

Generic lesson plan for a workshop to help students/learners adapt to higher level studies and build adaptability and coping strategies: 'How to Succeed on the [insert your programme name here ('the Programme')]'.

How to use this resource

This is a generic (subject agnostic) lesson plan for a workshop I designed to improve learners' adaptability and coping strategies and set them up for success in their studies.

It is based on an induction session I designed and implemented for a level 7 professional law programme. The two cohorts (approximately 130 students) who attended this workshop had 40% fewer fails, a significant rise in distinctions and approximately 50% fewer deferrals compared to two earlier cohorts who did not have the benefit of the workshop.

This document is a rough guide as to what I did in that successful session, so that you can adapt it for any type of learning. It can be done face-to-face or online, though face-to-face can work better when encouraging students to talk about setbacks. Alternatively, they may prefer the anonymity of online!

Materials: Handout/slide with examples of assessment questions (relevant to your programme).
Slides (generic slides with suggestions are included in the 'Feeling Failure' collection on the National Teaching Repository).
White boards or flip chart paper or shared online doc (and pens, if needed).

Timings: The session lasts approximately 2 hours but can be tailored to be longer or shorter, as you wish. The suggested timings are only suggestions, usually the sections took less time than indicated in the plan by 1 to 3 minutes.

Content: The first hour is to establish student buy-in by concentrating on study techniques, the next hour is then dedicated to support recovery from setbacks and encourage resilience and adaptability. **Please consider whether you need to give students a trigger warning for this session, around discussing difficult topics such as failure and set backs.**

Learners/Students: I taught this workshop to classes of 20 in 2 hours, my colleague from Lancaster University scaled up and taught it to 483 students in one hour!

Generic lesson plan: 'How to Succeed on the [insert your programme name here ('the Programme')]'.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify previously successful academic strategies
2. Consider what academic strategies will lead to success on the Programme
3. Identify attitudes/beliefs to help you succeed generally
4. Identify how these attitudes/beliefs will also help you succeed on the Programme

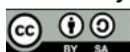
Rough timings	Exercise	Guidance
8-10 mins	Introduction and Learning Objectives (lecturer)	<p>Lecturer/s introduce themselves.</p> <p>Congratulate students on getting this far in their academic journeys.</p> <p>Stress that the purpose of the session is to help students to succeed in the Programme by sharing some best practice ideas about how to succeed and by spending a little time thinking about how to get things back on track if there are any setbacks.</p> <p>Stress that this is 'just in case', we are not expecting them to have setbacks. However, we know that if students have allowed for the possibility of setbacks, they recover more quickly should any occur.</p> <p>If your group is an appropriate size, get students to introduce themselves – name, why doing Programme, relevant experience, aspirations...making it ok to say 'don't know yet' for aspirations. It also helps to know roughly who you have in the room so you can tailor messages appropriately.</p> <p>If you have a large group, they can introduce themselves to each other in pairs.</p>
10 mins	Previous academic experience exercise – how did you succeed to get here?	<p>Explain to students that their previous academic experience is valuable and we're going to use it to highlight differences and similarities with what they'll need to do to succeed on the Programme.</p> <p>Split students into groups – no more than 6 in a group.</p> <p>Ask them to discuss with each other how they have succeeded in their academic studies so far – ask them about the next two levels down (e.g. 'A' levels and GCSEs or Undergrad and 'A' levels).</p> <p>Ask them to write up any key techniques or ideas on the WB/flipchart paper etc.</p> <p>Walk the groups, encouraging them and asking for further details when necessary.</p> <p>Likely to get things like 'revise' – make them break it down – exactly what did they do?</p> <p>Also, encourage honesty. Are there any last-minute crammers? Question spotters? People who just write out and re-write the notes?</p> <p>If you have students who were studying during COVID, then their experiences may be atypical (e.g. all open book) but work with what you have 😊.</p>



