



# SO, HOW DID IT GO?

By now, you have experienced your first quarter at UCT. You've seen and experienced what UCT is like. At breakneck speed, you've covered LOTS of content and attended many tuts and pracs, on top of adjusting to the UCT environment. You have written your first university tests. Some subjects may have gone well. Others not. Maybe you used to get 90% at high school, but now you are getting 50%. Your courses may not have been as you had expected.

After a week's break, you may be asking yourself: what am I doing here at UCT? Whatever happened in the first quarter, now is a good time to do some metacognition, i.e. pause and think about what you did (in the first quarter) and what you want to do (in the second quarter and going forward). By realigning yourself with your goals and values, you can be the best version of yourself for the rest of the year. In this chapter, we share some useful metacognition tools. But first, let's take a moment to find the gold.

## FIND THE GOLD

In the first quarter, there were things you did well. There were also things you could have done differently, and times when you doubted yourself. Mistakes, doubts and challenges are not bad things. They just need to be seen in a different light. So let's explore how to do that.



There is a Japanese art form called *kintsugi*. When a pottery object like a teacup or bowl is broken, the broken pieces are re-joined together with glue containing gold powder (the *kin* in *kintsugi* means gold). The Japanese belief is that, by being repaired in this way, the object becomes more beautiful than before it was broken. The repaired cracks become golden traces that enhance the beauty of the pottery.

Figure 1: Illustration of a kintsugi vase



As with *kintsugi*, your past mistakes can become beautiful gold traces in you, if you use them as opportunities to learn and grow. In this way, your past mistakes will not define you, but instead become part of your resilience, producing beautiful traces that make you a hero.



A hero is someone who makes mistakes (because they are human), but most importantly learns from these mistakes and channels them into something anyone can learn from. A hero is someone who has weaknesses, but does not allow those to overshadow their strength.

Bathabile Ndzendze



Now that you see the potential for gold in your mistakes, maybe you'll find it easier to forgive yourself for those past mistakes. In fact, forgiving yourself is essential for turning cracks into gold! Maybe you are someone who forgives others, in which case, turn that kindness back onto yourself. Forgive yourself for the things you could have done differently, for the times when you doubted yourself, and for missed opportunities. Whatever has happened is in the past.

Note that forgiving yourself does not mean 'just forget about it and move on' or 'just get over it'. You want to learn from your mistakes so that you can turn them into golden strengths. This way you can move on with those valuable lessons to be a TOUGHER and more beautiful person (like *kintsugi*) towards a deserving future.

The question is HOW? How do you turn cracks into gold? How can you learn from your mistakes? The answer is: by using metacognitive tools. Metacognition means 'cognition about cognition' - it's the process of thinking about your own thinking. In the rest of this chapter, we provide some practical tools for doing this.

But first Thandiwe (not her real name) reflects on her past choices and the lessons she learnt from them, demonstrating beautifully how your 'cracks' can become your strengths.

Learn from your mistakes. But also learn from the mistakes of others (life is just not long enough for you to make them all yourself). The worst possible mistake is to repeat the same mistake over and over again, never learning from it.



## **MY STORY**

## I was losing myself just to fit in

**Thandiwe** First-year BSc student



Varsity is very different from high school. It is filled with these beautiful opportunities to enhance your character and find things that excite you and that you are truly passionate about. Along with these experiences comes the responsibility of choice. You have to know when something simply looks shiny on the outside, but is not worth it.

During my first four weeks in varsity, I felt alone. I tried to make friends, but it didn't really happen. This led to me pushing myself into different friend groups at res that didn't really go with who I was. But the fear of loneliness was so strong. I found myself going out on weekdays when I should have been studying. I was losing myself just to fit in.

That is when I remembered why I came to Cape Town. I started making new friends within my faculty and we immediately clicked - we shared almost the same problems and the same goals. It was refreshing to fit in without trying. I learnt that sometimes life gives you people that are not going to stay but are just there to teach you to make better choices. I learnt that finding your people in varsity is difficult. But if you remember where you come from, it becomes clearer. My parents' words kept me going and helped me realise that we are all different and come from different backgrounds.

Learning to avoid the noise and make my own peace is what guided me to know when to fit in with people who match my energy and who don't



make me feel like I have to change who I am and what I believe in. It also guided me to know when NOT to fit into situations that won't benefit me in any way. I realised that some people and some experiences or situations are not bad, they are just not for me, and are not worth the risk of my sanity and future.

## WRITE ABOUT IT

Things that have happened in the past and which have not been meaningfully resolved can create uncertainty and add to your stress. Your mind and body do not like uncertainty, both in the past and in the future. For your future, it is useful to write or talk about your past. In doing this, you can extract useful information from your memories and experiences, so that you don't repeat the same mistakes as you move forward. Though it may sound like a time-consuming and unnecessary activity, it is in fact a useful exercise. It provides a good opportunity to bring you up to date, to catch 'you' up on where 'you' are right now in your life. It is a chance to re-evaluate yourself, to be honest with yourself about your feelings, especially as you enter the second quarter.

