Learning from Failure

Failure feels awful. The good news, though, is that it can actually improve your performance. Below, you will find some strategies and questions to help you use failure to lift you up, rather than knock you down.

Some things to do after performing badly on an assignment or test:

- Think carefully about any outside factors that might have negatively impacted your performance: Did you get enough sleep? Were you distracted? Did you have time to study? Was there another major assignment due that week?
- If you have a graded copy of your test with you, look over each question and your answer. If possible, find the correct answer in your class notes or textbook and make sure that you understand it.
- Make a list of any keywords or concepts from the course that you still do not understand.
- Meet with your professor to review the test or assignment.

Questions you might ask your professor about a test:

- Were there any concepts that I needed to focus on more? (Did I lose marks on five multiple choice questions that were all on the same topic?)
- Do you see any patterns in the types of questions I’m getting wrong? (E.g. negative multiple choice, multiple multiples, written answers, fact-based vs. application questions)
- Do I need to focus more on the material from the lecture/the textbook/discussions?
- Will I see this material again on an upcoming test? Is it necessary for me to “get” this in order to understand future material in this course or program?
- Do you have any advice for me on how to improve on the next test or final exam?

Questions you might ask your professor about an assignment:

- Was there anything missing from my assignment? Which expectations did I miss?
- Was there any one factor that had the most impact on my mark? (E.g. content, expressing my ideas clearly, mistakes with writing)
- Will I see this material again during this course? Is it necessary for me to “get” this in order to understand future material in this course or program?
- Could I meet with you before the next assignment to review a draft?
- Are there any resources offered by the program or college that would help me for the next assignment?
- Do you have any advice for me on how to improve on the next assignment?