

The Learning Pit reminds us that when students encounter difficulty, confusion, or uncertainty, they are on the path to meaningful understanding. This Spotlight focuses on the moment just before we put students in The Learning Pit, the language we might use & the Trusted Techniques that we know work

### Talking Students Into the Pit

The words we choose signal whether difficulty is to be feared or embraced. By explicitly preparing students for the Pit, we make struggle safe, expected, and purposeful.

"This is where we enter The Pit together"

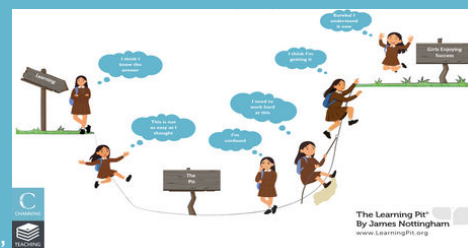
"Confusion is the first step to understanding."

"We're aiming for productive struggle, not easy answers."

"This task will feel effortful – that's exactly what makes it powerful."

"This is going to be challenging, but you can get there with effort and strategies."

"You're meant to wobble here – that's how we know the challenge is right."



### Trusted techniques to use as you put students in the Pit

#### Begin with a Pre-Question

This activates prior knowledge and primes curiosity (InnerDrive, 2021).

Example: "Before we learn about photosynthesis, what do you think plants need to survive?"



#### Announce the "Wobble Point"

This normalises struggle by signalling when it will arrive (Nottingham, 2017; EEF, 2018).

Example: "Today's wobble point is understanding the hydrograph — expect it to feel confusing at first."

#### Think-Aloud Modelling

This makes metacognition visible; shows how experts navigate difficulty (Rosenshine, 2012)

Example: "I'm not sure how to start, so I'll break the problem into smaller parts. If this doesn't work, I'll try another way."

#### Predict the Struggle

Encourages self-monitoring and resilience (EEF, 2018).

Example: "Looking at this task, where do you think the tricky part might be?"

#### Reframe Mistakes as Data

Builds psychological safety; mistakes become information, not failure (Bjork & Bjork, 2011).

Example: "That answer tells us something useful — it shows which idea needs more work."

#### Highlight Threshold Concepts

Identifies transformative but troublesome knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2006).

Example: "This is a threshold idea — once you grasp it, the rest of the topic will open up."



### Reflection Questions

How do I currently frame challenge and mistakes in my classroom

Which of these phrases could I adopt to better prepare students for the Pit?

Which Trusted Techniques do I use well?

How can I model resilience and persistence so students see what it looks like?

The language we use normalises for students why struggle is valuable. The strategies equip us with how to prepare them for entering the Pit.

