



FAILURE RÉSUMÉ

“The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again.
But one disaster is enough to overthrow the wicked.”

- Proverbs 24:16

At Notre Dame, we spend a large amount of time and energy developing our professional skills. Such a focus has value but also has limitations. A singular focus on achievement does not allow space for failure in growth and development, especially when we see a seemingly unending string of success in others. This kind of perfectionism means that the very possibility of failure threatens our very sense of self.

The aim of this exercise is to take a humble and larger view on our own journeys. This includes our mistakes, errors, and failures in our personal and professional lives. While this will not be an easy process, it is a valuable and constructive one in our efforts to live a more integrated and balanced life.

In your Failure Résumé, contrast your non-successes with how you can learn from them. They pose an opportunity to look over your fears and mistakes without judgement but with an attitude of growth. Consider your failures as experiments and opportunities to learn. That being said, it is important to note that failure is not an inherent good (and it can be catastrophic), but that we can find and make good from failure.

EXAMPLE

| Failure | Details | Self-Development Insights | Growth Opportunities |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|
| Didn't get X internship | One of 300+ applicants. Made it to the interview stage. | Followed up with the interviewer and she said I had good but not great answers on [specific questions], that I needed more experience with [specific skill], and I came across as awkward in the interview. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice interview questions with friends Address weakness on [specific topic] with practice, research, etc. Set up meetings with people who did get job in past and ask for what they did |

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|---|---|---|---|
| Failed Y test | Differential equations were not kind | I studied hard but probably not well. Need to figure out how to study more effectively. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break down each question I got wrong for specific gaps • Go to office hours to check in with professor and ask for practice tests • Employ more effective study techniques (deliberate practice, tests, spaced interval, etc.) instead of just passive re-reading |
| Didn't stop someone from getting beaten up in middle school | <p>Sometimes what we don't do can haunt us more than what we actually do</p> <p>Could have stopped it, but didn't</p> | Sometimes what we don't do can haunt us more than what we actually do | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can't do everything, but each of us can do something • "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it." - Talmud |

Other examples can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

FAILURE RÉSUMÉ TIPS

- Remember that your failures do not define your worth as a person or predict your future success.
- But how you *react* to failure correlates with success.
 - "In a world defined by hypercompetition and intense pressure, where business breakthroughs and career advancement demand a willingness to take risks and defy convention, the notion that any person can achieve meaningful success without experiencing setbacks and disappointments seems hopelessly naïve. A willingness to chronicle your failures helps to create the kind of resilience that allows you to get beyond them."¹
- In this process, Dr. Kristin Neff argues that you should treat yourself with kindness, like you would to anyone else, since "failure is not only inevitable, but it's also our best teacher, something to be explored rather than avoided at all costs."
 - Moreover, practicing self-compassion allows you to recognize "that imperfection is part of the shared human experience."²

¹ Taylor, Bill, "Write a Failure Résumé to Learn What Makes You Succeed", *Harvard Business Review*, 13 June 2016.

² Neff, Kristin, "The Motivational Power of Self-Compassion", *Self-Compassion*



- “We can then work on improving ourselves, not because we’re unacceptable as we are, but because we want to thrive and be happy.”
- Remember that some failures may be out of your control, à la gravity problems.
- For further details, check out the [New York Times Smarter Living article](#) on the topic.

SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND

- Failure Résumés are rooted in the concepts of growth mindset³, mental contrasting⁴, and studies of successful individuals.
- Research demonstrates the importance of using self-compassion, not judgment, when grappling with failure.⁵
- See the chapter on decision-making in [Smarter Faster Better: The Transformative Power of Real Productivity](#) by Charles Duhigg for more information.
 - “We become trained, in other words, to notice success and then, as a result, we predict successful outcomes too often because we’re relying on experiences and assumptions that are biased toward all the successes we’ve seen—rather than the failures we’ve overlooked.
 - Many successful people, in contrast, spend an enormous amount of time seeking out information on failures. They read inside the newspaper’s business pages for articles on companies that have gone broke. They schedule lunches with colleagues who haven’t gotten promoted, and then ask them what went wrong. They request criticisms alongside praise at annual reviews. They scrutinize their credit card statements to figure out why, precisely, they haven’t saved as much as they hoped. They pick over their daily missteps when they get home, rather than allowing themselves to forget all the small errors.”⁶

³ Dweck, Carol, “What Having a “Growth Mindset” Actually Means”, *Harvard Business Review*, 13 Jan. 2016.

⁴ Duckworth, Angela Lee, et al., “From Fantasy to Action: Mental Contrasting With Implementation Intentions (MCII) Improves Academic Performance in Children”, *SAGE Journals, Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1 Nov. 2013.

⁵ Germer, Christopher, “To Recover from Failure, Try Some Self-Compassion”, *Harvard Business Review*, 05 Jan. 2017.

⁶ Duhigg, Charles, *Smarter Faster Better: The Transformative Power of Real Productivity*, Random House, 2017, loc. 2883. Kindle Edition.

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