

FAILURE

A Guide for Students

“It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all, in which case you have failed by default.”

J. K. Rowling



FailuretoLearn

Lancaster
University



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“The question is, are you going to grow or are you going to just stay as you are out of fear and waste your precious human life by status quo-ing instead of being willing to break the sound barrier?”

*Break the glass ceiling,
or whatever it is in your own life?
Are you willing to go forward?”*

Pema Chodron. Fail, Fail Again, Fail Better

Please note some of the material used in this guide is drawn from the following books by Jeff Gill and Will Medd:

- Your PhD Coach: how to get the PhD experience you want (Mcgraw Hill 2013)
- Get Sorted: how to make the most of your student experience (Palgrave 2015)

Introduction

Who worries about failure? Lots of students, it seems. Some students worry because things are going badly in their studies, social life or plans for the future.

Other students worry because things are going really well and they are putting pressure on themselves to continue to be successful.

You arrive at University buckling under the weight of expectations. You carry the hopes of friends and family as well as their own and that's before you get to the financial burdens, time constraints and pressure you put on yourself. A new city, friends and subject, can all whip you into a state of high anxiety. It's exciting! There can be anticipation of the buzz of a new social circle and a life-changing career. Perhaps you feel as if you are reaching for the moon and maybe, just maybe, you will grasp it, with a confident hand.

The reality is grounding, and the dream can evaporate once the grunt work kicks in. With no time or money to socialise, you might soon find that there's more work than play. The workload can be daunting and its execution, isolating. Joining new societies and groups of friends can be overwhelming. You were captain of your school team and now you're on the reserve bench. You're getting great grades, yet feeling very alone. Those new friends didn't appear.

Funded by the Lancaster University Friends programme, we ran a short coaching programme designed to challenge students to put into practice strategies for learning more and fulfilling their potential. The coaching offered an invitation to become more aware of habits and responses, to help students realise where they can make alternative choices, and to give strategies to students to find the confidence to trust themselves in what they do.

This guide offers you a way to explore your relationship to failure and how you might change that relationship to enhance your learning and overall experience of university life. We start by inviting you to think about your experience of university life and how you want it to be. We then look at the relationship between failure and performance before exploring different ways of seeing failure. The guide introduces techniques to spot and work with your own inner-chatterbox and invites you to explore learning as risk taking. Offering a way to think about confidence as a way of being, rather than being about how good you are, we also offer techniques to look more closely at your resistance to moving towards what you want. Offering techniques to look at situations differently – to reframe them – we finally invite you to explore your experience by stepping back and writing a simple movie's structure! Throughout the guide are challenges to try out – that's the key, not thinking about it, rather trying things out, experimenting.

Two big questions to get started:

1. *What is your experience of University life now?*
2. *How do you want it to be?*

Notice these are very simple yet powerful questions to ask yourself. The gap between your answers is where this guide comes to help. In the following sections you'll see 'FAILURE' is a tool kit you can work your way through to start to address the gap and learn something along the way.

Meanwhile you might like to know you're probably not alone. We asked students on the programme, "What is your experience of university now?"

and they said:



Students on the programme said they wanted to experience more of:



- learn how failure can help you succeed
- worry less about what others think
- enjoy life
- be less inhibited by performance anxiety.
- gain the confidence to speak out in crowds or groups
- deal with negative feedback and overcome the sense of an inadequacy in my abilities and knowledge
- gain greater confidence in myself and my ability
- face my perfectionism head on in order to attempt to control anxiety and stress.
- be less anxious and more in control of my mental well-being
- decrease amount of moments when I feel despondence because of my mistakes.
- not panic when things don't go the way I want them to.
- find self-confidence which I can apply to the male dominated workplace I'm going to enter.
- enjoy learning
- learn how to deal with fear and move forward

A note on vulnerability

Engaging in questions about 'failure' or a fear of failure brings us close to our vulnerability. It's worth noting that often we think of vulnerability as something to be avoided. We associate vulnerability with challenging feelings such as shame, fear, guilt or disappointment. Actually vulnerability is much more than this. If we allow ourselves to experience vulnerability we can start to see how it's key to our learning. When we engage in learning we are also engaging in uncertainty and so in risk. That can make us feel vulnerable. Taking this further, if you feel vulnerable in your learning, that's a sign you are onto a good thing! It's a sign you are at the edge of deeper learning. As you read this guide, notice your vulnerability and let it be there.