5 mins	Discussion/Summary	Pull together the key techniques from the students' work and discuss/invite student commentary.
10 mins	Introduction to types of Programme assessments	Lecturer explains how programme may be different from students' previous academic experience and introduces the types of assessments students will face on the Programme. Can also explain why those assessment types are used (if known e.g. authentic assessment etc.). E.g. whole content is examinable, it is closed/open book, knowledge heavy, single best answer MCQs etc.
10 mins	Assessment taster/s	Students attempt some self-contained cut down assessment tasters. They can either try them all, or different groups can try different ones and report back. It is important that the questions are self-contained, so may need to include subject specific definitions etc. that students do not know yet. E.g., I gave students definitions of different types of legal privilege and some documents and asked them to work out if any privilege would apply to the documents. Lecturer circulates and intervenes as appropriate.
5 mins	Discussion of taster answers	Stress that the Programme isn't easy, we expect students to find it hard at times. Discuss answers, ideally bringing out how the assessment requirements may be different to students' previous experiences.
10 mins	Student group work – do they need to change their previous successful techniques? If so, how? Is there anything they are going to want to keep?	If you are also using this to help students get to know each other, you can get them to change groups before this exercise. Give students time in their groups to think about whether they need to change their previous successful techniques for this new academic challenge of the Programme, given what the lecturer has told them about how different it is and their assessment taster experience. Get students to write on WBs/Flipchart paper/Shared work document by crossing out things they are going to change and writing in new things going to do (ideally in a different colour). E.g., students may realise the Programme is very knowledge heavy and they will not have time to write out the textbook/notes again and again or just to cram at the end of a module. What will they do instead?
5 mins	Wrap up/discussion	Lecturer pulls together students' ideas, bestowing lots of praise and making sure students understand the best practice approach to studying and assessment on the Programme (ideally, students have worked this out for themselves already, with lecturer facilitating). Tell students now covered LO 1&2. Many students have not worked with LOs before, so this is also to show them how to do that.
Total: 60 mins	This usually takes less time, but it is highly dependent on the students. If necessary, cut exercises and discussions short to ensure time for the important second half.	
IF YOU HAVE A CHANCE, A QUICK BREAK HERE IS GOOD		
5 mins	Lecturer introduction	Welcome students back, remind them of L.O. 3&4. Introduce them to the general employer requirements for resilience and adaptability – ideally pull some famous people/business leader quotes that will appeal to your



		<p>students. For law, I pulled what firms and chambers say they are looking for in their employees and also the 'O' shaped Lawyer principles can be helpful. Just pick a few illustrative principles though, don't terrify students with the whole 'O' Shaped list, just let them know it exists. Point out that behaviours and attitudes are transferable, so not just about [their subject] or their studies and make clear that no-one is the finished product – we all always have something we can work on and they are at the start of their journeys so are not expected to be great at any of this yet! Be very reassuring.</p> <p>Inform the students that they will meet various challenges that they will need to overcome in their careers, and that they will need to continue learning and adapting throughout their careers. The most successful (legal) professionals continuously look for ways to improve. Part of this is acknowledging when things have not gone as well as you would have liked. A key skill for professional growth is acknowledging mistakes and failures and learning (if possible) from these experiences to grow and improve. Successful (legal) professionals also rise to challenges, and the best employees will try new things, even if they are not sure they are going to succeed. Lastly, it is vital as a new recruit, and throughout your career, to know when you need to ask for help. You need to be able to accurately assess your own limits and seek help accordingly.</p> <p>If you have any war stories about when it all went horribly wrong because a new recruit didn't ask for help, share them. The more awful the better – but no names, including business names, to protect the guilty/innocent.</p> <p>Link this message to the process of learning on the Programme, and the importance of giving things a go, participating in group work etc. If appropriate, emphasise that this is their chance to build on and try out helpful behaviours and attitudes in a safe space so they can hit the ground running as (legal) professionals.</p> <p>WARNING: be aware of who you have in the room – if they've been working for years this message may not go over well unless you change it appropriately.</p>
6 mins	Student group work	<p>Ask students to work in groups (again, you can ask them to change groups, so they meet more of their cohort). They should discuss and produce a list of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that will help them in their careers and also to succeed on the programme. These can be written up on WB/Flipchart paper etc. Stress there are no right or wrong answers – you really want to know what they think. Watch for them just pulling the O shaped list if law students – if so, remark on it and ask them to pick the top 5 and be prepared to explain why these are the most important.</p>



		<p>Circulate and help as necessary. Here are some ideas they may mention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be professional and courteous • Treat everyone with respect • Take on new challenges • Accurately assess your abilities • Ask for help when required • Take responsibility for mistakes • Respond well to feedback and use it to improve • Actively seek feedback • Ask if not clear on instructions • Be keen to learn • Communicate clearly • Be organised • Good time management • Prioritize appropriately • Engage with the work and your colleagues • Find enjoyment in your work
4 mins	Student group work	Ask some groups to identify their top 5 and be prepared to defend their decision
5 minutes	Lecturer led discussion about top 5	<p>Facilitate a discussion about the top 5 and why the students picked those ones If possible, bring out the idea of transferability and try and steer students away from things like time management to the more metacognitive suggestions like 'keen to learn' and 'accurate self assessment'.</p> <p>Sprinkle praise like confetti!</p>
10 mins (but probably less)	Lecturer introduces top 5 going to explore in session	<p>Link each of top five with why important to success on Programme and also in career/life. If you can contribute your own stories here to illustrate, please do.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be willing to try new things <i>This is the essence of learning – they are going to be asked to go beyond their comfort zone and they need to be able to give things a go - even if they are scared they are not going to be good at whatever it is...</i> 2. Stick with hard tasks and not give up [Do not let setbacks prevent them accomplishing their goals] <i>Absolutely vital in a professional. You will face setbacks, that is life. You will also make mistakes. It's how you deal with them that counts.</i> 3. Take ownership of mistakes – learn from them if possible. Sometimes it isn't possible, and a mistake is just a mistake e.g. stuck on a train so couldn't get to exam. <i>You will face setbacks. How you respond to this and any feedback you are given will be key to how your colleagues see you and how successful you are in your career.</i> 4. Have confidence in themselves as professionals and their ability to learn <i>You need to have a realistic appraisal of your strengths and weaknesses – so you know when to ask for help. You also need to believe that you can learn and improve. You will find some things difficult, but if you avoid difficult things, you do not progress.</i>



