



Content Unit 6: Personal Well-Being



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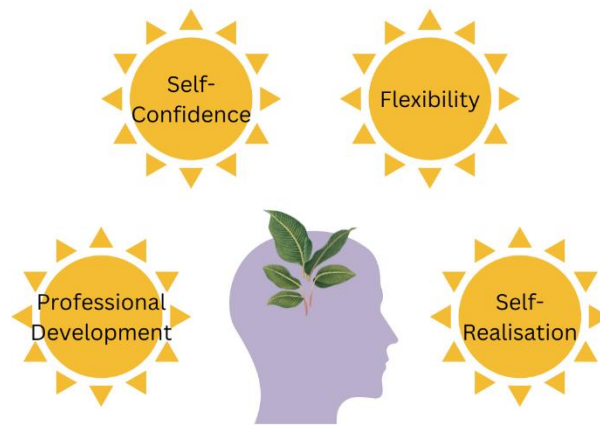
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1 DEVELOPING YOUR OWN STRENGTHS AND SKILLS

It is worthwhile to further develop our own strengths and abilities for many reasons:



We enhance our **professional development** by broadening our skills. We are more successful in performing our job, we are more likely to take advantage of opportunities for advancement or to reorient ourselves professionally.

Learning new things has a very positive effect on our **self-confidence**. We feel more confident and competent to overcome challenges and achieve our goals.

By learning new skills and expanding our strengths, **we develop our personality**. Our previously hidden talents get visible which has a positive effect on many areas of our life.

When we possess various skills and strengths, we can adapt **more flexibly** to changes. We can respond to different challenges with less effort.

By expanding our strengths and learning new skills, we can **develop ourselves**, our personal goals. We have the opportunity to do what is really important to us.

When expanding our strengths and abilities, we can observe something very exciting: **like a tender little plant, we become stronger and stronger, grow and blossom beyond our previously imagined limits**. This makes it much easier for us to achieve our goals and live a fulfilled life.

Practical relevance

John decided to be brave and do a professional reorientation to become a health and fitness trainer. This course is made up of several modules. With each module that John completes, he not only feels more professionally competent. His self-confidence has also increased. Finally, he can implement what is particularly important to him in his personal life - sport and health - and make it his profession. He recognises that he has less stress when preparing for future exams. His fear of not passing an exam also disappears. In the meantime, he even feels really good while learning and is already considering whether to follow a course on "rehabilitation" in addition.

In this content unit, you will learn about factors that **help you to overcome all your concerns** and decide for your professional and personal development. Learning together with other people is considered particularly effective. Here you will get information about what is needed to learn **successfully in a team** and how you can support this way of learning. In addition, you will find helpful tips on how to manage **solving challenges calmly and competently**. At the end, you will see what you can do to stay **relaxed** both **when studying for an exam and in stressful times in general**.

1.1 Defining your Strengths

To be more self-confident, it is good to know about your individual strengths. You can have strengths in your profession, but also in your private life. Some examples are: reliability, ability to learn something new, communication with others, language skills, creativity, ability to work in a team, precise work, and much more.

But how can you define your strengths?

- Ask your family or friends how they perceive you. What do they think you are good at?
- Identify moments in which you are feeling good. What strengths led to this feeling?
- Think of areas in your life in which you have already been successful. If you are successful, this is an indicator that you are good at something. You can derive your strengths from your past.
- Define activities you are interested in and you love to do. Usually, these are activities that are related to your strengths.

Practical relevance

Juan is doing a blended learning course in customer service. Before he started the course, he tried to find out about his strengths, so that he could set himself goals for this course. By thinking of the things he particularly likes to do or he has already been successful in, he defined, amongst others, these strengths:

- Communication with customers
- Ability to work in a team
- Self-confident appearance when talking to customers
- Punctuality



He is very proud of his strengths, but he knows that he also has some weaknesses. For example, his digital skills are only at a very low level. Thus, the goals for this course are on the one hand to further develop his strengths, but on the other hand to improve his digital skills. He is for example particularly interested in learning how to hold video conferences with his customers. He learns a lot about that during the online lessons. When the course members meet face-to-face, he can improve his ability to collaborate and communicate with others.

It is completely normal that there are things we are good at and things we are not that good at. And it's ok that we all have some weaknesses as well. But we should take the opportunity to identify and further develop our strengths, so that our personality can grow.