"I would like to discover who I really am. Not every day must be exciting, but some, surely."

"I'd like to develop other parts of my personality, not only the academic side. This will ultimately improve my personal life as well as my professional one."

"I want to do things that will make my goals for the future come to a realisation."

"The same but with growth, I can never be 'perfect' in my outlook but I'd like to keep growing and be increasingly vulnerable and bold."

Failure and Performance

Let's start at the beginning and think about failure and the meaning we attribute to it. The focus of 'failure' always seems to be something in particular, with failing at something. That something often takes centre stage and becomes about how well we are doing. Or, to use another word, how well we are 'performing'. Performing is a powerful word: it can mean doing well in work, it can also be about doing well with friends, and all the other aspects of life that give us meaning. When we use the word 'performance' here, you can replace it with any other word that captures what you are worried about failing at. For example, you might want to use a word like 'happy' or 'relaxed' or 'balanced' or 'focused' or 'enjoying life' or 'resilient' or 'sociable'.

Whatever word you choose, the following formula helps us start to see what happens when failure enters the stage. A focus on failure seems to emerge from a focus on performance. We are afraid of failing and ironically, the subsequent fear of failing is the very thing that stops us from performing well (well most of us maybe, not all of us – sometimes fear can be a real driver though that can have consequences).

**PERFORMANCE =
Potential – Interference**

**(Real and
Made Up ones)**

If you look at the logic of this formula something interesting happens. Performance will never be more than your potential. If it is, then the potential was there. The trouble is, we never really discover what our potential is if we focus all our energy on performance. Worse still, while focusing on performance, we often start to raise our anxiety and worry, we start to tell ourselves versions of what will happen 'if', and suddenly, all our focus is on what we don't want to happen and becomes part of the interference.

So a focus on failure seems to emerge from a focus on performance. We are afraid of failing and ironically the subsequent fear of failing is the very thing that can stop us from performing well. Of course for some a fear of failure is what enables their drive to kick in; it's what keeps them going. For many of us though, we hold back for fear of doing something wrong, of making a mistake. Of course, things do go wrong. Things can get in the way. Our mind often makes such situations

worse with all sorts of judgements and then there is a negative feedback loop. Over time we start to reinforce self-limiting beliefs about ourselves and hey presto, we really do hold back from anything like what is possible, from our potential.

When we focus on 'failure' we are at either end of the formula. What happens to your learning when you do this? And what might an alternative be?

"I feel like my fear of failure has held me back in life, stopping me from trying new things I want to do – I'm hoping this will change that and allow me to seize opportunities I'm too scared to take."

"I think I would benefit from [the failure project] through being less risk-averse in many life domains (not only my academic and later professional career but also in personal life) and I believe it would help me be more proactive and challenge myself and change my approach to failure."

"I've constantly worried about being a failure and letting other people down, but specifically letting myself down. I understand failure is a learning experience, but I want to feel more comfortable with failing (obviously it shouldn't become a normative behaviour but on the odd occasion it can be unavoidable.) I would like to beat myself up less when I haven't done well and compare myself less to others who have done better than me (which I also see as a failure)."

"Despite being a relatively outgoing person, I have basically zero self-confidence which has made me struggle to want to do things that I would normally love to do...."

Alternative views of Failure: a taste of failure

Let's be honest: when we're talking about life-threatening situations we probably don't want to experience failure. Even that is debatable in some situations. It's pretty rare that we're in those situations. At the same time our bodies may not know the difference between a real and perceived threat and our anxiety can run havoc in response to our imagination, including imagining how past events may be playing out in new situations. Our imagination is powerful – think of nightmares. So how we view and imagine failure can quickly become part of the interference that inhibits our potential.