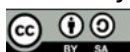
		<p>[Dependent on time/mood of group, you may want to tell students about Binet/IQ test here or Dweck's work – see end of this document].</p> <p>5. Seek to continually improve (reflective learning) <i>This is how you get better at whatever it is you do – you need to examine what you do and how you are doing it to work out how to do it better. Part of reflective learning and accurate self-appraisal is the ability to recognize when you need to ask for more information/help. Knowing your limits is key, most dreadful mistakes I have seen in practice are because a trainee didn't want me to think they were not intelligent so didn't ask when they should have done!</i></p>
10 mins	Whole group Q&A	<p>Tell students going to think about unhelpful behaviours now – ask for any suggestions of common behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that they think will be unhelpful for success on the Programme or later on in career/life. Make it general, not related to any student. Stress that the student is best placed to know how they can succeed as different things work for different people.</p> <p>Lecturer should highlight these 5, addressing any others in brief but explaining not concentrating on them in this session. Please explain that we're not attributing these behaviours to any individual, they are general things we see that impede learning. Depending on your group you may want to soften these messages.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'head in the sand'- not learning, adapting or in some cases, even recognizing difficulties – includes not taking advice/listening to experts trying to help (e.g. lecturers) 2. 'Prioritizing appearances over learning' – not asking questions or not contributing/trying things (e.g. in class or for example, mock assessment) because worried about getting things wrong or what other people's impressions will be. 3. 'Not taking responsibility' – expecting lecturers to 'fix it' and tell them what to do, rather than looking for solutions themselves. Failing to adapt to independent learning. <p>1-3 also usually result in not asking for help when it is needed.</p> <p>4. 'Passive learning' – not doing practice questions, not using the VLE resources – staring at pages of notes while thinking about what is for dinner</p> <p>5. 'Fear of failure' – spend some time on this as it introduces the next activity.</p> <p>Explain that mistakes are normal, rarely irredeemable, and what is important is how you handle them. Students have probably seen some of the videos of famous people talking about failure and then amazing success – might be worth asking them if you have time or watch a few yourself and mention them. You'll probably get a couple of inspirational stories if you ask students and that's great but do follow up with the point that inspiration is fantastic, but not all failures lead to amazing success. Some failures</p>



		<p>there is nothing to learn, it's just a thing that happened. And that is ok too!</p> <p>However, an important part of having the right attitude is to acknowledge that they are not going to get everything right 100% of the time and if possible, to learn from when they get things wrong, because this is how we learn and improve. Success is a process, which starts with getting things wrong/not perfect, learning from that and improving. The most successful (legal) professionals continually go through this process. This process is often associated with resilience, and resilience is often associated with success. Tell students now going to take couple minutes think about resilience.</p>
5 mins	Student pair work	Students come up with their definition of and example of resilience
5 mins	Lecturer led discussion	<p>Take a few definitions and examples and facilitate discussion. Key points to get across to students – resilience isn't something that happens in a vacuum – nor does it mean coping with everything by yourself (a surprising number of students think this).</p> <p>Rather, it is adapting as well as possible in adverse circumstances - doing the best you can from the place you are in, using all sources of help at your disposal. This may mean that resilience looks like taking time out rather than pushing forward, depending on your circumstances. This 10 minutes on resilience is important as a lot of students do not ask for help as they think it makes them not resilient. Reframing resilience as 'doing the best you can in the face of adverse circumstances' gives them freedom to seek help and to make the right decisions for them, rather than pushing on with their studies regardless.</p> <p>Wrap up discussion by telling students that one of the best ways to build resilience is to think in advance of strategies to use if something does go wrong – then if it happens, rather than slipping into a cycle of despair and giving up you can deploy the strategies. They are now going to work together to come up with some strategies to use if things get difficult – you hope they never ever need to use them, and not expecting them to have to, it is just in case.</p> <p>Reassure them lots, (if true) that most students are very successful on the Programme (if you have helpful stats, use them).</p>
6 mins	Student pair work	<p>Ask students to pair up and talk to each other about when something didn't go how they wanted/expected and what they did to fix it. Flag for them that this is a common assessment day /interview question used to test applicants' attitudes to failure and their resilience, because businesses want employees who can react appropriately and sort out problems. Tell them that we aren't after what happened, but what they did to remedy the situation.</p> <p>If they have never had to remedy a situation before, ask them to imagine that things are not going to plan on the Programme and to come up with some steps they could take to get things back on track. Stress the situation doesn't matter, but unless they have a specific situation</p>