To secure your future, write about your past.

By externalising your thoughts through writing, you allow yourself to think about your thoughts, which is the essence of metacognition. Writing helps you think about your thoughts in a very precise way, noting the feelings they invoke and why you are feeling that way. Even the words you use to define yourself and describe the various aspects of your reality all reflect your mental state and how you see yourself. So writing

#### Science is Tough (But So Are You!)



**Metacognition: Your key to success** 

can help you process things that are difficult to understand and help you build a clear picture of how you are actually doing. You can see how Thandiwe did that in her writing.

Try it out yourself: look back at the first quarter and let your state of mind be unfocused, allowing your mind to wander. Consider yourself as a 'whole' individual. This means that you consider every aspect of your life that makes you who you are, all the different parts of your reality. Write down the things that went well for you (what you did right) and the things that did not go so well for you.

This kind of writing may not initially be easy for you. But it's the essence of writing as a metacognitive tool. It is a reflective practice that allows you to place yourself and your reality into a broader context. It is a process that can also help you know yourself better and know what is important to you.

By writing regularly, whether in the morning or before bed, you can check in on yourself. This will also clarify (shed light on) your mental well-being. This, as well as reflecting on your thoughts and the lessons from your past through writing, can be used to help you take another step to being the best version of yourself.

The most important step in any journey is the first one.

pause to ponder

Look at the words you use to describe yourself. Do these words have negative or positive connotations, or any secondary (or hidden) meanings?



## SET GOALS

Thandiwe found that she 'clicked' with people with whom she shared the same goals. Another useful metacognitive tool to help you be the best version of yourself is that of setting goals, which we explore next.

Human beings are goal-orientated creatures – we always need to be aiming for something. When defining your goals, you need a clear sense of where you are now, where you want to be in the future and why you want that future. Take a moment now to think about your goals and write them down:

Don't just read, do it now!

- 1. First picture the important aspects of your life. These can include family, academics, spirituality and values. These aspects shape 'why' you want the future you want, because whatever you do will have some impact on your family and society as a whole.
- 2. Next, define your long-term goal for each aspect. What would you like to achieve that will ultimately contribute to the future that you want?
- 3. Then ask yourself what you can do to achieve each long-term goal, and set yourself medium and short-term goals. For example, if your long-term goal is 'get my degree', your mediumterm goal is probably 'pass this year' and short-term goals could be:
  - Be present in lectures and tuts this week.
  - Improve my time management skills by reading through the 'Next-level time management for succeeding



at UCT' chapter and choose two new time-management tips to use (this weekend).

- Look at the 'How to succeed in your first BSc tests' chapter again and implement some of the hacks mentioned there (by the end of next week).
- Check whether your goals are SMART goals, and adjust if needed.
- **5. List your strengths.** These will help you achieve your goals.
- 6. It is also a good idea to list your weaknesses that might potentially disrupt your goals. You can also use this 'weakness' list to picture the kind of future you could have if you don't take action now. Remember, your weaknesses can always be improved upon they, like your past mistakes, do not define you.

It is important to always keep your long-term goals in sight - on a page on the wall by your desk, as the wallpaper on your phone or laptop, or in your journal or diary. Refer to them often because they serve as a reminder of the reason for why you are studying, and why you chose UCT. Whatever your reason is for pursuing a degree at UCT, it needs to be a strong reason because it forms the very foundation of your self-discipline as you take responsibility for your life.

If this goal-setting exercise made you realise there's a mismatch between your long-term goals and your course of study, do something now rather than later. See suggestions at the end of this chapter.

#### **SMART** goals are:

**S** = specifically defined

**M** = measurable (you can track your progress)

**A** = achievable (given your resources, abilities etc.)

**R** = realistic (given other goals and obligations)

**T** = time-based (you specify a date)

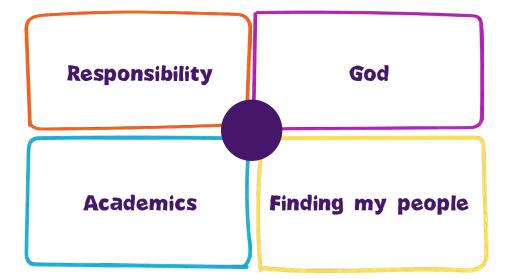


## MAP YOURSELF

If you don't like writing that much, another metacognitive tool to use when setting goals is a mind map of yourself. When you draw your mind map, write out the aspects of your life that are important to you now. For each aspect, consider your goals (what you would like to achieve) and what you can do to achieve them.

