

# Resilience in Research

A guide to developing and managing  
your resilience and well-being in an  
academic environment



University  
of Dundee

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## INTRODUCTION

**Academic environments can be complex and dynamic work places. Full of comradeship, yet also sometimes a solitary experience – and while there is a great sense of achievement in the research process to create new knowledge, there are the inevitable ups and downs to navigate through. At a superficial level, a research career, of any duration, can fluctuate from challenging, overwhelming and exciting, sometimes within the same day. Underneath this, there are more subtle factors that keep individuals going, through these ups and downs of research life. This self-resilience is different for everyone and what might excite or energise one colleague may dishearten another.**

Resilience is most commonly defined as the ability to bounce back after setbacks. However, this definition only tells part of the story because of the variety of tasks and outputs required from researchers daily. Dealing with the rejection from a submitted paper or grant proposal is a large, but not always unexpected, setback. This requires a different set of resilience skills compared to setbacks generated when managing colleagues and deadlines. There will always be certain things that are beyond your control or that you can directly influence; significant life events, changes at a strategic or policy level in our environment or the behaviour of other people around us. The strategies outlined in this resource are about raising your awareness to the things that you can control. While using up part of your reserves of resilience day-to-day can't be avoided, you can find ways to regularly assess how much of it you have left and what you are doing to maintain and replenish it.

Resilience is essentially about coping, prevention and replenishment strategies that you can adopt to improve your busy professional and personal life. With this in mind, the content of this booklet has been purposely divided into thirty small sections for you to self-select from. It is likely that you will identify with some things more readily than others, and equally, may need to work on a small handful of things that would make a difference.

It is recommended that you select 1-3 things that you might work on at any particular time; this sets you up for success which is resilience building in itself. There is also space in each section for you to make notes and adapt the topic for your own needs. Ultimately, this is a booklet of thirty suggestions that may make a difference for you. It is not in any way a replacement for working in a supportive environment, or seeking specialist help - some of these sources of help are listed on pages 36-37.

## How to use this booklet

This booklet draws on the work of others, in direct and indirect ways, on resilience and related topics, as well as the authors' experience of being researchers and working in the research environment. It is not an exhaustive study on the subject, rather a tool to help you identify key areas for developing resilience and well-being. The various resources have been grouped into five main themes starting with better self-knowledge so that you know where to best direct your efforts:

- **Self-knowledge:** it all starts with you
- **Engagement:** managing your work and environment
- **Self-direction:** seeing your work and projects through to the end
- **Clarity:** understanding your role and environment
- **Self-confidence:** building ways of believing in, and stretching, yourself

Each section contains a short description of the topic and how it relates to building resilience. There is additional information, in the form of a University resource, a book that examines the topic in more detail, a blog post, a TED Talk, a YouTube Clip or a self-assessment questionnaire.

There is a strong relationship between developing good habits and having high resilience – we've used this as the thinking behind the format for the booklet. By using the same repeated format for each chapter, the aim is to make it easier to navigate this booklet.

And so it is with resilience – if we can create some reasonable frameworks around good habits for ourselves it allows us to do more interesting things and be more robust with our residual energy.

The authors work with researchers across UK and European universities on leadership, career development and self-management topics. While appearing robust on the surface, they are not naturally resilient individuals; rather they have had to learn through challenging experiences. Everything in this booklet takes practice; it isn't sufficient to just read it. Repetition, reflection and readjustment are constantly required.

## The starting point: which parts of this booklet are most relevant for you at the moment?

- The wheel on page 5, is divided into five segments (representing each of the chapters) – self-knowledge, self-direction, engagement, clarity and self-confidence.
- There are six positively written statements per segment aimed at helping you to decide where to direct your attention. You are free to look at your resilience from a big picture perspective by looking at all the statements and then standing back to assess where to put your energy, or to look at the individual statements on a sequential or random basis, and select any area(s) for focus.
- The wheel provides a visual overview of the booklet's chapters and sections. There is room for you to shade individual wedges on the wheel relating to each of the positive statements. If you are scoring each statement, then assign the following point rating scale to indicate where you:

**very highly identify with the statement ..... 5**

**highly identify with the statement ..... 4**

**moderately identify with the statement ..... 3**

**weakly identify with the statement ..... 2**

**do not identify with the statement..... 1**

You might just want to tick the relevant statement box because the topic sounds like it might be useful now or later. Alternatively, you may choose to skim read these statements and jump to the section that stands out for you.