We know that people perceive failure differently. They attribute different meaning to a similar situation.

So, how do you perceive failure? Have a look at the statements in the wheel below and ask: which is the most true for you?

Now ask yourself, in what ways is there some truth in each of these statements? Even a small pomegranate pip of truth?

We're confident from the work we did through the coaching that there is some truth in all these perspectives, yet never the whole truth. Sharing their experience of these perspectives, students started to get a sense that failure has many colours and that, depending on how you looked at it, you could feel very different. The quotes below present some helpful alternative views of failure.

Notice how you feel when you see failure in a particular way. Ask: what do I gain from this perspective?



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J. K. Rowling

“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”

Thomas A. Edison

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“If you’re not failing every now and again, it’s a sign you’re not doing anything very innovative.”

Woody Allen

“What matters is this: Being fearless of failure arms you to break the rules. In doing so, you may change the culture and just possibly, for a moment, change life itself.”

Malcolm McLaren (Sex Pistols)

Inside your head: getting to know your inner chatter-box

“It’s amazing to observe how much power we give unknowingly to uninvited thoughts: ‘do this, say that, remember, plan, obsess, judge’. They have the potential to drive us quite crazy, and they often do.”

Joseph Goldstein

What informs students understanding of failure? We could come up with many interesting accounts here about wider societal and culture pressures, parents etc. etc. Those may all be valid and interesting. And they won’t help you! Actually, they will a bit, because it’s nice to realise, as students on our project did, that you’re not alone! Other people have concerns too. They feel they don’t fit in. They are worried about wasting their time. They have concerns about being found out as the impostor one day. They are distracted by Facebook. They miss home. Feel lonely. Are afraid of letting people down. It can be good to know others have these thought too! When it comes to you and your learning though, our focus is on how you can start to manage your own internalised conversation. As the students on this project saw, getting to know the pattern of that internal conversation is a big start in the right direction.

So, let’s go back to what you want to experience – the second question we asked you earlier. What gets in the way? Whatever it is you want – to focus, be balanced, feel happy, feel resilient and so on – what is it that gets

in the way? While there are ‘real’ things that can be a problem, there are also a whole set of inner thoughts that tend to get in the way. For example, how often do you hear yourself saying the words ‘but’, ‘can’t’, ‘ought’, ‘should’, ‘shouldn’t’, ‘must’, ‘mustn’t’, ‘ought not’, ‘if only’? If you pay attention, you’ll notice that when you use these words in your head, they tend to create a bit of a burden, put pressure on you, make you hold back, feel stuck, or long for something different. There are many words for these voices – the inner critic, self-limiting belief, gremlins, demons, saboteurs, devils whisper, watchdog, etc.

A first step is getting to know this voice. Later we’ll look at managing it. As a first step, students found it already helpful to see what happens if you just turn down the volume of that voice a little, to notice what space opens up for other possibilities.

We can start that by looking at how Gremlins inform your approach to learning – we use the word Gremlin to add a bit of lightness, referring to a mischievous character. You can replace the word Gremlin for ‘thought pattern’ if you find that more helpful.

Gremlin Spotting

“Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.”

Henry Ford

“I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

Michael Jordan (Basket Ball Player)

“I am never satisfied that I have handled a subject properly till I have contradicted myself at least three times.”

John Ruskin

Over the next few days, pay attention to when your inner voice is using Gremlin-type words (ought, should, shouldn't, must, must not, can't). For example, 'You don't know enough about that topic', 'You ought to have done more reading', 'You shouldn't risk writing anything wrong', 'You're not working hard enough', 'You should be with your friends'. Also, notice how that voice tends to generalise, raising the stakes to be all or nothing: 'Get this wrong and it's all over', 'It's all too much, I can't do anything anymore', 'My degree is a disaster', 'Don't make a mistake here', 'Change is too scary, be careful', 'I'm always a failure'.

Name your Gremlin voices. Some people call them 'John' or 'Harry', others name them based on what they're saying, 'Hedge your bets', 'Mr. Risk Averse', others use cartoon characters or characters from novels – whatever works for you so that you've a shorthand. What do your Gremlins look like? Draw a picture!

