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Transitions Skills and Strategies

# Avoiding and overcoming setbacks

As a college or university student you can optimise the possibility of success by trying to avoid and learning how to deal with setbacks. Setbacks in your academic progress can be unexpected things that happen that can result in disappointment and your performance not being as good as you had hoped. For example, lower grades than you expected, levels of anxiety greater than you have previously experienced, missing assessment deadlines or failing exams.

There are many things that you can do to make it less likely that something goes wrong. Planning ahead, working hard, maintaining good attendance, devoting enough time to your studies, backing up your work, making sure that you know what is expected of you, asking questions if you are unsure, setting goals, managing your time, prioritising your academic tasks and believing in your own ability to succeed.

The reality is that however much effort you have put in and well prepared you are sometimes things can go wrong. It is impossible to prepare ahead for unexpected events but your reaction to those events, should they happen, can make the difference between success and failure. Failure is not something to be feared and much can be learned from facing up to problems, accepting responsibility for them when that is appropriate, communicating early with the staff who are teaching or supporting you, looking for solutions and later reflecting on any lessons or skills that you have gained as a result of overcoming adversity.

The ability to overcome adversity and go on to achieve academic success is known as academic resilience. There are factors in your environment and personal experience that have already contributed to your existing level of academic resilience. These have defined your skills, attitudes, beliefs and values. Research has identified other factors that could help you to further develop academic resilience, and these include:

* co-operation and communication
* strong problem-solving skills
* well defined goals and aspirations
* high self-belief and self-awareness.

Applying good study skills, communicating well and taking advantage of any peer support or opportunities to work collaboratively with other students are good strategies. These along with improving your goal setting and self-belief may help you to become more academically resilient. Further awareness and strengthening of your future academic resilience could come from looking at examples where real students have faced setbacks. Putting yourself in the role of their advisor may also encourage you to realise that there are different ways to solve problems. Consider the following scenarios and answer the questions that follow. This activity will be supported by a facilitator who will discuss with you the responses you make to the questions in each of the scenarios.

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| **Scenario 1**  Student A has been working on his essay for the last two weeks. The essay is worth 25% of the overall mark for the module and it is saved on a USB memory stick. The day before the essay is due to be handed in, the student leaves his bag containing the USB memory stick on the bus. He has no other electronic copy of the work.  Q.1 Identify who the student should communicate with about this problem.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.2 Advise the student on how this problem could be solved or the outcome be improved.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.3 If your advice is ignored, what could the student do that might make the situation worse? This could show a lack of academic resilience.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.4 Suggest anything the student can do to make it less likely that this problem happens again.   |  | | --- | |  | |

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| **Scenario 2**  Student B has been following a study plan for the three weeks leading up to the examination period. She arrives on the campus at 1.30 pm, 30 minutes before the time that she believes the exam is due to start. She meets another student who tells her that the exam started at 10 am that morning.  Q.1 Identify who the student should communicate with about this problem.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.2 Advise the student on how this problem could be solved or the outcome be improved.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.3 If your advice is ignored, what could the student do that might make the situation worse? This could show a lack of academic resilience.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.4 Suggest anything the student can do to make it less likely that this problem happens again.   |  | | --- | |  | |

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| **Scenario 3**  Student C has just received their report mark and has been given a mark that is 15% lower than he expected. This report is worth 40% of the marks in a coursework only module. The second report, which is worth the remaining 60%, is due to be submitted two weeks later.  Q.1 Identify who the student should communicate with about this problem.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.2 Advise the student on how this problem could be solved or the outcome be improved.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.3 If your advice is ignored, what could the student do that might make the situation worse? This could show a lack of academic resilience.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.4 Suggest anything the student can do to make it less likely that this problem happens again.   |  | | --- | |  | |

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| **Scenario 4**  Student D has just read an email confirming her end of year results. She has failed two exams by only a few percent and the Assessment Board has decided that she cannot progress into the next year of study with her classmates until she re-sits and passes the two exams.  Q.1 Identify who the student should communicate with about this problem.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.2 Advise the student on how this problem could be solved or the outcome be improved.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.3 If your advice is ignored, what could the student do that might make the situation worse? This could show a lack of academic resilience.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.4 Suggest anything the student can do to make it less likely that this problem happens again.   |  | | --- | |  | |

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| **Scenario 5**  Student E has withdrawn from his programme of study because he was offered a job. The information about the job came from an online source. Later he discovers that the job offer was not genuine.  Q.1 Identify who the student should communicate with about this problem.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.2 Advise the student on how this problem could be solved or the outcome be improved.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.3 If your advice is ignored, what could the student do that might make the situation worse? This could show a lack of academic resilience.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.4 Suggest anything the student can do to make it less likely that this problem happens again.   |  | | --- | |  | |

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| **Scenario 6**  Student F has suffered a close family bereavement and has stopped attending classes. They are halfway through the academic year but feel unable to cope with the idea of returning to study and has lost contact with their classmates. They know that they have already missed the deadline for submitting a piece of coursework.  Q.1 Identify who the student should communicate with about this problem.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.2 Advise the student on how this problem could be solved or the outcome be improved.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.3 If your advice is ignored, what could the student do that might make the situation worse? This could show a lack of academic resilience.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.4 Suggest anything the student can do to make it less likely that this problem happens again.   |  | | --- | |  | |

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| **Scenario 7**  Student G has just read an email confirming her end of year results. She is surprised to discover that a ‘no submission’ is recorded against an essay that she knows she submitted. This has resulted in her failing one of her modules.  Q.1 Identify who the student should communicate with about this problem.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.2 Advise the student on how this problem could be solved or the outcome be improved.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.3 If your advice is ignored, what could the student do that might make the situation worse? This could show a lack of academic resilience.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.4 Suggest anything the student can do to make it less likely that this problem happens again.   |  | | --- | |  | |

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| **Scenario 8**  Student H has to submit a report via the virtual learning environment by midnight on Sunday. She has struggled to find time and is late getting the report started but finishes by 11.50 pm. When uploading the report, there seems to be a delay and the upload is completed at 3 minutes after midnight.  Q.1 Identify who the student should communicate with about this problem.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.2 Advise the student on how this problem could be solved or the outcome be improved.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.3 If your advice is ignored, what could the student do that might make the situation worse? This could show a lack of academic resilience.   |  | | --- | |  |   Q.4 Suggest anything the student can do to make it less likely that this problem happens again.   |  | | --- | |  | |

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