



Building resilience for academic and personal success: Bounce back stronger

**Directorate: Counselling and
Career Development**
October 2025

Define tomorrow.

UNISA



university
of south africa

Our focus:

- What is resilience?
- Common challenges faced by Unisa students
- Key traits & core traits of resilient students
- External enablers that strengthen resilience
- Unisa support systems
- The power of affirmations
- Practical activities



What is resilience?

The ability to adapt and recover and grow from adversity, stress, or failure

Not about being “tough” it’s about being flexible, resourceful, and supported

It’s not about avoiding stress it’s about learning to navigate it

Examples: students who overcame academic setbacks, personal loss, and financial hardships



Common challenges faced by Unisa students

Academic pressure and isolation in distance learning

Financial stress and lack of access to resources

Mental health struggles and low self-esteem

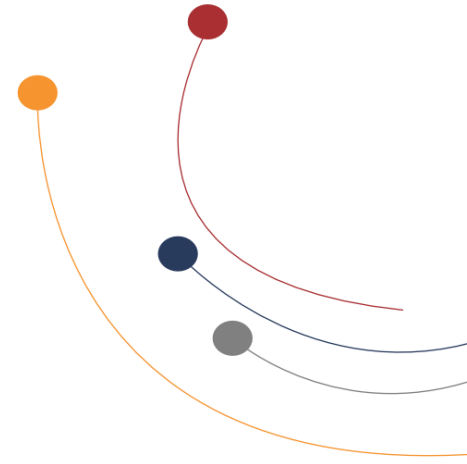
Family responsibilities and limited time

A woman in a white shirt and dark pants is pulling a large, dark, rounded rock up a grassy hill. She is leaning forward, holding a chain or rope attached to the rock. The background shows a cloudy sky and a grassy slope.

U kondela a si tshivhumbeleo tshine wa bebwa natsho; ndi vhutshilo hune wa vhu fhaṭa.

Resilience is not a trait you're born with; it's a skill you build.

Key traits of resilient students



Self-efficacy: Belief in one's ability to succeed academically and personally, even in tough conditions.

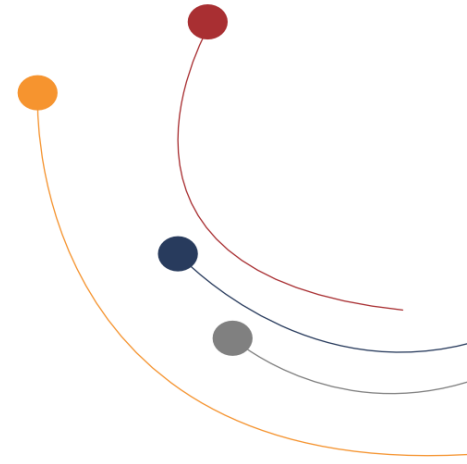
Hopeful future orientation: Maintaining dreams and goals despite adversity, often tied to a strong sense of purpose.

Emotional regulation: Ability to manage stress, anxiety, and setbacks without becoming overwhelmed.

Adaptability: Willingness to adjust expectations and strategies when faced with challenges—sometimes called “adaptive preference”.

Persistence: Continued effort in the face of obstacles, whether academic, financial, or social.

How to manage adversity



Skill	Description	Example
Emotional Regulation	Managing stress & emotions	Breathing, journaling
Growth Mindset	Learning from failure	“I’m not there yet”
Time Management	Prioritizing & pacing	Weekly planner
Connection	Seeking support	Peer groups, mentors

External enablers that strengthen resilience

Supportive relationships:

Strong ties with family, peers, and mentors provide emotional and practical support.

Community connections:

Engagement with local networks and cultural identity can offer a sense of belonging and stability.



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Why resilience matters at Unisa

*“Kgotlelelo e tswala katlego.”
(Perseverance is a mother of success)*

Distance
learning can
feel isolating

Financial
pressure
affects focus
and motivation

Mental health
struggles are
common but
often hidden

Family
responsibilities
compete with
study time

Unisa support: You're not alone



Academic support:
tutors,
lecturers,
peer support

Mental health:
counselling,
peer support

Financial aid & career services

The Resilience Myth

Myth: “Strong people don’t struggle.”