## Your call. Your priorities. Your resilience.

**Self-knowledge:** it all starts with you (pages 6-11)

- S1** I know what my resilience builders and drainers are
- S2** I know my most productive times of day
- S3** I know how I respond to a deadline
- S4** I know how I deal with feedback
- S5** I know how to handle criticism and conflict
- S6** I know how I respond to an obligation

Score 1-5 or ✓


**Engagement:** managing your work and environment (pages 12-17)

- S1** I know how I spend all my time
- S2** I can overcome procrastination
- S3** I have time away from my tech
- S4** I regularly get a good night's sleep
- S5** I regularly take days off, holidays and vacations
- S6** I have boundaries between work and my home life

Score 1-5 or ✓


**Self-direction:** seeing your work and projects through to the end (pages 18-23)

- S1** I have clear goals
- S2** I know the outcomes I want in my work
- S3** I have clear accountability in my work
- S4** I have good writing habits
- S5** I know when I've done 'good enough' work
- S6** I have ways of identifying and measuring my success

Score 1-5 or ✓


**Clarity:** understanding your role and environment (pages 24-29)

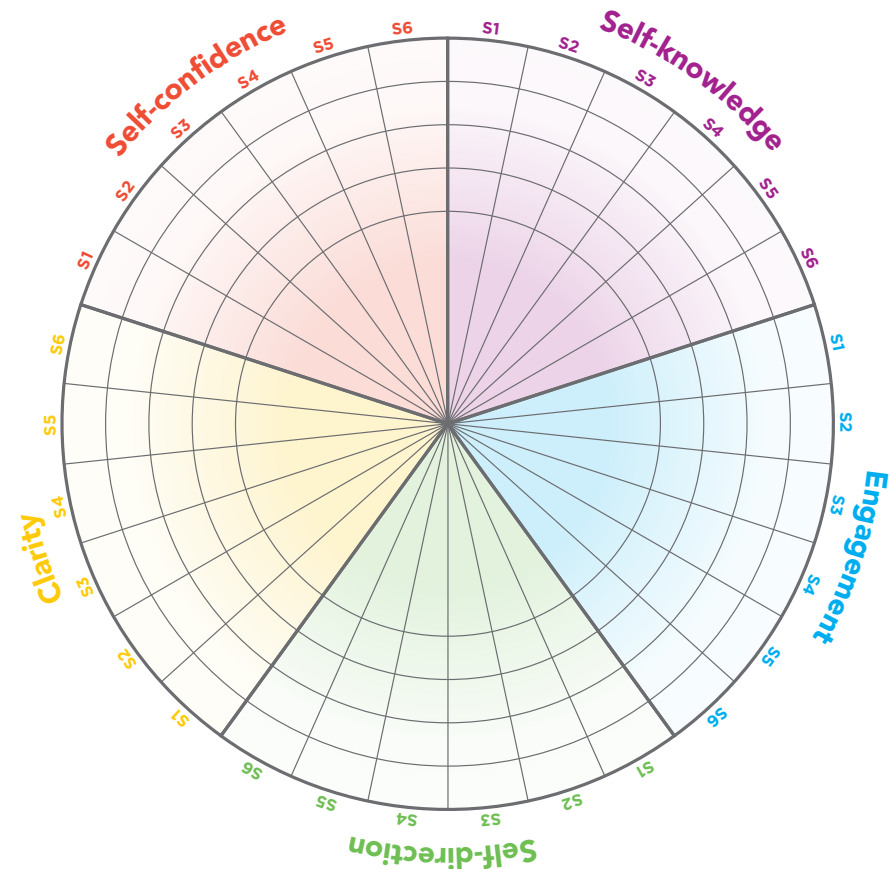
- S1** I can deal well with distractions
- S2** I manage criticism, conflict and failure well
- S3** I am able to say no to things
- S4** I learn from observing others
- S5** I have time and space to deal with difficult issues
- S6** I have goals and a plan of how to achieve them

Score 1-5 or ✓


**Self-confidence:** building ways of believing in, and stretching, yourself (pages 30-35)

- S1** I have a 'growth mindset'
- S2** I know my strengths
- S3** I can tackle something new and unfamiliar
- S4** I have a mentor that I use as a sounding board for ideas
- S5** I have people that support me in my life and career
- S6** I know how to work well with others

Score 1-5 or ✓

Self-knowledge builds over time. Some resilience-building activities are regularly repeated behaviours in certain situations or with specific individuals or groups. The same is true for resilience-draining ones. When things go well and you feel encouraged and strong, think about what led to that. Similarly when you have used a lot of energy dealing with something or someone, pause to work out what or who has caused you to use so much of your resilience in dealing with it/them.



[www.robertsoncooper.com/iresilience/](http://www.robertsoncooper.com/iresilience/)



**What have you found about yourself and your resilience today that surprised you?**

[illegible]

# Self-knowledge

What are my best and most productive times of day?

