

## Bouncing Back from Academic Setbacks

**When you are learning, your mistakes can be valuable information.** A mistake is not a verdict on your academic ability, and it isn't an indication of your self-worth. It is feedback on how you performed under specific conditions at a specific time. Every error gives you insight into ways you can change and improve your approach to course material.

### How To Conduct an Error Analysis

Analysing your errors can help you improve your performance if you get to the root of the mistake and have a clear plan to fix it. With a recent test, quiz or assignment, follow the steps below to analyse the mistakes you made.

#### Step 1: Classify the Error (what type of mistake occurred)

Common Error Types:

- Conceptual -missing key knowledge about the material
- Application - difficulty applying course material to a new situation
- Procedural- missed steps, used poor grammar, lost marks on the little things
- Prioritization - focusing on material and details that weren't being tested
- Timing - misread questions or failed to answer questions because time ran out

Look at an incorrect answer or feedback on an assignment and select the error type that best describes what occurred.

Answer the following question :

*This was primarily a \_\_\_\_\_ type of error because\_\_\_\_\_.*

#### Step 2: Reflect on the Context (Looking for patterns)

After classifying your errors on a few questions, reflect on the bigger picture, considering performance, environment, preparation.

Some questions to reflect on include:

- *When did this error occur? (on an exam, in homework, in lab etc.)*
- *Do I make more errors in a certain context?*
- *Was I confident in my performance before receiving feedback?*
- *What type of error am I frequently making?*

Try to diagnose a root cause like:

Knowledge – Did I know enough through preparation?

Application – Did I know concepts but misapply them?

Performance – Did I know the content but failed under pressure and time constraints?

### Step 3: Create a Plan to Improve

Using your analysis, create a specific plan with measurable goals. The more specific your solutions are, the more likely you are to follow through.

Instead of:	Try:
Study More	Create 45-minute study sessions on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays at 1:30pm. During each session use learning outcomes to write answers from memory, then check notes and correct any gaps.
Review my notes	After each lecture, spend 20 minutes summarizing the main ideas in my own words and write one question that might appear on the exam to solve later.
Do practice problems	Complete 5-7 exam style practice problems per day for 3 consecutive days. Re-do any missed problems without notes 24 hours later.
Ask someone	Attend office hours this Thursday at 2pm with two written questions for the professor.
Start assignment sooner	Two weeks before the deadline, schedule a 1 hour session to locate and download 5 academic sources from the library data base and work on an outline.
Be more careful	On exams, reserve the final 10 minutes to re-check calculations and underline key terms in each question before answering.

If you need help strategizing solutions to errors you made, [book an appointment with a Learning Specialist](#) to discuss your plan.

### Sources

Library Web Team. (2026, January 16). *Succeed at Exams/Analyze Exam Errors*. University of Guelph Library Guides. <https://guides.lib.uoguelph.ca/SucceedatExams>