

Want to Go to College? Learn to Fail

Before we read Angel Pérez's article, take a little time to preview it by responding to the following:

A. **Vocabulary:** Write an antonym (the opposite) of the following words:

- Stunned: Astonished or greatly surprised. _____
- Rigorous: Thorough and demanding in nature. _____
- Falsify: To make false or incorrect statements. _____
- Coping skills: Strategies and abilities to deal with challenges and difficulties. _____
- Perceive: To become aware of _____
- Imperfections: Flaws or deficiencies. _____
- Bounce back: To recover or rebound from a setback or adversity. _____

B. **Pre-reading questions**

- Look at the title, and make predictions about what you think will be Pérez's message.

The title suggests . . .

- Take a look at the length of the article, and decide if your predictions can be fulfilled in an article of this length—752 words or eight paragraphs.

Pérez will need to . . .

- Skim through the first two paragraphs, and read the final paragraph. Once you have done that, can you add anything to your predictions about Pérez's message?

The article seems to . . .

C. **Read the TEXT**

1. **Highlight** GREEN for claims, YELLOW for facts/evidence, RED for commentary
2. **Annotate** In the margins, write a 2-5 words summary for each paragraph (sketchnote okay)
3. **Complete Journal** Add your commentary to these quotes in a reflective way.

D. Respond to the Text (Dialectical Journal) - Respond to each quote with a personal reflection about your own life. Add two additional quotes that also stood out for you.

Quote (make sure to introduce the quote and cite it).	Commentary Write your own reflection
<p>Pérez claims, “The reality is, perfection doesn’t exist, and we don’t expect to see it in a college application” (4).</p>	<p><i>I always thought that I had to represent my best self in an application, but I can see his point that it might be more important to acknowledge my challenges.</i></p>
<p>Pérez states, “In fact, admissions officers tend to be skeptical of students who present themselves as individuals without flaws” (4).</p>	
<p>Pérez comments, “It’s so rare to hear stories of defeat and triumph that when we do, we cheer” (6).</p>	
<p>Pérez points out that “we believe an error in high school should not define the rest of your life, but how you respond could shape you forever” (6).</p>	

Want to Get Into College? Learn to Fail

By Angel B. Pérez Education Week, January 31, 2012

1 I ask every student I interview for admission to my institution, Pitzer College, the same question, “What do you look forward to the most in college?” I was stunned and delighted recently when a student sat across from me at a Starbucks in New York City and replied, “I look forward to the possibility of failure.” Of course, this is not how most students respond to the question when sitting before the person who can make decisions about their academic futures, but this young man took a risk.

2 “You see, my parents have never let me fail,” he said. “When I want to take a chance at something, they remind me it’s not a safe route to take. Taking a more rigorous course or trying an activity I may not succeed in, they tell me, will ruin my chances at college admission. Even the sacrifice of staying up late to do something unrelated to school, they see as a risk to my academic work and college success.”

3 I wish I could tell you this is an uncommon story, but kids all over the world admit they are under tremendous pressure to be perfect. When I was traveling in China last fall and asked a student what she did for fun, she replied: “I thought I wasn’t supposed to tell you that? I wouldn’t want you to think I am not serious about my work!”

4 Students are usually in shock when I chuckle and tell them I never expect perfection. In fact, I prefer they not project it in their college applications. Of course, this goes against everything they’ve been told and makes young people uncomfortable. How could a dean of admission at one of America’s most selective institutions not want the best and the brightest? The reality is, perfection doesn’t exist, and we don’t expect to see it in a college application. In fact, admission officers tend to be skeptical of students who present themselves as individuals without flaws.

5 These days, finding imperfections in a college application is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Students try their best to hide factors they perceive to be negative and only tell us things they believe we will find impressive. This is supported by a secondary school culture where teachers are under pressure to give students nothing less than an A, and counselors are told not to report disciplinary infractions to colleges. Education agents in other countries are known to falsify student transcripts, assuming that an outstanding GPA is the ticket to admission.

6 Colleges respond to culture shifts, and admission officers are digging deeper to find out who students really are outside of their trophies, medals, and test scores. We get the most excited when we read an application that seems real. It’s so rare to hear stories of defeat and triumph that when we do, we cheer. If their perspectives are of lessons learned or challenges overcome, these applicants tend to jump to the top of the heap at highly selective colleges. We believe an error in high school should not define the rest of your life, but how you respond could shape you forever.

7 I’ve spent enough time in high schools to know teenagers will never be perfect. They do silly things, mess up, fall down, and lack confidence. The ability to bounce back is a fundamental life skill students have to learn on their own. The lessons of failure can’t be taught in a classroom; they are experienced and reflected upon. During my weekend of interviews, another student told me, “I’m ashamed to admit I failed precalculus, but I decided to take it again and got a B-plus. I’m now

