Are You a Loser?

IF YOU ARE, GREAT. BECAUSE STUDIES SHOW THAT TO BE A SUCCESS, FIRST YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO FAIL.

complete the proverb

"IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, YOU'LL BE RICH AND FAMOUS!"

YESSS! I GOT IT WRONG!!

What is the secret to success? Loads of money? Good luck? Great teeth?

Nope. Cash, luck, and a nice smile can't hurt, but many experts agree that what successful people have in common is this: They were once failures.

Take George Washington, who lost two huge battles and was nearly fired before leading troops to victory in the Revolutionary War and becoming America's first President. Then there's Steve Jobs, who developed a slew of failed products—and even got canned from Apple—before returning to change the world with the iPod, iPhone, and iPad.

The list of famous failures goes on: Pop icon Katy Perry was dropped by three different record labels. Nobel Prize winner Albert Einstein was expelled from school. Basketball star Jeremy Lin spent his early career sitting on the bench. Many of the world's most successful people were once losers. They probably felt humiliated, lost, and hopeless. Eventually, though, they figured out how to move forward. And that is the key to using failure to your advantage: the ability to dust yourself off and try again. And again. And again.

This is called resilience, and it's what can turn losers into winners. In fact, experts say that in terms of future success, resilience can be more important than brains or talent.
Utterly Humiliated

Seventeen-year-old Miranda, of Williamsburg, Virginia, still cringes when recalling her early experiences with the martial art tae kwon do. She started when she was 7, and for years, she lost every competition she entered.

"It was devastating," Miranda says. Dejected, she decided to quit. But at her father's urging, she reluctantly agreed to give it one more try. She worked harder and slowly started to improve. True, she never became the champion she'd dreamed of becoming, but she stuck with it long enough to earn her black belt by age 12.

"I could easily have said, 'I'm a failure, I should never have tried,'" Miranda recalls. "But I'm really proud that I kept at it."

The experience taught her that she could fail—and feel utterly humiliated and miserable—and still go on to succeed.

Go Ahead, Mess Up!

It's no wonder many experts believe every kid and teen should experience failure. That's right. They WANT you to mess up. Learning to cope with failure at a young age will help you handle bigger challenges later in life.

Miranda would agree. Today, she's finally winning medals—in Irish step dancing. When she first started, she was bad at that too. But her experience in tae kwon do had built up her emotional strength. So she didn't see her mistakes as failures, but as a part of the process of achieving success.

Miranda is just one person in a long line of people to figure that out. One of history's proudest failures was inventor Thomas Edison. According to legend, the first 1,000 times that Edison tried to create a light bulb, his invention didn't work. So he kept experimenting until he finally found a way to build one that did.

"I didn't fail 1,000 times," Edison later said. "The light bulb was invented with 1,000 steps!"

Good Ol' Hard Work

So what about you? Are you a successful failure? Say you do poorly on a math test. Do you think, "Oh, my teacher just hates me" or "Oh, I'm just bad at math"? People who don't know how to fail tend to blame others for their mistakes or give up without trying. They might feel like the whole world is against them. Often, they are insecure. After all, it takes a lot of confidence to admit your own shortcomings.

Part of being successful means having the courage to take a good, hard look at yourself and identify ways to do better next time. Well, that and a bit of patience. Sometimes it takes a while to get where you want to go.

Just look at the New York Knicks' breakout star, Jeremy Lin. A few months ago, no one had even heard of him. For years, he was overlooked by coaches. Once, he was even called "the weakest player on the team." When he finally got a chance to play, he surprised everyone. He was fantastic, unstoppable.

And now he's one of the most promising young athletes in pro basketball.

How did he do it? Lin spent hundreds of hours with coaches and trainers. He arrived at practice hours before his teammates to do extra drills. In other words, he relied on good, old-fashioned hard work and perseverance.

So next time you fail a test, strike out at bat, or sing off-key, cheer up. With the right attitude, you could be onto something truly great.
What Do You Think?
What does it take to be a successful failure?
Go back to the article and identify good and bad ways to deal with failure. Write them on the lines below.

**DOs**  
**HOW TO SUCCEED AT FAILING**

1. Admit your own shortcomings and find ways to improve.

2.

3.

**DON'Ts**  
**HOW TO FAIL AT FAILING**

1.

2.

3.

EXAMINE THE LIST OF DOs AND DON'Ts, THEN TAKE A LOOK AT YOURSELF. Are you a successful failure? State your conclusion in one sentence below. This can become a thesis statement for an essay on this topic.

TAKE THIS ACTIVITY FURTHER! WRITE AN ESSAY USING OUR SCOPE TEMPLATE.

GET THIS ACTIVITY ONLINE
Write a Reflective Essay

**Directions:** Read "Are You a Loser?" on pages 16-18 of the April 2, 2012, issue of Scope. Fill in the chart on page 18. Then follow the steps below to write an essay answering the question "Are you a successful failure?"

### STEP 1: CONSIDER THE ARGUMENTS

When you write a reflective essay, you write about yourself—your personal experiences and emotions. Sometimes it is helpful, or even necessary, to do some reading before you start writing. You might read to gather information about your topic, to find out what other people have said about the topic, or to get ideas about what types of experiences to write about.

For this reflective essay, you can use the article "Are You a Loser?" to identify good, productive ways of dealing with failure as well as bad, unproductive ways of dealing with failure. We got you started.