Are you a morning person or an evening person? When do you have your biggest focus for important tasks? This is a question of when is the best time in the day for you to have periods of 30-60 minutes of focused working time where you can really concentrate on getting important things done rather than one about setting hours aside to lose yourself in a task.

- When is it a good time for **you** to read?
- When do **you** find it easiest to write something?
- If you were to answer emails only once a day when would it be most useful for **you** to do that?
- If you were to take a break from using the Internet for an hour a day when would that be the most effective **for you**?

Resilience can be built by the completion of things you and others care about. We can often find it easier to complete things if we do them when our energy is at its highest for that task.

As busy researchers, it can often be difficult to find the time, energy and environment to write and develop a writing habit despite many of the outputs being written ones. Finding and sticking to your “writing time” may be a resilience builder for you.



Below is a link to an interesting article that identifies six common habits, that academics interviewed, tended to use to boost their productivity.

<https://www.methodspace.com/six-academic-writing-habits-boost-productivity/>



**If you could work on an important project every single day, what time of day would work best for you to do it?**

[illegible]



# Self-knowledge

## How do I respond to a deadline?

How you manage deadlines may contribute to either building your resilience (by enabling you to get-things-done and feel purposeful) or drain your resilience (by the lack of sleep or stress they can create when one is imminent).

Typically, we tend to prefer to either stick to a plan OR be excited by the creativity and productivity that comes with the rush of the last minute. Constantly working against our preference, or in an environment where we feel others prevent us from achieving our preferred deadline management approach, can be a significant resilience drain. This can be a particular issue when it leads to conflict or causes stress.

Having some understanding of our own preference and those of others around us can help us to manage ourselves and our environments. If we have language to describe ourselves and what we need we can use this self-knowledge to communicate it to others and potentially restore resilience-draining situations.



The link is to an online assessment, which covers some deadline-based topics and is loosely based on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. The outputs of this type of questionnaire can help to give us self-knowledge.

[www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test](http://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test)



**How do you respond to a deadline compared to those around you and how does this affect your ability to manage your resilience?**

[illegible]



# Self-knowledge

## How do I feel about feedback?

Feedback is a difficult topic. We can receive it and dwell on it for days, particularly if we feel that the feedback is personal. How do we respond to feedback?

Whilst at a core level we can believe that:

***"We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve."***

Bill Gates

As individuals...

**We can react to it** - "the other person is wrong, they don't see things in the way they should, their perspective is not relevant!"

**We can ignore it** - "it doesn't apply to me and my work, it is not worth anything to me at the moment."

**We can sift through it and extract the useful parts -**  
*"...actually that bit is relevant and I can do something about it."*

**We can take it on the chin and do something about all of it**  
*"They are right, I must do something about all of this!"*

Our resilience can be strengthened by considering the perspectives of others in developing our own reactions to feedback and what we do with it.



The link is to several pages (p.42-49) of Rowena Murray and Sarah Moore's book *The Handbook of Academic Writing - A Fresh Approach* that deals with using feedback:

[https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=c-VydDwA\\_jwC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=c-VydDwA_jwC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)



## How do you respond to feedback and how could you do this in a more resilience-building way?

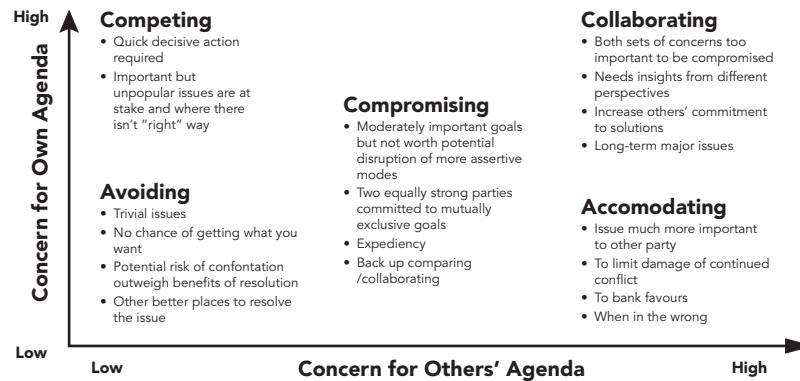
[illegible]

# Self-knowledge

## How do I handle criticism and conflict?

This topic could run to pages in its own right. The point of covering it briefly here is to raise it as a subject and ask you how the management of conflict in your life affects your resilience? Significant conflicts over personal and professional issues have the potential to reduce our resilience over a period of time, whilst handling them well might boost our resilience-building strategies. However, it is often the more trivial ongoing conflicts that need to be addressed in equal measure to the more obvious major ones, in order to sustain day-to-day resilience.