Orateng Mogadingwane's mind map provides you with an example. In creating her mind map, Orateng explored the important question: what kind of person do I want to be? This question stems (originates) from reflecting on her values, and on what is important to her. Do you notice how Orateng has incorporated goals in her mind map?

**Figure 2:** Overview of the quadrants of Orateng's mind map that are shown on the next two pages





### My degree

- It's all up to me how this degree will go!
- It is my responsibility to ensure that if I need help, I must SEEK IT!



# Responsibility for myself includes:

- Physical health
- Mental health
- Taking care of myself is my responsibility
- Check on myself

## RESPONSIBILITY

I can't expect to do my best when I am not at my best. Prioritise MYSELF!



We are responsible for our own actions, not the way other people react, so always act in a way that is respectful.

### Other people

My actions will impact those around me, whether I realise it or know it or see it or not.

### My mindset

It helps to first acknowledge that my mindset starts my academic journey

## **ACADEMICS**



- My degree is not mine alone
- Have people around that can help me & I should also help others
- Creating that sense of community will make it even more worth it!

### **Orateng Mogadingwane**

# STA1007S – what to do to improve my grade:

- Take advantage of the resources available
- Ask the tutors & attend tuts
- It is my responsibility to make my degree work
- It has been very helpful so far to continuously engage with the tutors.
   Set other goals for myself and ask for help on how to achieve them.



A spiritual mentor of mine once said:

Let your degree find you still standing!

Don't let go of the habits that build me!

GOD

#### **Look for God**

- In the small things, I find purpose and even if the reason isn't at first clear, holding onto purpose will give me reason
- Me being here is a PURPOSE!!!

- My soul
- My spirit

#### **Values**

- This is what keeps me going
- They are the parameters that safeguard me; the things that hold me accountable for my actions

### Seeking

- Among my learning
- When seeking my career, I'm seeking my identity, finding out who I am.
- Do me when it comes to academics.

Another step to finding my 'place' is find my people

- For me, because I come from far, my friends become the closest thing to family
- They will be the only people near enough to talk to
- It matters the kind of friends I make.



# 1

## FINDING MY PEOPLE

- Friends shape how we view life & varsity. My experiences are also shaped by them.
- Go out of my way to learn about other people this will help me understand different peoples and potentially help me learn more about myself.
- Make friends: making friends is a skill
- My degree isn't actually just my degree



# USE METACOGNITION TO STUDY SMART

You have seen how metacognition can be used to think about the 'big picture' of your life. But metacognition is also a useful study skill. You're engaging in metacognition when you think:

- What do I already know about this topic?
- My approach to solving this problem is not working - what other approaches could I try?
- How can I learn from my mistakes on this test or assignment?
- Which of my study strategies for this test worked well? What did not work well that I should change next time?
- I should ask for help.
- How am I doing in different aspects of studying? (daily routine; making the most of lectures; tuts and pracs; reviewing my lecture notes; making weekly summaries; working with other students; sleeping, etc.)

These are useful questions that help you monitor your learning process. Metacognition keeps you honest with yourself about how you're doing, and helps you know yourself as a learner - your strengths, weaknesses and preferences. Overall, it's an important skill for working 'smart'.



## **FAIL FORWARD!**

In this chapter, you have learnt to see the beautiful gold traces that can come from mistakes. Bear this in mind as you pursue your dreams and goals. When you learn from your mistakes, you 'fail forward'. Failing forward means being unafraid of things not working out or of failing, because you know that's a necessary part of growth. You've also learnt some metacognition tricks to help you be the best version of yourself. Writing, mind mapping and goal-setting are all metacognitive tools that can help you succeed at UCT. Writing and mind-mapping are helpful when setting goals because they allow you to see yourself as a holistic entity.

Never waste a good mistake.

Now it is up to you to do your part. You need to actually heed (take note of) the advice of this chapter in order for it to be useful. What do you need to do now, in the present, in order to achieve the future that you want? Keep track of your progress towards your goals. If things are not going as smoothly as you had hoped, it is okay. Write down your thoughts. Try to see where you are going wrong and think about what you can do to fix it. Seek help if it is needed. This is better than ignoring a problem or giving up on a goal. Think of help-seeking as keeping your problems manageable, given your own reality and given that some things are out of your control.

We wish you the very best with the weeks ahead. There will a mix of success and stumbling, but it's up to you to regularly engage in metacognition to make the best of both.



## **READ/WATCH MORE**

If you want to take any ideas further, here are some resources:

- What do you want to be in the future?
   Book a free consultation to discuss careers related to your majors at careers.service@uct.ac.za or 021 650 2497. More info at https://careers.uct.ac.za/
- If you'd like to read more about 'failing forward', here is a good blog: 7 principles for failing forward
- Find another time management tip by skimming through Next-level time management for succeeding at UCT
- Now that you have your test results, maybe you'd like to find some more study tips at How to succeed in your first BSc tests

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