

Attitude Activity 8: Worst Case Scenarios

Writer and entrepreneur Tim Ferriss openly admits that, like many of us, he feels the pressure when there's lots on the line and he can't stop imagining disaster ahead. The activity that follows is based on a process suggested by Ferriss; a process that can help us all tackle and tame our fears. (The original is at Tim's blog: <https://tim.blog/2017/05/15/fear-setting/>)

The thinking behind it is this: we often write down our goals and record plans for achieving them... but we never record our fears.

Instead, our fears stay in our minds, where they get distorted and exaggerated. We carry them around with us every day, creating worst-case scenarios and fretting constantly, imagining *what if*...

- we fail an important test, exam or portfolio submission
- we drop a grade and can't get into our first choice university
- we can't motivate ourselves and end up doing no work between now and the end of term
- we have to listen to teachers making critical comments at parents evening

Fears like these are not new. Seneca the Younger, a Roman philosopher living over 2000 years ago, observed that "we suffer more in imagination than in reality."

So rather than carrying our fears around every day, suffering as we imagine them all coming true, we could instead get them out of our heads and onto paper. That way we can put our worst case scenarios under a microscope and objectively study them. Here's how Ferriss suggests doing it.

1. First, **define** your worst case scenario. Objectively write it down without emotional language; just a statement of fact at the top of the table (*"I miss the grades needed for my chosen degree course"* not *"my grades are terrible and everything's a disaster."*)
2. Underneath in the **prevent** column, record all the things you could do to either (i) prevent or (ii) lower the likelihood of the fear coming true. Keep your actions small and realistic.
3. In the **repair** column, list all the actions you could take to fix things if the worst case scenario happened. Again, keep them realistic and achievable.
4. Finally, in the **upside** column, record the potentially good things that might happen as a result of your worst case scenario coming true. Lessons you learn, skills you develop, relationships that are strengthened, new opportunities that might arise.

Check out our example:

Define: <i>I get a C in Biology, miss my offer and get rejected from Bristol University</i>		
Prevent: <i>I could take the following achievable actions to lower the likelihood of my worst case scenario coming true...</i>	Repair: <i>If my worst case scenario happened, I could take the following actions to try and partially fix things...</i>	Upside: <i>The potential positives that might arise if my worst case scenario happened are...</i>
<i>I could meet with another student who's really good at the bits of the course I can't do</i> <i>I could ask my teacher for a one-to-one on the hard sections of the course</i>	<i>I could contact the university and ask to be re-considered if a student with an offer decides not to take it up</i> <i>I could go through clearing</i>	<i>I might end up at another university and really enjoy the course there</i> <i>I might end up much more resilient because I've worked harder and solved problems</i>

<p>I could make small adjustments to my revision to give me more time on Biology</p> <p>I could do more past papers, focussing on the hard questions</p>	<p>I could start a closely-related course, then ask to be transferred onto Biology after the first year</p> <p>I could start a similar course with a slightly lower entry requirement</p>	<p>I might meet a really inspiring professor at another university</p> <p>My experience might mean I'm well-placed to help others</p>
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Now it's your turn:

Define:		
Prevent: <i>I could take the following achievable actions to lower the likelihood of my worst case scenario coming true...</i>	Repair: <i>If my worst case scenario happened, I could take the following actions to try and partially fix things...</i>	Upside: <i>The potential positives that might arise if my worst case scenario happened are...</i>

Hopefully this activity will help you get a clearer sense of perspective when everything feels overwhelming.

It pays back the time you put into it by calming your mind and giving you a better quality of life. Try it... what's the worst that could happen?