The diagram below is a representation of the work of Thomas Kilman on conflict styles.



The link is to the Kilman Diagnostics web page as they have a more detailed description of each of the conflict handling approaches (no purchase necessary).

[www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument-tki](http://www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument-tki)



## What are your approaches to conflict management and how do they affect your resilience?

[illegible]

# Self-knowledge

## How do I respond to an obligation?

On your physical or mental to-do list today there will be things you have to/want to do for yourself and things that you have to/want to do for other people. It is often useful to look down your list at the things that are routinely left undone – are these tasks for other people or yourself?

If you regularly prioritise both equally it is likely that your resilience is pretty high – that you satisfy your own needs as well as those of others around you. If you consistently put the needs of others ahead of yourself, it may reduce your resilience. It is important, to reprioritise where possible and satisfying your own needs, particularly for larger tasks, that will make a difference to you professionally or create enough time and space to do things that you know will be resilience building.

This extends to all types of commitments as you may find yourself able to keep obligations to yourself to run, walk outside and resist the sugary snacks at the counter when you are feeling resilient which are equally important commitments you've made to yourself.



There is a link to the work of Gretchen Rubin who studies and writes about happiness and human nature, and understanding how we respond to an obligation. Managing obligations to others and ourselves is relevant to how we manage our resilience. How can we create an obligation to ourselves to keep our resilience high?

[http://gretchenrubin.com/happiness\\_project/2015/01/ta-da-the-launch-of-my-quiz-on-the-four-tendencies-learn-about-yourself/](http://gretchenrubin.com/happiness_project/2015/01/ta-da-the-launch-of-my-quiz-on-the-four-tendencies-learn-about-yourself/)



## How might the way in which you respond to an obligation to yourself or others affect your resilience?

[illegible]

Can you to track your time for a week to help you see where your time actually goes and how many hours you are spending on different activities? It will confirm the amount of time you are working and will also illustrate how much additional time you spend doing things for yourself, sleeping and spending time with those around you who matter to you.



<https://lauravanderkam.com/2017/09/welcome-168-hours-time-tracking-challenge/>



**If you tracked your time today what resilience-draining things would you find in there and how much time would you have spent on resilience-enhancing things?**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

# Overcoming procrastination

Often we are not consciously procrastinating anything at all. Sometimes we are distracted by the needs of others; by a seemingly simple task taking longer than anticipated; by a quick email; or an internet search.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

# Engagement

Taking an hour a day away from tech  
- how would this benefit me?

This topic goes hand in hand with managing distractions and the effect they have on our resilience. Technology has brought us so much. The constant connectedness puts us in a position of being 'always on' because there is always something in our inbox, message feed or timeline to look at – always something that needs responding to. For those of us who feel that we have to respond to every obligation (and do it quickly!) it can mean a feeling of being overwhelmed with no headspace to get on with things that we need to process, think about or connect with.

What do you use your tech for? Is it your constant companion? Would you break away from a face to face conversation to look at a message on your phone or to check social media mid-conversation? Do you look at your phone whilst walking along the street or crossing the road?

It might be useful to examine the role that being constantly connected plays in your life and how you might create some useful resilience-building space from it.



The link below is a short post and filmed interview from a lifestyle blog called the Whole Life Challenge about taking a week with no tech for 1 hour per day:

[www.wholelifechallenge.com/shut-off-electronic-communication-lifestyle-practice-week-2/](http://www.wholelifechallenge.com/shut-off-electronic-communication-lifestyle-practice-week-2/)



**When would be the best time of day for you to take a break from your electronic communications and what would you do with the space that an hour off created that would be *resilience building* for you?**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

## Getting more, better quality sleep

Prioritising sleep might feel like a difficult thing to do when we have so many other things competing for our attention. However with repeated practice, prioritising good quality sleep, might give us the energy and focus needed to be more effective every day.



<http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-organizational-cost-of-insufficient-sleep?cid=eml-web>  
<http://zenhabits.net/get-sleep/>



**What role does sleep play in your resilient life and if you currently don't get enough sleep how could you get 15, 30, 60, 120 minutes more sleep every 24 hours?**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.



# Engagement

## Planning and taking days off, holidays and vacations

Taking breaks helps in the process of getting things done and helps us to feel more resilient. This feels counterintuitive – if only we can spend more time at our work we can get more done! Actually, no. Whether these breaks are short, for example an hour away from work to exercise; or of longer duration, say for a holiday – they make a difference. Taking regular breaks gives us the opportunity to take time away from work and pursue other interests beyond work. We will be more likely to return to work with a renewed focus.