Spend time identifying the consequence of your Gremlins in relation to what you do (or don't do) and how you feel. You can do this by completing the following:

- My Gremlin is called.....
- He, she, it..... is very fond of saying.....
- The consequence is that I.....

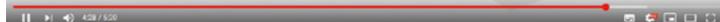
See also a short video on Spotting your Gremlins:

My Gremlin is called...

It/he/she is very fond of saying...

The impact on me is...

WillMedd



Learning as risk taking

You'll notice your Gremlins pop up when you think about how you approach your learning. If you try the following, you'll see what we mean. With each of the following questions, see where you'd position yourself – each is a continuum, so you can be anywhere along the line. The trick is not to try to be clever about this. In different situations you may well choose a different response. For now, try and be intuitive and go with your own tendency.

Looking at each in turn ask: how is my Gremlin informing this choice? Then ask, what would it be like to go to the different extremes? What might that enable for me?

Note this is adapted from questions you might ask about 'mindset' – see the work of Carol Dywck. However, we found it was a distraction if we get too fixated on whether someone is a 'growth' or 'fixed' mindset.

Orientation to Failure, to Learning

Imagine you have to write a new essay. Do you see this as a chance to learn more, or as a chance to prove how good you are at something?

Learn more

Prove how good

|-----|

Imagine you have the opportunity to do an extra activity, like choosing an optional course. Would you prefer to stick to the things you know you can do, or do you enjoy the challenge of learning something new?

Enjoy challenge

Stick to what know

|-----|

Imagine you are in a seminar or tutorial and you weren't sure about something. Would you take the risk and ask, or would you prefer not to be seen to have misunderstood?

Take risk

Avoid Risk

|-----|

Imagine you get some feedback on your work. If you get a low mark does it prove you're no good, or do you see that you need to work harder?

Work Harder

No good

|-----|

If you get a high mark: do you worry you won't maintain it in the future, or does it show how you can achieve things you set your mind to?

Can achieve things

Won't maintain it

|-----|

Which is more true: If I ask for help it shows I'm not competent, or, other people are a great resource to learn from?

People are a great resource

Shows not competent

|-----|

Utilising your confidence

Noticing your orientation leads to another question – what if you were to try a different approach? What if you didn't let the Gremlin have a last word? We offered students two different ways to do this.

Stepping up your confidence

Pick a situation in which you'd like to experience something different. Perhaps it's an essay you want to approach. Perhaps it's a student society you want to join. Maybe a job interview you are preparing for. Imagine in front of you a series of, say, 8 steps. Each step is an action you could take. Near to you are easier steps. At the far end are more challenging steps. Easier or more challenging here means in terms of your fear. Remembering to turn down the volume on your Gremlins, what is a first step you could

take? What's a second step you could take? And so on, right up to the last step. The last step may feel really challenging. That's okay because you're not committing to anything yet. Notice all the steps you've identified and, once you've got all the possible actions identified, decide which ones you could commit to.

Sometimes it's hard to pin yourself down in this way. One way to do that is to add in some time. What would be an action you could take tomorrow? This week? This month? You could even do the ladder for tomorrow – 7 actions you could take tomorrow if you were daring enough. Then do the same for the week and month ahead.

As you start to make small steps, your confidence will grow.

Get more from your essays

Step 1 – Set some time to have a proper look at the list of questions set! Notice any judgements that might arise about particular questions seeming 'difficult' or even a bit 'scary'. Rather than automatically picking the 'easiest' option on the list, try asking yourself 'which question seems most interesting to me? Which would I actually quite like to explore if I wasn't worried about messing it up?'. Notice that you don't actually have to decide which essay to take yet!

Step 2 – Set some exploratory time to have a look at some of the reading for the more 'interesting' questions: does it help you see the question in a new light? Maybe it gives you a different insight into which might be the most fulfilling question to explore.