1.2 Personal and professional Development with a Growth Mindset

The American psychologist and professor of psychology, Carol Dweck, has investigated in her research what effects our mindset has on our ability to learn and on our performance. The term "mindset" means "**way of thinking**" or "**inner attitude**". Dweck has developed the concepts of fixed and growth mindset. The following overview shows the differences between these two:

	Differences	
fixed	Mindset	Open
they are limited and fixed	Own intelligence, talents and abilities	they can be developed
fear of challenges, trying to avoid them	Responding to challenges	challenges are accepted
insecurity, helplessness	Feelings	curiosity, liveliness
use what you already know	Inner motivation	learn something new
depending on external factors	Responsibility	What can I influence myself?

A **fixed mindset** refers to a fixed way of thinking. The person believes that his/her **intelligence, talents and abilities** are **limited and fixed**. He/she is afraid of making mistakes and doesn't want to have any challenges in his/her life. The confidence in his/her own abilities is low.

A **growth mindset**, on the other hand, refers to an open mind. The person believes that **his/her skills and talents can grow through his/her own effort in work or learning**. Therefore,

challenges are accepted and the person is motivated to learn, even if difficulties are very likely and mistakes can happen.

The key difference is how we see our skills and talents: as something fixed that is given to us, or as something movable that we can develop by participating in lifelong learning.



Important

It is your decision if you face a challenge with a fixed or a growth mindset! By choosing to think with a growth mindset, you lay the foundation for being **more successful** not only in learning and in your career. Your **personal life will also become more fulfilling**. You accept challenges, recognise your own mistakes as learning opportunities and get stronger from setbacks. Especially when you do something you haven't done before, you acquire new skills and develop the talents that haven't been visible until this moment.

But what helps us to be motivated for learning and to overcome the fear of failure?

The German neurobiologist Gerald Hüther emphasises that learning success has nothing to do with the brain, but with one's own liveliness. To follow a growth mindset, you don't need a very high level of intelligence to be able to learn very well. You just have to **do what makes you happy**. So, if you can choose between different courses you can take, just ask yourself the question:

Which topics make me feel alive?

While a person with a **fixed mindset** only wants to **use existing knowledge and abilities**, people with a **growth mindset** feel an inner motivation to **learn something new**. Our **curiosity** has supported people in their development for thousands of years. So, if you want to learn something new about a topic you are interested in, learning is very easy. In addition, you feel self-efficacious because you succeed more and more in finding answers and solutions to challenging questions. This motivates and encourages you to continue learning in order to

acquire even more knowledge and skills and to implement them in your everyday life. **So stay curious!**

With a growth mindset, you automatically support yourself in achieving goals: You realise that you are essentially responsible for your own success – and no external factors can stop you. And you are **finally in a position to orientate your life according to what is important to you personally!**

However, **it takes time to handle all challenges** with a growth mindset. Therefore, be patient with yourself! It is completely normal if you have the feeling that changing your patterns of thinking is exhausting and that this does not happen as quickly as you would like. Therefore, it may be useful to seek personal support from an expert (coach).

No matter where you are in the process of achieving your goals, please remember: **Your mistakes and setbacks are also part of your personal learning process!**

And regardless of whether you are already trained in using your growth mindset or not - many goals are simply too difficult to reach within a short period of time.

Continue to work **patiently, persistently and optimistically** towards those goals that are really important to you! Only in this way will **you achieve positive changes in the long term**, both professionally and privately.

Reflection

Take some time and think about the following questions:

- What kind of person are you? Do you have the feeling that you already know everything or are you open to learn something new?
- What are the skills you would like to further develop?
- What topics are you curious about? What would you like to learn?
- Why does it make sense to learn something new?



1.3 Learning in a team

From our school days, we know the motivating feeling of not having to manage difficult learning phases alone. As a class community, we supported each other. Friendships also emerged from that time, which we remember fondly.

Learning together - in a team - makes sense also for adults:



Support from colleagues or friends increases our motivation to learn. This makes it easier for us to overcome difficult learning phases. By **exchanging ideas** with each other, each member of the learning team brings different perspectives and competences to the table. We share our knowledge and experience and **learn from each other**. Through these diverse perspectives, **problems** can be **solved better**. The exchange of different ideas contributes to **more creativity** in solving tasks.