At the beginning of the calendar year/academic year it is useful to think about breaks and time off, for that twelve month period. So many people in an academic environment take next to no time off between September and Christmas and between New Year and Easter – is there a way you could pace your holiday days throughout the whole year?



Oliver Burkeman's column gives a slightly different perspective on taking a break.

[www.oliverburkeman.com/blog/posts/on-micro-retreats-or-why-you-need-a-break-today-not-later-this-year](http://www.oliverburkeman.com/blog/posts/on-micro-retreats-or-why-you-need-a-break-today-not-later-this-year)



**When is your next scheduled time away from your work?**

[illegible]

## How do boundaries help or hinder me?

- Having boundaries set by others can create a helpful obligation for delivery of work
- Having flexible boundaries can sometimes lead to too much procrastination
- Creating accountability between the work you want to do, the work you have to do and the work you are able to do can help define what you do every day
- Being able to work on something that deeply interests you can really help your resilience.

Building your resilience may require more structure imposed by others to help you get things done or you may need more flexibility to help you explore your subject further or take new opportunities that may develop things for the future.



Michael Bungay Stanier covers the topic of setting boundaries in his book *Do More Great Work*. There is a link to his free e-course on the subject of *Doing More Great work* in the link:

[www.boxofcrayons.biz/books-products/do-more-great-work/](http://www.boxofcrayons.biz/books-products/do-more-great-work/)



**What is your approach to boundaries? Do they help you to manage your resilience or do they constrain your ability to manage yourself and your resilience?**

[illegible]

[illegible]

## Self-direction

## Thinking ahead: what outcomes do I want?

In terms of building your resilience, it is most important to think about the daily *inputs* that you can manage, to help us build the overall ability to bounce back or respond to setbacks. However, like the goals outlined in the previous section, it is often useful to think of the outcomes that you want from the behaviours that you employ on a daily basis.

Sometimes it is useful to spend some time reminding yourself to think about the bigger picture and *focus on the outcome* that you want from situations or pieces of work.

Having an outcome focus can help to determine whether or not any piece of work fits with what *you want to be doing or achieving in your career*. When you mindlessly say yes, or as importantly, don't say no, you can find yourself with things that are not your work or that may be enjoyable but don't move you forward in the things that are either pure enjoyment and fun or useful.



An interesting article by Dr Richard Piper, has a section on **Thinking Outcomes** and contains six questions that are helpful in determining which outcomes you want to pursue in your work today/ thinking longer term.

<https://knowhownonprofit.org/organisation/strategy/whatis/outcomes>



**What outcome would you like from a meeting that you have within the next week and how would achieving that outcome, through preparation, help you to feel more resilient?**

[illegible]

## Self-direction

## Setting up forms of accountability

Sometimes our plans to do a large piece of work can feel like the kind of overwhelming task that never quite gets done and forms a mammoth project. It can feel difficult to get started, acting like a burden that we carry everywhere – grinding us down when we are doing something more pleasant and sitting there as an expectation when we need to be doing something else.

So, two things may help. Firstly, to break down the bigger project into smaller tasks that seem more do-able and feasible to fit into a particular timescale. Secondly, to create a plan to be delivered by a particular time or date for review by others for comment or completion.

Creating accountability with other people for delivering smaller tasks prevents us from drifting. It helps us to make progress when the task is big and the major deadlines are a long way off.



<http://getalifephd.blogspot.ie/2011/12/accountability-really-works-writing-and.html>



**Which person or process would help you to set up accountability for something today that would build your resilience?**

[illegible]

## Creating a writing habit

This raises the question about whether writing is a resilience builder or a resilience drainer *for you* and what you might do about it? Senior academics talk about the importance of writing every day, writing regularly and having a sense of what they are writing now and planning to write in the future. Professor Sarah Moore, from the University of Limerick, talks about having a writing strategy for papers that is '*one in my head, one on the desk, one out for review - one in, one on, one out*' and many have a practice that is about writing something, however small, every day.



<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/opd/>



**Does it work better for you to write every day, every week or in large bursts once in a while?**

[illegible]

# Self-direction

# Done is better than best

We can sometimes notice that our level of resilience is in inverse proportion to the size of our to-do list. The more overwhelmed we appear, the less resilient we can feel. Often by trying to be 'excellent' in all areas of work, one can end up putting energy into too many different things at the same time, therefore being unable to give adequate time and attention to the most important areas of work.

There are clear messages in books like *Deep Work* by Cal Newport, *Overwhelmed* by Bridgid Schulte and *Do More Great Work* by Michael Bungay Stanier: by focusing on the areas in your life, at both work and home, which are of most importance to you, will make the biggest difference. How not to let perfect be the enemy of good or to accept that some minor or less important tasks just may not get done.