**PRODUCTIVE WAYS OF DEALING WITH FAILURE**

- Don't quit just because you fail; keep at whatever it is you are working on.

**UNPRODUCTIVE WAYS OF DEALING WITH FAILURE**
**STEP 2: BRAINSTORM**

It's time to start reflecting. Below, take notes on your own experiences with failure. Use what you wrote in Step 1 for inspiration, and include anything else that helps answer the question of how you react to failure. You can include single words or even simple sketches—the idea is to get all of your thoughts and emotions onto the page. Cluster your notes around the category headings provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Experiences</th>
<th>Facts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stories, memories ... specific experiences when I have failed at something</td>
<td>what experts say about failure and other facts about failure that are not related to me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>my feelings about failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STEP 3: CRAFT YOUR THESIS

It's time to decide: Are you a successful failure? In other words, do you use failure to your advantage, or do you let it get in your way? Whatever you conclude, your thesis should be a clear, strong statement of that conclusion—your central idea. The thesis is where you tell the reader what your essay is going to be about.

Your thesis:


STEP 4: WRITE YOUR HOOK

The beginning of your essay is called the hook because it "hooks" your readers' attention. The hook should relate to the topic of your essay, but it can take many forms. It can be an anecdote (a very short story), a fact, a quote, or a rhetorical question (a question to which you don't expect an answer). Here are three ideas for hooks that could work for this topic. Choose one of the ideas below or use your own idea and write a hook on the lines provided (1-3 sentences).

1. ANECDOTE: Choose one of the experiences you thought of during Step 2. Describe that experience briefly, using sensory details to help the reader imagine himself or herself in your place.

2. SURPRISING FACT: Find a fact that will raise your readers' eyebrows. Several surprising facts are included in the article. You can also do some research to find a surprising fact that is not included in the article.

3. QUOTE: Quote a statement from "Are You a Loser?" or another magazine or newspaper article about failure. Then explain how that statement applies to you.

Your hook:


STEP 5: START WRITING

Now that you have the key ingredients for your essay, you are ready to start writing. On the next page, you'll find guidelines for how to organize your ingredients, as well as hints about what else you'll need to add.
**Directions:** Follow the guidelines below to write a strong reflective essay on whether you are a successful failure. You will use what you wrote on the first three pages of this activity.

### INTRODUCTION

Open with your hook from Step 4.

Write a transition sentence that relates your hook to your thesis.

(See Scope's handout "Great Transitions" for some ways to link your ideas.)

Finish with your thesis from Step 3.

### BODY PARAGRAPHS

Here's where you write out the information you brainstormed in Step 2. You don't need to include every single thing you wrote down; rather, review your notes and decide what your reader will find most interesting and what most strongly supports your central idea. Then think about the best way to arrange your information—how you can group your ideas in a way that makes sense. For example, if you have two experiences of quitting an activity because you didn't reach the goal you'd set for yourself—or two experiences where you failed but picked yourself up and tried again—it probably makes sense to put them in the same paragraph.

Use 2-3 sentences to remind your readers of your main points.

Finish with a strong final sentence. Looking for an idea? Try referring to your hook, finding a quote, or stating how you intend to deal with failure in the future.

### CONCLUSION

Use Scope's "Reflective-Essay Checklist" to evaluate and edit what you have written. Make any necessary changes and write a second draft.
Great Transitions

Transitions are like bridges between your ideas—they help your readers move from one idea to the next. Here are some transition words and phrases you may wish to use in your essay. Keep in mind that they can be used at the beginning of a sentence or within a sentence.

If you are adding information or showing similarity between ideas:
- additionally
- besides
- in addition
- also
- so too
- likewise
- as well as
- another
- furthermore
- first of all/secondly/thirdly
- to begin with
- finally

If you are showing that one idea is different from another:
- however
- yet
- but
- even though
- despite
- although
- in contrast
- still
- in spite of
- on the one hand/on the other hand
- some people say/other people say
- regardless

If you are showing that something is an example of what you just stated:
- for example
- to illustrate
- for instance
- namely
- this can be seen
- specifically

If you want to show cause and effect:
- as a result
- it follows that
- consequently
- therefore
- so
- eventually

If you want to add emphasis:
- in fact
- of course
- truly
- even
- indeed
Reflective-Essay Checklist

Directions: Use this guide to check your own essay, or exchange papers with a classmate and use the list to check each other's essays. In the margins of the essay you are checking, make notes about anything that needs to be revised.

Introduction
- Does the first sentence grab readers' attention?
- Does the first paragraph provide a general overview of the essay's topic?
- Does the first paragraph include a thesis statement that strongly and clearly states your central idea? Does the thesis clue readers in as to what the essay is going to be about?

Body Paragraphs
- Do they contain personal experiences that relate to your thesis?
- Do they describe your emotions related to the topic?
- Do they contain facts that support your thesis?
- Is the information arranged in a way that makes sense, with similar experiences or ideas grouped together?

Conclusion
- Does the last paragraph remind readers of the main points of the essay, without going into too much detail and repeating everything readers just read?
- Is the conclusion free of new information (such as another experience)?
- Does the last sentence leave readers with a strong final impression?

General
- Does one idea flow smoothly into the next?
- Do the sentence structures and lengths vary?
- Does every sentence relate to the thesis?
- Does everything make sense?
- Is the essay honest? Does it truly reflect you?
- Are the grammar, punctuation, and spelling correct?