Step 3 – Chat to another student and/or your tutor about the questions and share your ideas and thoughts – again, see if this changes how you feel about what you might get from the different questions. Etc.

Step 4 – Make a decision as to which essay to focus on. Keep aware of your criteria and whether any Gremlins have crept back in. Try making the decision from a place of confidence!

Step 5 – Plan out the reading you need to do. Perhaps allocate time to it – 'how long will I give it?' can be more empowering than 'how long will it take?'.

Step 6 – Draft some initial thoughts about how you want to approach the essay, testing out some ideas, arguments you want to make.

Step 7 – Arrange to meeting with your tutor and/or friends to explore your arguments. What can you learn from the conversation?

Step 8 – Write a full draft in plenty of time. Allow yourself the opportunity to look back at some reading, to re-write parts, to improve it.

Step 9 – Hand the essay in with time to spare, feeling proud that you have learnt something along the way! You've really worked towards your potential.

Confidence as a way of being: as if!

Confidence is sometimes associated with arrogance. That sort of confidence isn't a quality you'll necessarily want! There is another way to think about confidence, one in which confidence has nothing to do with ability or how good you have done something. When we associate confidence with ability, this assumes to be confident you have to know what you are doing. This is not real confidence, it is a very limited version of confidence. This limited version is the kind of confidence that makes you hold back for fear of being shown up, or mask how you feel and appear arrogant. It is a sort of confidence that assumes you have to demonstrate your knowledge rather than ask questions. Indeed, it may lead to a version of pretending to know something when really, for everyone involved, it would be better to have the confidence to ask the question.

Tapping into your confidence – as if

Here we invite you to explore situations as if you were confident. This is a bit of a trick of the mind because, since confidence is a state of being, to act 'as if' is actually to be confident. Experience tells me though, people are not always so happy 'to be' confident, but are more willing to explore things 'as if' they are ...

The first part of this process is to learn to conjure up a feeling of confidence. Before you start, choose a simple gesture that you can use to connect with being confident. This gesture can act as a trigger for the feeling of confidence – people sometimes call it an anchor. For some it's holding their hands together in a particular way, for others clenching their fist, for others squeezing their thumb and middle finger. You choose.

Think back to a time when you felt really confident. Perhaps a time during your studies or when you were doing something completely different (hanging out with friends, playing sport, music, art, etc). What's important is not what happened before, or after, rather the very moment when you felt most

confident.

Remember that moment vividly. Bring it alive. What were you doing? Who was around you? What were you wearing? What could you see? What could you hear? How did you feel? What sensations were you feeling in your body?

Stay in the moment and allow your sense of confidence to intensify. Try making the images brighter and more colourful. Make the sounds louder and crisper. See what works for you. Notice your physiology associated with being confident, how you are standing, what position your head is in, your shoulders, back, etc.

Now, keeping that sense of confidence and holding your physiology of confidence, notice the image that comes to mind that really connects you to that sense of confidence?

Keeping the feeling of confidence strong and the image in your mind's eye, make and hold the gesture you chose at the beginning. If you need to, repeat any of the steps above.

The following two videos talk through confidence and how to create a feeling of confidence:



*“No one can make you feel inferior
without your permission.”*

Eleanor Roosevelt

*“Confidence has nothing to do with
how good you are at something.”*

Esther Ekhart

*The trick is what one emphasises.
We either make ourselves miserable,
or we make ourselves strong. The
amount of work is the same”.*

Carlos Castaneda

Understanding your resistance

Even if you've decided there are things you really want to do, it might be you've also experienced some resistance. The Gremlins are still there. Here's a way to take a closer look at your Gremlins.

To aid this process a metaphor might be useful. Imagine you live in a place where you are always being robbed. You buy a puppy and train it to be a guard dog, to protect you. It does a good job. It frightens people away. Then some years later you move to a nice neighbourhood, a place you've heard people are friendly. It feels safe. Yet no one comes near you, no one says hello. You realise your guard dog is scaring them away. It's doing nothing wrong. It's doing what you taught it. Poor dog! It wouldn't be fair or effective to get angry at the dog. So what can you do? Retrain it! Retrain it to be a friendlier dog ... And so it is with your Gremlins.

