncertainty

Grade motivation

Nadler, A. (1998). Relationship, esteem, and achievement perspectives on autonomous and dependent help seeking. In S. A. Karabenick (Ed.), *Strategic help seeking: Implications for learning and teaching* (pp. 61–93). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
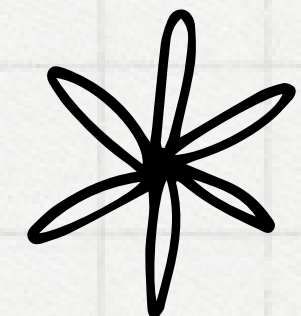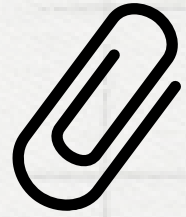
So it's about emotion.

Does help-seeking have to be so emotionally charged?

I can use language to minimize barriers to help-seeking and increase the likeliness of a help-resistant student creating a research appointment.

What does this look like?
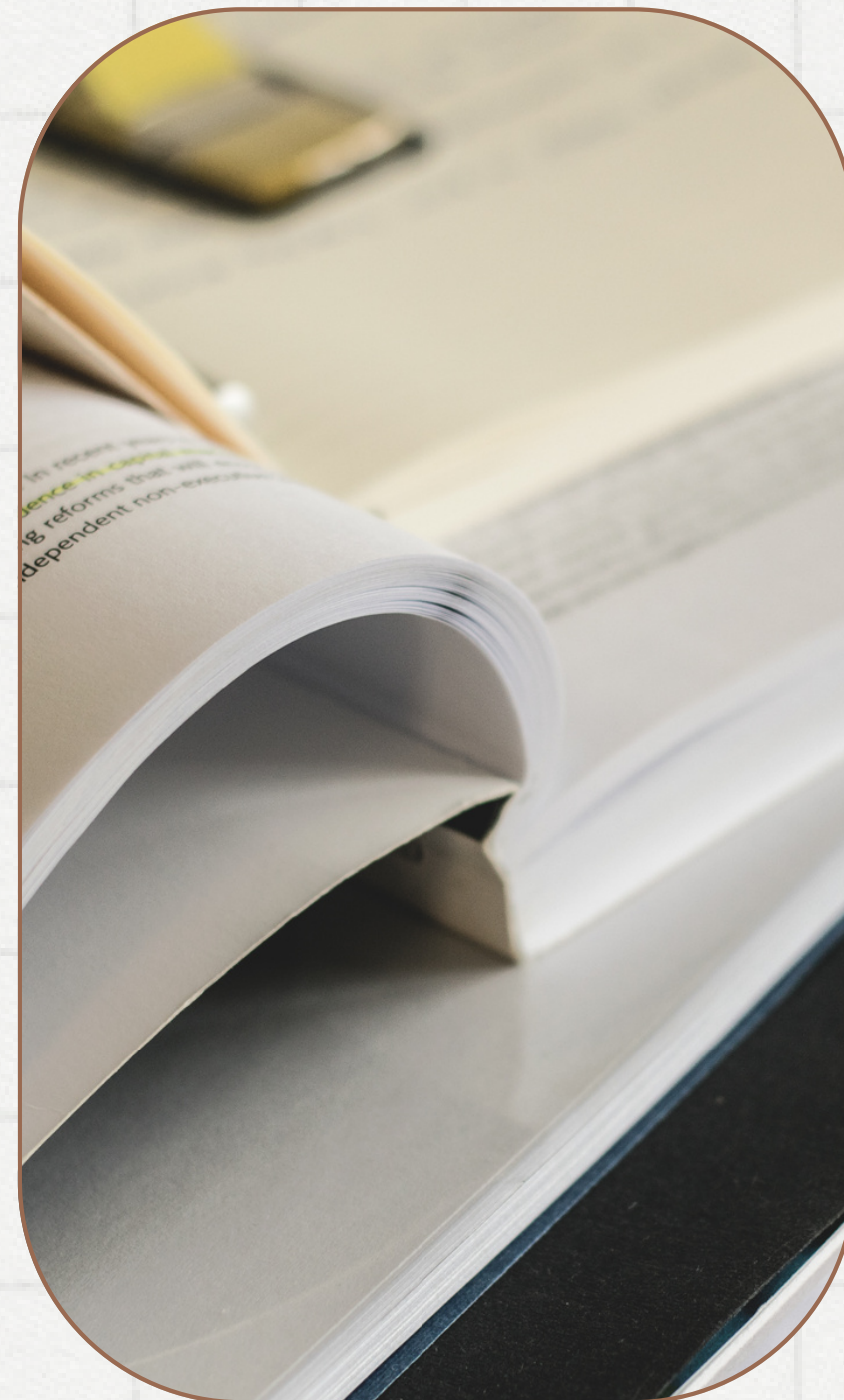
Struggle-Based Language example 1:

"Find me if you're struggling"

This might:

1. Imply that one must admit they are failing in order to get help
2. Imply that research appointments are a last resort

Instead:

Reframe appointments as a tool to get ahead, to be proactive and engaged.

What does this look like?

Struggle-Based Language example 2:

"If you find yourself struggling, don't struggle alone. Make an appointment and we can work on this together."
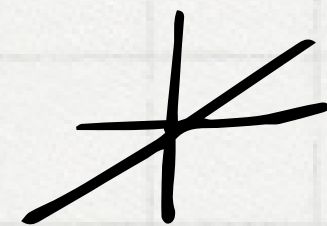
Pity

A new way to say things:

"Use this tool! Your professors do, all the time! I'd **love to help** you **sharpen up your research skills**, from figuring out where to start looking to formatting citations, where ever you're at. Even if your paper is **already very good**, we might be able to **make it great**."

Empower

Mindset change, not language change

The language will come naturally.

Self-reflection:

01 What am I currently saying? Am I aware of it's potential impact?

02 Could it contribute to feelings of inadequacy and shame?

03 Could compassion be misconstrued for pity?

04 Am I focusing on empowerment, collaboration, and positive outcomes?

Shared reflection:

01 **Team sessions** and **peer feedback** to share insights and inclusive language strategies

02 **Material review** to identify instances where language may emphasize struggle

03 **Talk to students** to learn about their experiences and what they find discouraging

Speak from the heart