Truth: Everyone struggles. Resilience is built, not born.

- Vulnerability isn’t failure, it’s courage. Opening up about your struggles doesn’t make you less capable.
- Self-compassion is your secret weapon. e.g, Rest when you need to. Celebrate small wins. Forgive yourself for the setbacks.
- Setbacks are part of the journey (Failure, anxiety, burnout), They’re telling you to pause, recalibrate, and keep going.

“Struggle is a sign you’re trying—not failing.”



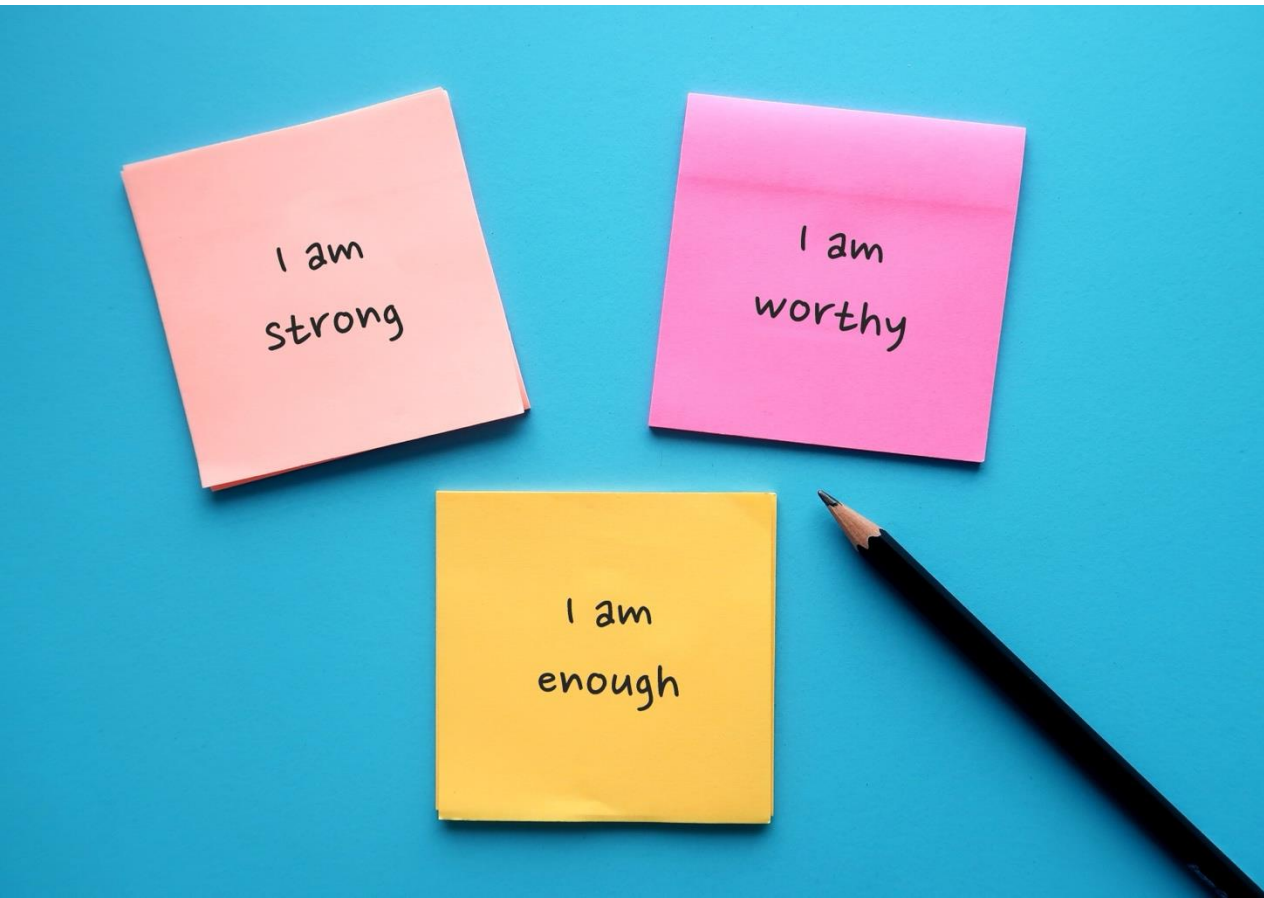
The power of affirmations

Affirmations are positive statements you repeat to yourself to challenge negative thoughts and reinforce empowering beliefs.