When you want to turn down the volume

If you find you just need to turn down the volume on your Gremlin. The following can be helpful.

1. Daily Gremlin spotting.

This is a simple task and you can be as creative with it as you like and elaborate on it in a way that works for you. Have 10 pages with you that have all your Gremlins printed out on each page. Whenever you spot a Gremlin, cross it off the list and throw that page in the bin. You have ten pages. See if you can spot all ten in one day. Or over the week.

2. Playfully depowering Gremlins.

Again, lots of options here. Some will work for you and some won't, so this is a menu of choices and no doubt there are more you can create. Imagine your Gremlin as vividly as possible. What colour is your Gremlin? Try changing it to something else. Try different colours until it feels different. Try different patterns over it: perhaps something stripy, something ridiculous?

How loud is the Gremlin? Change the volume, does that help? Change the tone, what happens? A squeaky voice perhaps? How big is the Gremlin? Change the size, what happens? How close to you is the Gremlin? What happens if it moves further and further away, until it's smaller and smaller... Keep trying different things that change its form in a way that, for you, depowers it.

The following video talks through this visualisation:



How to listen when the Gremlin digs in

Every now and then the Gremlin really digs in its heels. It's worth checking something here. Is there some truth you need to acknowledge? Is there something the Gremlin is saying that you need to listen to? Could there be a way of reframing the voice from 'ought' to 'I want' ... Might that lead to a better set of actions?

3. Challenge the limiting belief

Having named your Gremlin and noted its impact, there are some further questions to ask. One set of questions are around the assumptions being made:

- What assumptions is the Gremlin making?
- What is the limiting belief?
- How would you answer it back? Can you give it alternative answers?

For example, 'Hedge your bets' is very fond of saying 'don't make the wrong decision, keep all options open' and the impact is I never feel committed to anything. What assumptions is the Gremlin making? It's assuming there might be a right or wrong decision. What is the limiting belief? That I might make the wrong decision. Answer back: There is no wrong here, all are good options. I've been fine in the past ...

That can risk running into an argument, one the Gremlins might win!

4. Engage with what the Gremlin really wants

This strategy is more like retraining the Gremlin. You have to believe it wants the best for you. It really does. It's like a parent who wants the best for their child, yet has got into a habit of saying just the wrong thing. That's why Gremlin's often get particularly loud just when you are onto something (which also means, if they are loud, it's a signal you are onto something!). So try a conversation with your Gremlin that goes something like this:

OK, Gremlin what is it you really want for me? You are my friend, you are loyal. What are you protecting me from? What are you worried about? What is it you want for me?

Now say: "In that case Gremlin, thanks, I appreciated you want for me." And then, "I'd find it more helpful if you said instead when that though comes up".

For example, what does hedge your bets want? Hedge your bets wants me to make the most of the opportunities and make a good contribution. I'd find it more helpful if you said : you'll feel better if you commit to something, trust yourself, there is no way to be wrong.

The following video talks through these questions :



Reframing situations

We also learn on this project that sometimes all it takes to feel different is a change in perspective. The truth is, we can always take a different perspective on a situation. So the question becomes: are you taking a perspective that is helpful to you?

This is about reframing. It relates to an experience or event you have faced or that you are facing, in ways that serve you well. It is an art that takes practice. In the words accredited to the inventor Thomas A. Edison, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work".

How to shed a new light on things

Reframing involves changing the meaning you're giving to an experience by choosing a perspective that is more useful for you. You can use this for past events (like low exam marks) or things yet to happen (like a presentation you're worried about giving). It can take practice. In the words accredited to the inventor of the light bulb, Thomas A. Edison, 'I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.' That in itself is an example of reframing.

Pick an event that didn't go as well as you would have liked and which left you feeling deflated or negative. Maybe some feedback you received, a presentation you gave, some writing, an argument with a friend, partner or parent.