<https://100daystothedoctorate.wordpress.com/2015/11/05/done-is-better-than-perfect-push-past-phd-perfection-syndrome/>



**What could you complete adequately today that would help you to move something on that has been waiting to be tackled for a while?**

[illegible]



## Celebrating success

It can be easy for our failures to dominate our successes. Constantly focusing on what we haven't achieved can be resilience draining. Keeping a list of successes, or adding them frequently to our CV, can be a way of keeping both failure and success in perspective.



<http://world.edu/wanted-one-gong-for-my-phd-office/>



## How do you celebrate your successes and do you make enough time to celebrate success?

[illegible]

- Knowing what is important to you and why you shouldn't be distracted from it.
- Getting the most important thing done at your time of maximum concentration when no one else is around and when your resistance to interruption is at its best. Morning people find that working first thing in the day is best for them, whereas this might be an afternoon or evening technique for others.
- Accepting that there will be parts of each day where your concentration is lower and that you won't get as much done during these times – good times to schedule meetings, go for a brief walk, allow yourself to chat to others and/or use the internet.

<https://hbr.org/2011/01/the-most-important-practice-i.html>

**If you could work on something today for a set period of time without distracting yourself or being distracted by others how long could you reasonably do that for and where would you be working to achieve it?**

[illegible]

## Dealing with criticisms, conflict and failure inherent in research

Generally we are not very open about the subject of criticism, conflict and failure in academic environments – it is an environment where all three are inherent behaviours in the environment and yet we are not open about them.

Getting to the stage of undertaking a PhD and developing a career in academia is based on strong academic and personal performances in all other forms of qualifications and education up until that point. Part of this is accepting that your work and ideas will be challenged, that there will be (sometimes significant) disagreements between researchers and failure. Academia involves us taking significant personal and professional risks to create something that doesn't exist at the moment, which can dent our resilience when we fail.



This article talks about the importance of being able to bounce back from failure.

[www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/02/habits-of-resilient-people\\_n\\_3818652.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/02/habits-of-resilient-people_n_3818652.html)



## How can you manage criticism, conflict and failure better and who can be your sounding board to help you put things in perspective?

[illegible]

# Clarity

## Being able to say no

This is a topic many struggle with their whole life. Sometimes it isn't because you don't have the skills to say 'no' – one can be assertive and have clear cause to say 'no' many times a day and do so without thinking. In many ways you don't say 'no' more often because you don't want to - we want to say 'yes' to things.

Attracted by the 'bright shiny' opportunity that you may be creating in conversation with someone else it is easy to say 'yes' now to creating something that seems great in the future. However, this is a practice that you may need to work on to keep on top of managing our resilience. This also linked to the earlier topic of how you respond to an obligation - once you've said you will do it you may then feel you have an inner and extended obligation to follow through on it.

The article linked below, on 'the power of saying no' includes a useful technique for imagining your future self's response to something you said 'yes' to today.



There are two links for this topic as both give supportive yet slightly different perspectives on the practice of saying 'no'.

<http://timharford.com/2015/01/the-power-of-saying-no/>

<https://seths.blog/2016/03/on-saying-no/>



**What are your priorities for the next 90-days and what could you reasonably say 'no' to today that would have a resilience building effect on your next three months?**

[illegible]

## Learning from observing others

Three ways of learning from others include:

1. **Reading** – reading blogs of people who work or live in similar worlds of work/lives to you to see what they do, how they manage themselves and what they know that is new to you and could be useful.
2. **Observing** – how people manage their time, writing and research work, flow of email, how they say no to things and how they (appear to) avoid being overwhelmed with commitments are all interesting things to observe in practice.
3. **Asking** – this may take a long time to develop but can be most useful to share good practices.



Dr Caitlin Nunn's blog shares her insights on managing her transition from one side of the world to another:

<https://theresearchwhisperer.wordpress.com/2016/01/19/on-leaving-home-and-growing-up/#more-4095>



## Whose behaviours of resilience could you observe and 'borrow'?

[illegible]

## Creating headspace to deal with difficulty

By having such mechanisms that help you to process and think, you may be more responsive to taking day-to-day difficulties in your stride and build your resilience as a result.



<https://www.headspace.com>

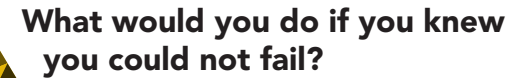


**What mechanisms do you have in place to 'press pause' before the start of the week next week?**

[illegible]

## What do I want to do/achieve/be?

What might be possible, if you can find a way through the day-to-day challenges and focus on things that you are working towards?

