Tips for Success: Dealing with Academic Disappointment

Receiving a low grade on an exam or essay can be disheartening—especially if you did not receive low grades in high school. Take some comfort in knowing that lower grades are a positive sign of the new difficulty and challenge of college-level study. Then, use these tips to move on and prepare for your next test or paper:

1. **Gain Some Perspective.** A low grade can feel devastating, but it usually is not as damaging to your overall course grade as you feel it is. In addition to remembering that your grade is a sign of the increased difficulty of college-level work, take the time to look at your course syllabus to determine the exam/paper grade’s percentage of your overall grade. Many of your first exams and papers will be worth much less than future assignments. Use the GPA Calculation on pg. 50 of your Draft Book to gain a more accurate sense of the numbers. What percentage of your grade do you have left to complete? What other assignments are you facing? Put your disappointing grade in the context of the full course; you will likely either feel relieved at how small the overall effect of this grade will be, or you will be able to move forward with a realistic knowledge of your standing in the course.

2. **Reflect on Your Study Habits.** Think back to how you prepared for the test or wrote the essay. How did you study? What resources did you use? When did you begin writing the paper, and what was your revision plan? Were you sick or not getting enough sleep? Were you fully attentive in class? Think carefully about what did and did not work. Being honest with yourself concerning your class habits, study techniques, and overall physical and mental preparedness can help you better prepare for the next round of assignments.

3. **Contact Your Faculty Member and/or TA.** If you find you have major questions regarding expectations, test format, or content, do not be shy in contacting your instructor and/or your teaching assistant to ask for clarification. Read your syllabus to learn how your instructor prefers to be contacted. Stop by office hours; professors offer them in order to help you! Your faculty member would rather you ask questions now than express confusion on the evaluations at the end of the year. They also can give you helpful feedback or point you toward valuable resources. Just make sure that you are truly bringing questions, rather than complaints, that can be answered by your instructor and can create productive conversation.

4. **Find the Campus Resources.** The university and individual colleges and departments make available a great number of resources to help you succeed. Spend time researching on-line, reading your Draft Book and these OFYE newsletters, and talking to your fellow students and evoLUtion seminar facilitator. Are there tutoring resources of which you were not aware? Study techniques that you would like to try? Gather a list of all of the resources available on-campus and on-line, and consider which opportunities seem best for you.

5. **Make a Study/Writing Plan for Next Time.** Once you have in mind the expectations of the course, the weaknesses of your previous mode of preparation, feedback from your instructor, and a list of resources and tips, you can develop a plan for your next assignment. Pull out your calendar and schedule study or writing time, well in advance of the assignment. Consider what you need to implement now (i.e., better note-taking techniques). Schedule appointments with tutors. Get yourself ready to succeed on your next test or essay. Good luck!

Want to read more about how to move on from failure? Check out this post from Zen Habits blogger Leo Babauta.