First, identify the current frame: What meaning are you making of this? What are you making this event say about you and about what's possible in the future? What are you saying the event implies about your degree? What assumptions are you making about what people are thinking about you? What assumptions about causation are you making? How much are you generalising how this event could affect other things in the future?

Second, try some exploration: Because this happened once doesn't make it a foregone conclusion that it will happen exactly the same again in the future. What alternative meanings exist? Try answering some of the following:

- What else could this mean?
- Who are you assuming is seeing the event in this way?
- What's there in this event or experience that could be useful?
- What is there for you to learn from this?
- What did you do well?

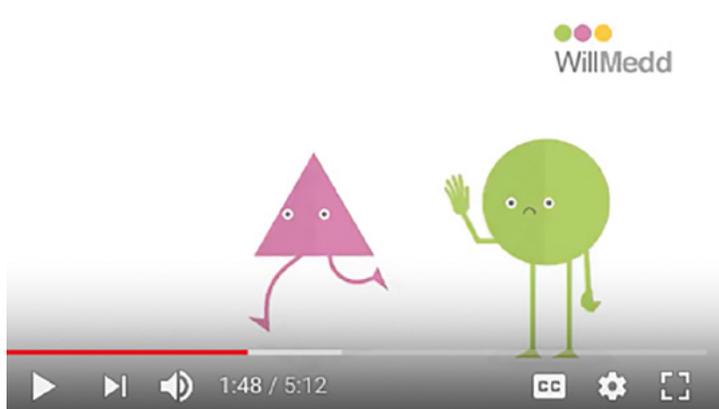
Third, the reframe: choose a new frame with a meaning that will be more useful for you than the current one. Watch out for the Gremlin that says 'only the worst case or more negative meaning is possible'. None of these meanings are true. They're all imagined perspectives and simply different ways of looking at things. So, with lurking Gremlins acknowledged, which meaning or frame will be most useful for you to take on? What do you want to choose this event to mean?

Fourth, start taking responsibility: Practice thinking about this new frame with its more useful meaning. Practice makes permanent and you've probably got good at repeating the more negative frame, telling the same old story, so now it's time to lay down some new neural pathways towards a brighter outlook.

Tip: you can also use reframing for a situation you're anticipating with some negativity, perhaps a presentation, picking up an essay mark, needing to have a difficult conversation.

Tip: if you like you can try reframing using drawings, objects or movement as a way of exploring the different frames.

The following video talks through reframing:



Experiment and engage

There is only one way to know if any of what we've suggested here will work for you. Try it! It wouldn't matter how much evidence we presented, how much we suggested how the latest neuroscience research suggests the power of these things, or if we gave you inspiring accounts of what other people did. You'll only find out if anything here is relevant to you if you 100% try it out!

What will help you try something out?

Your story

As a final process of reflection perhaps you'd like to step back from yourself for a moment and write a movie. Seriously! In folk tales and Hollywood movies, there are universal codes of behaviour that heroes use when confronted with challenges. By studying these templates and applying them to our own lives, we can learn to recognise the prospect of failure and find new ways to overcome it. In essence, we become our own hero.

Awarding winning writer and member of our failure team, Rob Young, suggests the following template to work through.

Using the themes above creatively, and having written your story, ask yourself:

- What is the moral of my story?
- What have I learned about me? About my future?
- What helped in my journey?
- What is my commitment to me?

For example ...

What is the moral of your story?

It's about taking the first step

What have I learned about me? About my future?

Self-belief can do wonders

What helped you in your journey?

Self-confidence

What is my commitment to me?

Take care of myself

Three Act Movie Structure

PREPARATION

First create a character. Make it clearly not you. Then give them some of your attributes and let them be faced with the kinds of challenges you face.

ACT ONE

ORDINARY WORLD	Our hero is restless
CALL TO ACTION	Someone needs help, but our hero is too entrenched to respond.
2nd CALL TO ACTION	Her inaction comes back to haunt her. This time, the call is more urgent.
OH, GO ON THEN	At last, reluctantly, she responds, informing us that her challenge is tough.
THE WARNING	At this point, 15 minutes into the film, someone gives her a warning. They say, 'be careful, if you accept this challenge, your life will change forever....'

