

THE SCHOLAR'S ASCENT

Failure Forensics Workbook

Turning Setbacks into Comebacks

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What Is Failure Forensics?

A Structured Methodology for Analyzing Setbacks

Failure Forensics is a structured methodology for analyzing setbacks, mistakes, and disappointments -- not to dwell on them, but to extract maximum learning. Just like forensic scientists investigate evidence to understand what happened, you'll investigate your failures to understand what went wrong, why, and how to prevent it from happening again. Every failure contains a lesson. This workbook helps you find it.

The Failure Forensics Framework

- 1 IDENTIFY:** What happened? State the facts without judgment or emotion.
- 2 INVESTIGATE:** Why did it happen? Use the 5 Whys technique to dig to the root cause.
- 3 INSIGHT:** What did you learn? What's the core lesson from this experience?
- 4 IMPROVE:** What will you do differently? Create a specific, actionable plan.
- 5 IMPLEMENT:** Execute your plan. Track progress. Celebrate growth.

The 5 Whys Technique

Drill Down to the Root Cause

The 5 Whys is a simple but powerful tool used by engineers and problem-solvers worldwide. You start with the problem and ask "Why?" five times, each answer becoming the basis for the next question.

Example: Failed a Math Test

Step	Analysis
Problem:	I got a 58% on my algebra test.
Why 1:	I didn't know how to solve the problems on the test.
Why 2:	I didn't study enough for the test.
Why 3:	I waited until the night before to start studying.
Why 4:	I didn't write the test date in my planner, so I forgot about it.
Why 5 (ROOT):	I don't have a system for tracking test dates and starting study plans early.
Solution:	Create a test calendar. When a test is announced, immediately schedule 3 study sessions starting 5 days before.

Root Cause Analysis Templates

5 Templates -- Investigate Each Setback Thoroughly

Root Cause Analysis #1 **Date:** _____

What happened?

Why 1:

Why 2:

Why 3:

Why 4:

Why 5 (Root):

My Action Plan:

Root Cause Analysis #2 **Date:** _____

What happened?

Why 1:

Why 2:

Why 3:

Why 4:

Why 5 (Root):

My Action Plan:

Root Cause Analysis #3 Date: _____

What happened?

Why 1:

Why 2:

Why 3:

Why 4:

Why 5 (Root):

My Action Plan:

Improvement Plan

Improvement Plan Framework

Area of Improvement:

Current State (where am I now?):

Desired State (where do I want to be?):

3 Specific Actions I Will Take:

1.

2.

3.

Timeline:

How I'll know I've improved:

Who will hold me accountable?

Reflection Prompts

1. "What did this experience teach me about myself that I didn't know before?"
2. "If I could go back and change one decision, which would it be and why?"
3. "Who can I talk to about this, and what specifically do I need from them?"
4. "What skills do I need to develop to prevent this from happening again?"
5. "How would I advise a friend who experienced this same setback?"
6. "What part of this was within my control, and what wasn't?"

7. "In six months, how will I look back on this moment?"

8. "What's the smallest next step I can take right now to move forward?"

Bounce-Back Stories & 30-Day Challenge

Bounce-Back Success Stories

Scenario	The Setback	The Bounce-Back
The Failed Test	Got a D on a biology exam after studying for only one night.	Created a study schedule, formed a study group, raised grade to a B+ by semester end.
The Rejection	Didn't make the varsity basketball team as a sophomore.	Trained every day, improved conditioning, made the team junior year and became a starter.
The Social Mistake	Said something hurtful to a close friend and damaged the relationship.	Wrote a sincere apology, learned about emotional intelligence, became a more empathetic communicator.
The Missed Deadline	Forgot a major project deadline and received a zero.	Built a planning system, never missed another deadline, and helped classmates organize too.

30-Day Resilience Challenge

Day	Challenge	Done
1	Write down a past failure and one lesson you learned from it.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Ask someone you admire about their biggest failure. What did they learn?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Try something new that you might not be good at. Embrace the awkwardness.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Replace "I can't" with "I can't yet" every time you catch yourself saying it.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Write a letter of encouragement to your future self for when times get tough.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Identify one area where you avoid challenges. Take a small step into it today.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Complete your first Root Cause Analysis on a recent setback.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Practice positive self-talk for the entire day. Catch every negative thought.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Help someone else through a challenge they're facing.	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Sit with discomfort for 5 minutes without distracting yourself (no phone).	<input type="checkbox"/>

11-15	Practice a hard skill for 15 minutes daily (math problems, instrument, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>
16-20	Ask for feedback from a teacher or mentor. Listen without defending.	<input type="checkbox"/>
21-25	Journal daily: "Today's challenge was ___ and I handled it by ___."	<input type="checkbox"/>
26-29	Tackle your hardest task FIRST each day (eat the frog!).	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	Write your personal resilience manifesto. Who are you becoming?	<input type="checkbox"/>

Fail Forward, Rise Higher

Every setback is a setup for a comeback. The students who succeed aren't the ones who never fail - they're the ones who learn from every failure and keep moving forward. You now have the tools. Use them.

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