

Reframing Learning Challenges

Chapman Learning Commons



Introduction:

During my first year at UBC, I often felt like a “bad” student. I would fall behind in coursework, not get the grades I wanted, and generally feel overwhelmed.

Now that I’m in my third year, I know that this is a fairly common experience; university is supposed to be challenging, and while I eventually learned how to adjust, I still found myself slipping back into a negative mindset.

So, what can I do when that happens? In this video, we’ll be going over a few ways to reframe our thinking towards learning. It’s okay to feel a bit lost sometimes—how can we find our way back?

1. Challenge 1: I got a low grade/I failed a course

When I first received a lower grade than anticipated, it felt disheartening. In post-secondary, these lower marks can feel like a huge impact; I thought I’d never recover from it, and that it was a sign of failure.

Because of it, I became extremely unmotivated and started to doubt my decisions.

“Am I cut out for university?”

“Is this the right major for me?”

“Should I have taken a gap year?”

These were just some of the many thoughts consuming my mind. It wasn’t until after I voiced this to my friends that I realized low grades are incredibly common! They don’t define who you are, but rather what you can learn.

Reframing Beliefs

Likewise, our own mindset can create our biggest obstacles. I found it difficult to go to an exam review, for example, because I didn’t want to be reminded of my results; to me, it was a representation of failure.

But then I started to reframe my thoughts: if I never went to the review, I’d never learn what I did wrong, and if I never did that, how could I improve?

What once was a shameful reminder then became a learning opportunity as I looked at what I could do differently next time.

2. Challenge 2: I can't keep up!

Balancing university and its demands can be overwhelming. With lectures, readings, assignments, and extracurriculars, it can feel like there's too much to do with too little time. I've found that this can quickly lead to feelings of burnout and comparison to other people—they seemed to have figured it out, why couldn't I?

Reframing Beliefs

To combat this, I tried turning towards strategies for time management, but I forgot one crucial aspect: time for myself.

With the speed and pressure of academic life, it can be easy to lose yourself within it. But, it's important to take a step back to reflect and recharge.

For example, while I typically set aside an hour every day to do a reading, I make sure to follow it up with a hobby or some quiet alone time. This helps take away some of the stress, and allow myself to slow down a bit.

It's during these times that I realize, it's okay to fall behind sometimes; not everyone—even the people I compare myself to—are able to stay completely on track.

3. Challenge 3: I'm studying hard but it's not working

Similar to challenge 2, I've found that sometimes, it can feel like I'm falling behind, even though I'm putting in the hours. This can be a frustrating feeling—I could be on track with all my readings and assignments, yet still not understand the material.

Sometimes, this could be a matter of the methods used, like passive review vs self-testing, but that's not always the case.

Reframing Beliefs

When I find myself stuck on a concept, I often feel upset and disappointed. No matter what I do, it feels like I haven't made any progress, and I tend to give up early.

But, it's important to recognize that not everything is going to click immediately. What's more, it doesn't necessarily mean a low level of understanding, but rather a harder concept to grasp.

For example, last week I was studying for a midterm and got frustrated at my own confusion. After processing my emotions for a bit, I sat back down and addressed my areas of confusion: what did I not understand, and why?

I took these points to my professor's office hours, who worked out these concepts in a way I could better understand. This helped me to discover a new perspective on the material, one that I wouldn't have considered if I didn't give myself more patience and consideration.

Conclusion:

While university life can feel big and overwhelming, I learned the importance of restructuring my beliefs to approach its challenges differently. University is a time for personal and academic growth; every student goes through their own journey, and that's made me realize that I'm not so alone.

I hope these tips have been helpful! What are some ways you've faced learning challenges? Let us know in the comments!