



# Overcoming Failure

**Feel your emotions.** When you feel you have failed, you may be overcome with self-recrimination, disappointment, and despair. Holding in your painful feelings can have negative effects on your health, your relationships, and your future success. Notice each emotion as it comes to you. Take time to name the emotion, be it anger, sadness, fear, or shame. This will enable you to work through it without turning it on yourself or others.

- Take time to process your feelings. If you try to fix or move past your disappointment before knowing how you feel, you may act rashly.
- Suppressing painful feelings can lead to health problems, such as chronic pain, sleep deficiency, and even heart disease.

**Accept what happened.** After the first shock of disappointment wears off, work on accepting what happened. It will be harder to move forward if you blame yourself or others, or pretend that what happened didn't matter or didn't really happen. Write down or reflect on everything that happened, what led to it and what the consequences were. State only the facts, without blame, judgment, or justification. Write in a journal if you have one, or write yourself a letter.

- If writing is not a helpful form of expression for you, find someone you can talk to. A trusted friend, family member, or a counselor can help you move past denial.

**Practice positive reframing.** Positive reframing is all about discovering the positives in any situation, even failure. Look at the situation in which you feel you failed, and contemplate different ways of describing it. "Failure" is a subjective term. Instead of saying "I failed at finding work," say "I haven't found work yet" or "I've been looking for work longer than I had hoped." Don't attempt to whitewash your mistakes, but state them without judgment, and look for the best.

- Failure presents you with an opportunity to learn until you get it right.
- Consider all the athletes, scientists, and other successful people who have tried and failed, only to persevere until they achieved their goal. Michael Jordan was famously cut from his high school basketball team, only to work hard and become one of the greatest players of all-time.

**Identify negative thought patterns.** With failure, often comes the tendency to beat yourself up over it, even calling yourself names. Learn to identify some common negative thought patterns so you can diffuse them. These thoughts may include: all-or-nothing thinking ("I have to do it perfectly the first time or I might as well give up"), catastrophizing ("This is terrible. There's no way I can come back from this"), or negative self-labeling ("I'm a failure and a phony").

- When you notice these kinds of thoughts arise, question them. They are coming from a negatively biased, critical place. Instead, ask yourself, “Is this really true?” Look for evidence for and against these claims.
- Write down an affirmation that goes against the negative self-talk. If you keep thinking of yourself as a failure, write something like, “I am a capable person” on a sticky note and put it on your mirror. Say it aloud to yourself and you can begin to change your negative thinking.

**Stop ruminating over the failure.** Do you find that you can’t stop thinking about what happened, replaying it over and over in your head? This is called rumination, and instead of providing insight about what you could have done differently or ways to improve, it just amplifies your negative feelings.

- Try journaling to put your obsessive thinking to rest. Getting it out of your head and down on paper can give you some relief from rumination and help reveal any underlying fears.
- Instead of doing a play-by-play, stop and ask yourself, “Okay, what have I learned here?” Maybe you learned you need to leave 30 minutes early for appointments so that you don’t show up late to your next job interview.
- Use mindful meditation to bring you back to the present. Mindful meditation helps you stop worrying about what happened in the past and focus on the here and now, and you can start asking yourself: what can I do differently today?

**Address the cause of the failure.** What happened to throw your goal off track? Could it have been prevented? Think about possible solutions you could have put into action, and what their consequences would have been. Were your initial expectations unrealistic?

- Try discussing your expectations with loved ones and teammates to measure their realism.

**Set realistic goals.** Once you have worked through the causes of your past disappointment, work on setting a more realistic goal for the future. What would you like to see happen next? What sorts of actions, on your part, could make success more likely? Check with people you trust to measure the realism of your new goal.

- For instance, if you just ran your first half marathon and had hoped to run 7 minute miles, you were probably overly ambitious. Try setting a goal for the next race that is just a little faster than your last time. If you ran 10 minute miles, try running 9.7 minute miles. Train toward that time.
- If your previous goal had been to publish a novel by the end of the year, make your new goal more moderate. Your new goal might be to get feedback on your draft. Sign up for some novel-editing workshops, or hire a freelance editor or writing coach.

**Practice mental contrasting.** Strike a balance between optimistic thinking and realistic planning by practicing mental contrasting. First, imagine your desired goal working out beautifully. Let yourself envision a total success for a few minutes. Next, switch gears and imagine all the obstacles that might arise. Envisioning the obstacles toward achieving reasonable goals can actually make you feel energized and more capable of tackling said issues. If the goal is unreasonable, however, this exercise is likely to allow you to let go of that wish and instead focus on something more achievable.

- Recognizing the obstacles between you and your goals should not be considered negative or unhealthy thinking. The exercise of mental contrasting will help you learn not to cling to unobtainable goals or to dwell on what cannot be done.

**Change your approach.** Brainstorm ideas and select the one that seems sturdiest. Use mental contrasting to test the solution out in your head. Ask yourself if you have the resources to put your new plan into place. What new problems are likely to come up? How will you solve them? What needs to be in place before you begin?

- Avoid repeating the same mistakes. Your new approach should not include any of the strategies that may have caused your last approach to fail.
- Create a plan B. Even well-executed approaches can fail due to unforeseen complications. Make sure you re-enter the fray with a solid back-up plan.

**Try again.** With your new goal set, and your new plan solidified, set out to achieve your goal. Take the time to reflect on your progress as your steps take effect. Feel free to change your approach. You are learning as you go, and a natural part of this process is to adjust and tweak your approach. Whether you achieve your goal or have to try again, you will have achieved a higher level of resiliency.

**Source:** How to Overcome Failure, Catherine Boswell and wikiHow  
<https://www.wikihow.com/Overcome-Failure>