ACT TWO

ENTER NEW WORLD	The hero stumbles in, to battle if it's a war movie or a relationship if it's a rom-com.
PRACTICE BATTLES	Small, sometimes funny, failures, as our hero adapts to this strange new world.
APPROACH VILLIAN	Our emboldened hero approaches the climax with a sense of dread and trepidation.
THE BIG BATTLE	In a life or death climax, the hero wrestles with her demons and...
FAILS	Our hero is humiliated but, in that moment, they learn a vital...
TRUTH	It is an absolute revelation. In this moment, they learn from failure. In a rom-com, this is the moment when the promiscuous hero makes a decision to finally commit.

ACT THREE

CHASED HOME	But it's not over yet. Their epic failure follows them, seeking resolution.
THE FINAL BATTLE	This time, when the fight is re-run, with truth as her weapon, she wins. Hooray!
ORDINARY WORLD?	And relax! Our hero returns home, a changed woman. She has learned from failure.

The Team

Funded by the Lancaster University Friends Programme the team brings together Beccy, Liz and Hilary from Lancaster University with Will and Edith (Professional Coaches) and Rob Young (Professional writer). Different combinations of us have worked together before in one way or another, and we've all experienced the challenges of learning to fail better in one way or another!



Rebecca Whittle – Lecturer in Human Geography, Lancaster University

Beccy is a Lecturer in Human Geography, with apparently quite diverse interests in food, emotions, children & families, learning and failure (!) and sustainability. She works part-time, so keeping her interests in check can be difficult. However, at the heart of her different projects, she's interested in relationality – put simply, in exploring the ways in which we come to connect with each other and the world around us... She's a newby to twitter @beccy_whittle



Liz Brewster – Non-Clinical Lecturer in Medical education, Lancaster University

Liz is a Non-Clinical Lecturer in Medical Education. As a qualitative health sociologist, and with a background as a librarian, Liz is interested in social media and well-being, using technology for self-management of long-term conditions, using social science research methods in healthcare improvement research, with a focus on programme implementation, and professional training for medical practice, with a focus on resilience. She tweets a lot @LizBrewster

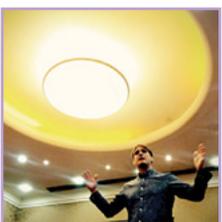
Hilary Simmons – Head of Colleges and Student Life, Lancaster University

Hilary brings vast experience of running services to support students struggling with stress, anxiety and the fear of failure. Hilary will make sure the project feeds into the places it needs to at the university.



Rob Young – Professional Writer

Rob is an award-winning writer. Rob wrote the first online play for the Royal Shakespeare Company. It appeared on 25 million tweets, trended 4th in the world and won two Lovie Awards (Internet Oscars). Rob has written feature films (Miranda, won the Audience Award at London's Raindance Film Festival), won the Award for Artistic Excellence at England's biggest arts festival and has been commissioned to write original scripts for Working Title, Aardman, Sony, Radio 4, Filmfour and The National Theatre. More on Rob at robyoung.info He tweets @R0BY0UNG (that's zero's not ooo's).



Will Medd – Professional Coach

Rob took this photo – that is neither a halo nor Will's ego ! Once an academic and now, as a coach, he works with people across the UK, Europe and North and South America. He is co-author of two books with Jeff Gill of 'Your PhD Coach' and 'Get Sorted: how to make the most of your student experience'. Will specialises in group coaching, coaching supervisions and teaching meditation. He tweeted once and decided that was enough. More on Will at www.willmedd.com



Edith Graham – Professional Coach

Will and Edith failed many times while training together as coaches. Edith holds a deep commitment to developing people and unlocking the creative and collaborative potential of individuals and teams. Edith brings over 20 years experience in the Learning & Skills Sector, working across many contexts (education, health, social work). If you look at Linked-in you'll see Edith knows Lancaster well... www.linkedin.com/in/edithgraham

[See YouTube for videos](#)

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