		<p>they want to speak about, try and pick something from their studies. To allay any alarm, stress that they don't need to tell anyone the specifics of any situation, just to explain in broad brush strokes and then be specific about the steps they took.</p>
10 mins	Student group work	<p>Join up 3 or 4 pairs to make larger groups. Ask the groups to discuss the strategies they came up with – some will be situation specific, rather than those ask them to come up with and write up on WB/flipchart paper general steps they could take to get themselves back on track after any setback. I tell them that any type of setback could have happened to me, and I should be able to work through their steps, applying them to my situation, to get back to where I want to be.</p> <p>Circulate and give praise for any sensible suggestions. Stress that there is no 'right or wrong' here, we're just building up a bank of strategies and ideas. If they are struggling to get started, ask them what the first thing they will do when something hasn't gone to plan.</p> <p>A: work out what went wrong. Q: how will they do that? A: examine behavior, examine own attitudes, check for circumstances out of their control; seek information/help from experts Q: then what? A: Make a plan to change behaviours and/or attitudes Q: Then what? A: Get on with it!</p> <p>Make sure you draw out the emotional response issues when one hits a setback – ask students how they would feel hitting a setback and if that might change their behaviour. They'll quickly get to 'they'll be upset so need to deal with that before taking any further active steps'.</p>
10 mins	Lecturer led discussion	<p>Most student groups will have ended up with a general-purpose disaster recovery plan (I include my suggestion for this on the slides).</p> <p>Get groups to apply other group's plans to some different possible scenarios – use specific examples.</p> <p>When talking about seeking sources of help it can be very helpful to remind students about any applicable University/Institution services. Ideally have a handout of sources of help, or a website to which you can direct students.</p> <p>Here are a couple of examples to get students to test their plans on, but feel free to use your own.</p> <p>Student didn't do as expected in exams, because:</p> <p>1. Unexpected illness/life event Not something student could control. Immediate action – mitigating circumstances/deferral/IOS</p>



		<p>Examine your response – is it helpful? If not, what do you need to do to put yourself in best place (behaviours and attitudes) to succeed?</p> <p>Resources – tutors, GP, friends for support, University/Institution support services</p> <p>Change behaviour/attitudes: Believe you can do it. Prepare appropriately for next sit. If necessary and appropriate, take time out (IOS).</p> <p>2. Panicked during exam and information left head</p> <p>What caused panic?</p> <p>Examine your response - how to prevent/minimize panic next time?</p> <p>Resources – tutors, VLE, GP, friends, University/Institutional services</p> <p>Change behaviour/attitudes: ensure fully prepared. Practice in exam conditions with permitted materials to get used to exam situation. Have confidence. Ask for help if required.</p> <p>3. Did not keep up with studies and tried to cram last minute</p> <p>4. Did not ask for help when recognized they were struggling</p> <p>5. Failed to adapt to Programme style questions</p>
4 minutes	Lecturer wrap up	<p>Tell students now covered LO 3&4 and remind them of them. Remind them of how the Programme may differ from their previous experiences and also remind them of sources of University/Institution support available, as well as encouraging them to form a strong community of practice and support each other.</p> <p>Scatter praise everywhere, thank them for their attention and contributions.</p>
5-10 mins	Lecturer available	<p>I usually stay behind for a few minutes as sometimes shy students want to talk to me but not in front of a full class.</p>

Appendix

BINET and IQ test. Key points: IQ is malleable and is affected by a variety of different influences – it is not a fixed point as it is often perceived. Some light reading on it is here: <https://www.verywellmind.com/history-of-intelligence-testing-2795581>

Dweck's work on mindset. This is relatively well known in education circles, especially the concept of growth mindset so a lot of students may have heard of it. Unfortunately, they may have experienced 'false growth mindset' - where Dweck's theories are presented as 'you can achieve anything if you work hard enough' which we all know isn't true.

<https://fs.blog/carol-dweck-mindset/#:~:text=Dweck's%20work%20shows%20the%20power,us%20from%20fulfilling%20our%20potential.>