- Rewire your brain
- Boost confidence
- Reduce stress & anxiety
- Protect your self-integrity



Affirmations and self-motivation



You are capable

"I am doing my best, and that is enough."

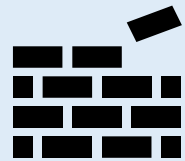
"I am resilient, even when things feel hard."

"I learn from setbacks and grow stronger."

"I am worthy of rest, success, and self-compassion."

"I trust myself to figure things out, one step at a time".

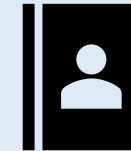
Practical activities



Positive Affirmation Wall

What to do: Create a shared space (physical or digital) where you can post encouraging messages.

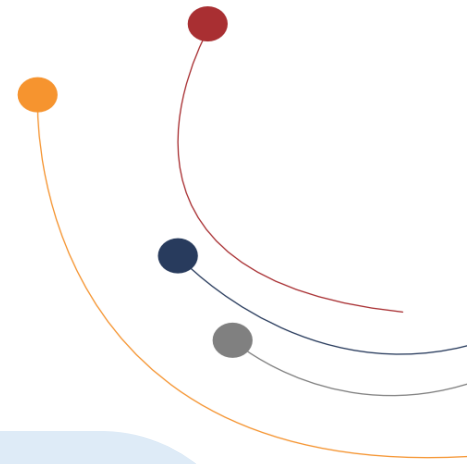
Why it works: Reinforces a growth mindset and community support



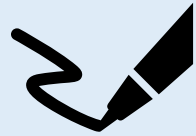
Failure Reflection

What to do: Reflect on a past academic or personal failure and identify what you learned.

Why it works: Reframes failure as a growth opportunity.



Practical activities



Resilience Journaling

What to do: Write weekly entries reflecting on challenges, emotions, and how you responded.

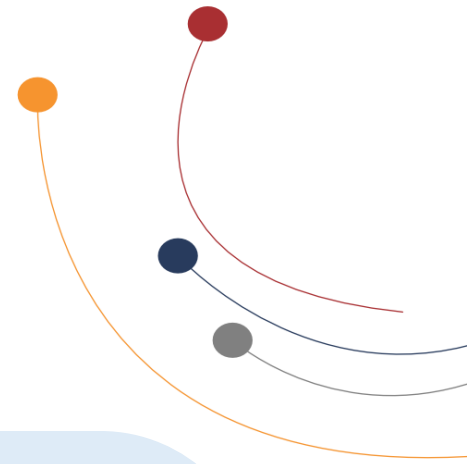
Why it works: Builds self-awareness and helps track personal growth over time.



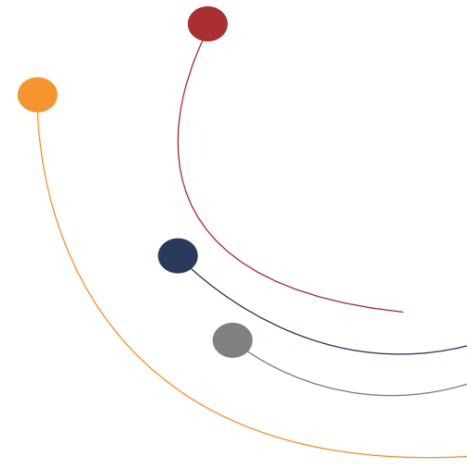
Mindfulness & Breathing Exercises

What to do: Practice 5-minute breathing or guided meditation before exams or presentations.

Why it works: Reduces anxiety and improves emotional regulation.



Contact us



- **E-mail** to counselling@unisa.ac.za
- **Online appointments** on MSTeams:
<https://bit.ly/DCCDbook>
- **Contact a counsellor at a regional office** to make an appointment for counselling in person:
<https://bit.ly/contactdccd>
- **Website:** www.unisa.ac.za/counselling
- **YouTube channel:** www.youtube.com/unisacareers