

Writing about Past Mistakes Improves Performance, Research Finds

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Category : Human Interest

Unlocking Word Meanings

Read the following words/expressions found in today’s article.

- 1. **dwell** / **dwɛl** / (v) – to talk, write, or think about something carefully
Example: I avoid **dwelling** on my past mistakes because it reduces my self-confidence.
- 2. **setback** / **ˈsɛt bæk** / (n) – a problem that causes someone to fail
Example: Because of the **setbacks** that we encountered, we were not able to submit our project on time.
- 3. **trivial** / **ˈtrɪv i əl** / (adj) – not very important
Example: The meeting was unproductive because the attendees talked about **trivial** topics.
- 4. **gear up** / **ɡɪər ʌp** / (idiom) – to prepare
Example: My classmates and I are **gearing up** for the upcoming exam.
- 5. **anxious** / **ˈæŋk ʃəs** / (adj) – nervous
Example: The students are **anxious** because their test scores will be released today.

Article

Read the text below.

A recent study in the United States found that **dwelling** on past mistakes can boost a person’s future performance.

The study, which was published in the journal *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, looked into the effect of writing about past **setbacks** on one’s future task performance. Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and Duke University invited two groups of volunteers for a ten-minute writing activity.

Those in the first group wrote about a time when they committed mistakes, while those in the second group wrote about **trivial** topics that are irrelevant to them. After writing, both groups performed some stressful tasks like delivering a five-minute speech in front of the researchers.

The researchers found that the first group displayed lower stress levels and increased attention than the second group while doing the tasks. In addition, those in the first group did better decision-making than those in the second group.

Nevertheless, researcher Bryne DiMenichi [brahyn dih-meh-ni-chi] emphasized that writing itself is not directly related to the body’s stress response, which can influence task performance. Instead, it only helped the volunteers **gear up** for the challenging tasks that were given to them.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by University of Chicago researchers analyzed how writing about worries affects one’s performance. The researchers asked high school students, especially those who were **anxious** about taking tests, to write about their concerns on an upcoming exam. After the exam, these students scored one grade point higher. Study author Sian Beilock [see-*u*hn bey-lok] explained that the writing activity helped students release their worries before taking the exam. Therefore, the students performed better because they were able to focus on the exam better instead of thinking about their worries.

Viewpoint Discussion

Enjoy a discussion with your tutor.

Discussion A

- Would you rely on writing about past mistakes or worries to boost your task performance? Why or why not?

- How do you usually gear up for a challenging task?

Discussion B

- Do you agree that dwelling on past mistakes is helpful? Why or why not?

- How do you avoid repeating the same mistakes?

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