[illegible]



[illegible]

## Self-confidence

## How do I find out what my strengths are?

In an environment where you are constantly and critically evaluating research, asking questions and looking for gaps, you equally apply some of the same thinking to yourself - daily, you need to develop some skills further, do things better than you did them in the first version and constantly look for novel ways of approaching things. The ongoing requirement to improve can often be delivered in a deluge of critical evaluation which you can sometimes interpret as personal criticism rather than criticism of your work.

The StrengthsFinder book is useful to give a language of strengths to add to your lexicon to balance out the 'critical voice' inside you. The book has an access code in the back to take an online assessment generating a personalised report and it may be something you'd find useful to articulate some of your strengths – particularly if you can translate them to the research environment and use them to strengthen the story of your CV or job/fellowship/promotion applications.

You don't need to use or read the StrengthsFinder book to think about articulating your strengths - 10 minutes with this resource and a pen, together with some space to think may be sufficient to get you started.



A link to the StrengthsFinder book and process.

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/StrengthsFinder-2-0-Upgraded-Discover-Strengths/dp/159562015X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1529663089&sr=8-1&keywords=strengthsfinder](https://www.amazon.co.uk/StrengthsFinder-2-0-Upgraded-Discover-Strengths/dp/159562015X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1529663089&sr=8-1&keywords=strengthsfinder)



**What is the main strength you bring to your work and how will you use that strength to do your work today?**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

# Self-confidence

The nerves that come with  
doing something new

Having the right amount of challenge helps to underpin our resilience. It is difficult to be confident in challenging situations, as by their very nature, they can expose a lack of certainty or expertise. So, what does self-confidence look like? It often looks like drawing on and playing to your strengths however you can be confidently 'new to something' by admitting that this is not your area of expertise or experience but that you've come to learn and contribute where you can.

It can help to strengthen your resolve to try new and different things to build both confidence and ability to respond to challenges with resilience, particularly when you get the perspective of someone so accomplished and experienced encouraging you to try it.



This blog post from Dame Professor Athene Donald of Cambridge University is from someone very successful in her professional life.

<http://occamstypewriter.org/athenedonald/2012/09/16/is-it-ever-safe-to-shed-the-l-plates/>



**What do you do with ease and confidence now, that you know made you nervous the first few times you did it?**

[illegible]

## Self-confidence

## Finding and using a mentor

Finding and using a mentor can help in the process of resilience building. A mentor is someone (often more senior than you) who has had more, sometimes different, sometimes similar, experiences and can help you set your own experiences and views in a different perspective as well as helping you to develop your confidence by talking through aspirations and tackling different challenges. Often they are part of your supportive community of people you trust and who believe in you in the research environment.

Mentoring in academia can work particularly well to help you think through things like determining your future plans, applying for promotion, thinking about how you come up with a writing strategy or how you manage particular situations or people.



The University of Dundee has created an e-book about mentoring that contains lots of good tips and guidance on making the most of having a mentor.

[https://www.dundee.ac.uk/media/dundeewebsite/opd/images/Mentoring\\_UoD%20booklet%2010.03.17.pdf](https://www.dundee.ac.uk/media/dundeewebsite/opd/images/Mentoring_UoD%20booklet%2010.03.17.pdf)



## How might you benefit from having a mentor and where could you find one?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

# Self-confidence

## Creating my own personal board of directors

In her book *It's Not a Glass Ceiling, It's a Sticky Floor*, Rebecca Shambaugh suggests that you create a virtual board of directors of people who support you and help to develop you. This concept translates well to the research environment and into helping you maintain your resilience by having some key points of reference, help and support. Building a personal advisory board doesn't involve creating a committee, the members don't actually meet each other and people may not know that they are on your advisory board - only you know. Some people will occupy a seat on that board for a long time, others for shorter periods and some may fulfil more than one role.

Your advisory board might include:

- Someone who is hugely supportive of you personally and professionally and encourages you to take opportunities
- Someone who shares a working life with you and understands the joys and pressures of being at this stage in your working life
- Someone who has some accumulated wisdom that can help you to get things in perspective



More details from the author Rebecca Shambaugh on her concept can be found here:

[http://www.shambaughleadership.com/2014/05/20/not\\_confident\\_enough\\_reprogram\\_your\\_confidence\\_level/](http://www.shambaughleadership.com/2014/05/20/not_confident_enough_reprogram_your_confidence_level/)



## Who would be on your personal advisory board for resilience?

[illegible]

# Self-confidence

Knowing myself and knowing how I work  
and fit best with other people

This is the final page. Hopefully by now you've done some thinking, looked at a few of the links and the read around the most pertinent topics for you and your resilience.

