



Information, Data and Media Literacy

Video transcript

3.3 Dealing with emotions

[Wir wissen was – WWW]

Academic work isn't just something we do on the rational side of brains, it's also influenced by our emotions. Positive feelings such as enjoying learning, hope and pride improve our performance.

Conversely, negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, boredom and depression have a detrimental effect. We often feel as if we're the only ones suffering, but more than a quarter of Swiss students experience problems with their mental health.

Today we will take a look at how we can deal with the most common emotional problems encountered when studying.

S: You've got to finish that today!

A: If you don't finish it, you won't be able to complete the course!

Most of the negative effects of stress and anxiety are caused by negative self-talk.

In particular, this includes catastrophizing and "must" thoughts. One way of dealing with stress and anxiety is to counter such negative self-talk with positive, supportive statements that contradict it.

P [off]: For example, if we expect a catastrophe:

P left: "At this rate there's no way I'll get this finished on time."

P right: "I'll get faster every day."

P [off]: Or, if we're demanding perfection:

P left: "I should always get the top grade."

P right: "It's OK to make mistakes, that's all part of learning."

Other approaches might need more practice, for example progressive muscle relaxation or mindfulness techniques. These can also help us feel non-judgmental and empathetic toward ourselves.



It's tempting to respond to boredom with avoidance tactics. Also, it's usually more fun to do something else. But ultimately, avoidance isn't really useful as a strategy for working successfully.

Strategies that actually address our perception or behavior are much more helpful.

By reframing our perception, we can attach a higher value to a situation we currently find boring. For example, we can remind ourselves that working out strategies for literature searches will not only help us with our current task, they'll also be useful in all other areas of our academic life.

Behavior-oriented coping strategies seek to change the situation itself, without turning into avoidance. For instance, we can ask others for help, search for tutorials, talk to lecturers about the work or share experiences in a group.

During depressive episodes, we suffer from feelings of hopelessness, loneliness and low motivation. This is associated with many dysfunctional thoughts that undermine our self-efficacy.

For example, we see negative feedback about a draft as proof that our work is completely on the wrong track. After a morning getting only poor search results, we believe that we're never going to find relevant literature. We tend toward catastrophizing and generalization.

In the case of mild depression, there are exercises we can do to successfully challenge such thoughts. Two such exercises are reality checks and self-instruction.

We use reality checks to break out of catastrophizing thought patterns, by asking questions like the following:

Where is the evidence to back up this negative opinion? What's the worst that could actually happen? Does the problem perhaps also have a positive aspect?

We can then see our situation from a different perspective. For instance, we could take the low literature search hit rate as evidence that our work is important and at the leading edge.

We use self-instruction to combat selective and dramatic self-criticism. For example, we substitute statements like: "I'll never be able to write a good chapter" with statements such as:

"You've already made some progress and you'll get better."

It's also important to get physical exercise, take part in activities you enjoy, spend time with others and talk to someone about your depressed feelings.