- Which topics hit the mark as far as your own resilience management is concerned?
- What do you need to work (even) harder on to develop and maintain your resilience?
- Who or what can help you to be more resilient?

From the perspective of the authors we know that we have a handful of daily control and confidence priorities that help us manage our day-to-day resilience. Additionally, for more complex or situational priorities we need to mentally prepare in advance to generate the right mindset of challenge and commitment to be resilient. Being more self-aware doesn't make us perfect at any of this (far from it, in fact!). It does, however, makes us feel more able to more effectively manage our own resilience.

We are all a work in progress.



Dr Brenee Brown's TEDx talk on her research on vulnerability.  
[www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)



**What are you going to do next and keep doing to help you be more resilient on a day-to-day basis?**

[illegible]

# Local Support and Resources

## Chaplaincy

[www.dundee.ac.uk/chaplaincy](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/chaplaincy)

The services and resources of the Chaplaincy are available to all students and staff. The chaplaincy welcomes enquiries and participation from all faiths and none. The Chaplaincy is a relaxing and friendly place and hosts many social activities during term time. The Chaplaincy provides a multi-cultural and supportive environment, so "whoever you are and wherever you come from, you will always be welcome."

## Counselling

[www.dundee.ac.uk/student-services/counselling](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/student-services/counselling)

Staff and students can make use of the Counselling Service to explore a wide range of issues, often related to personal life, and to look at ways of managing their lives with greater effectiveness.

The availability of the University's Counselling Service is an invaluable confidential support in getting a new perspective on problems that are causing distress. Counsellors abide by the ethical framework and practice promoted by the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy.

Members of staff can also access counselling through **Recourse, Supporting Education Professionals**, a service which offers free telephone counselling to staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They can be contacted on 0808 802 0304.

## Early Dispute Resolution (edr)

[www.dundee.ac.uk/edr](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/edr)

The *edr* team has is a volunteer group of trained and nationally registered mediators. This service was created within the University to provide an alternative mediation route for dialogue and dispute solutions for members of staff and students. Since 2007, the service has facilitated many mediations for resolution of difficulties, for staff and students.

## Equality and Diversity

[www.dundee.ac.uk/equality-diversity](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/equality-diversity)

Any queries regarding the application of the Equality Act (2010) should be directed to the Head of Equality & Diversity.



## **Institute of Sport and Exercise**

[www.dundee.ac.uk/ise](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/ise)

The University is committed to providing exercise opportunities and positive activity experiences that allow you to boost your health, feel better and have fun. The University community is strengthened by creating a culture of activity, health and wellbeing.

## **Occupational Health Service**

[www.dundee.ac.uk/safety/occhealth](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/safety/occhealth)

Occupational Health provide an accessible but confidential service for all staff. Members of staff may be referred by HR, line managers, Safety Services, or by self-referral.

## **Organisational and Professional Development**

[www.dundee.ac.uk/opd](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/opd)

OPD offer a wide range of workshops around wellbeing and resilience, designed to promote and support a positive, healthy and safe environment. As individuals we can all take an active role in improving our own resilience by making the most of the available information, opportunities and toolkits.

## **Student Services**

[www.libguides.dundee.ac.uk/livesmart](http://www.libguides.dundee.ac.uk/livesmart)

Student Services have developed a LIVE Smart toolkit that signposts to information to help with wellbeing, healthy living, personal development and student life.

## **University Health Service**

[www.dundee.ac.uk/student-services/health](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/student-services/health)

The University Health Services offers experienced advice and guidance to students and staff for both mental ill health and physical illnesses.

It provides a professional, confidential and approachable service with a range of treatments and interventions tailored to individual needs, in conjunction with GPs or other health professionals as appropriate.

## **Where else to get help**

### **The Samaritans**

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)  
Helpline 116 123

### **Mind**

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0300 123 3393  
Text 86463

# Resilience in Research

## THE AUTHORS



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She has a background in leading and managing large teams and projects and working in academic, commercial and not-for-profit sectors.



**Dr Sandra Oza** manages the researcher and academic development programme that covers training and opportunities for postgraduate researchers, research staff and academics at the University of Dundee.

She works extensively with colleagues in Research Staff Associations, Careers Service, Centre of Entrepreneurship and Research Policy Governance on training and project based initiatives for researchers.

**Three, related, additional books you may be interested in reading:**

**Resilience: How to cope when everything around you keeps changing**  
*Liggy Webb*

**Deep Work**  
*Cal Newport*

**Better than Before**  
*Gretchen Rubin*

**Or if you are interested in podcasts:**

**Feel Better Live More**  
*Dr Chatterjee*

**Another great resource from the NHS, is the Five steps to mental wellbeing:**  
[www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing)

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