When talking to others, it also becomes visible if you have already understood the learning contents well or if there are things that you still have to learn. In addition, the ability to express oneself in discussions and to argue is trained - this is also the perfect preparation for oral exams.

1.3.1 Proven methods

Some methods of **how we can support each other's learning are proving** particularly helpful in practice:

- **Group work:**

Especially when we want to understand difficult concepts, it helps us to share our ideas with those of other team members. Everyone involved supports each other by sharing their knowledge and solving challenges together.



- **Discussion:**

When we discuss a certain topic with other learners, it can be accessed from different perspectives. This helps each team member to develop a deeper understanding of it. By having different ideas explained to us and responding to them, we also improve our critical thinking skills as well as our language expression.

- **Mentoring:**

Those learners who have already understood a topic can explain it to other learners and support them.



- **Learning groups:**

Three to six people (optimal amount of people) meet to work together on a specific objective, e.g. to prepare for a specific exam. Each person contributes to answer questions.

- **Asking each other questions:**

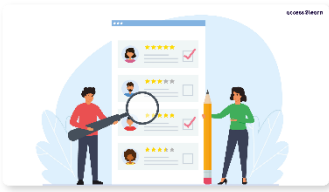
By asking each other questions from the subject matter, we consolidate and improve our knowledge - both for those being asked and for those asking the questions, as well as for those listening.

Keep in mind that when attending a blended learning course, all methods mentioned above **can be implemented when learning in the classroom, but also during self-learning phases**. You can use breaks onsite for talking to your colleagues or your teacher. And during self-learning phases, you always have the possibility to meet colleagues personally or via video conferencing tool. You can also ask you teacher if you could have a short online meeting to clarify open questions.

- **Online forum:**

If face-to-face learning is not possible, e.g. because the participants live too far apart, it makes sense to communicate online. A so-called online forum offers the possibility of virtual exchange. There we can ask our questions online to the other course participants or to the teacher. Since all participants can read along and contribute, everyone benefits from the exchange. Many online learning platforms also offer the possibility to upload voice messages or videos to the online forum to make learning even more interesting and entertaining.

Video conferencing is also a useful tool for meeting other learners online. In this way, it is possible to communicate well with each other and work together on a question despite the physical distance.



- **Social media:**

Social media supports the learning process and communication between learners by facilitating collaboration, sharing of information and resources and providing feedback and support. A group on social media with all interested people can be created so that collaboration is easier. It is important that the common goal of the group is clearly stated in the group description and that a decision is made whether the group should be accessible to all interested social media users or only for those known to the founding member.

Practical relevance

Julia loves to bake and cook. That's why she has already attended several cooking and baking workshops. To stay in touch with some of the workshop participants, she created the Facebook group "Kitchen Secrets". The common goal of the group is to support each other with tips and tricks that cannot be found in any book.

Julia is frustrated because she doesn't know how to make a tasty sauce hollandaise. So she asks in this Facebook group if someone can give her some tips. After a brief time, she receives tips from some group members and even a video on how she could make it better next time. There is also a discussion in the group about the decisive factors in the preparation of the sauce.

All group members can benefit from this post and share their experiences.

As we can see, there are many different ways we can support each other in learning together.

Important

Choose those team learning methods that best suit you and your personal learning style!

1.3.2 Communicating with each other

No matter which method we choose, we almost always communicate verbally, i.e. in words, and non-verbally, i.e. with our body language, with the other learners and the trainer. Both types of communication help us to express what we want to contribute to the joint processing of a topic.



Verbal communication in team learning refers to the use of **language to make others understand facts, ideas, thoughts or opinions**. Make sure you are as clear and precise as possible so that everyone involved can understand your words as you mean them. Listen carefully when other team members speak. And keep asking questions to make sure that each person in the team understands what is meant. When people have different opinions, it is important to still focus on the common goal and to be respectful during discussion.

Non-verbal communication takes place when we use our **body language, facial expressions and gestures** rather than words, for example to convey emotions and to emphasise the meaning of what is being said. It is particularly helpful to express words together with the matching body language to make oneself more understandable and to be able to work better together on a topic. By adopting an open body posture, you promote trust and cooperation in the team.



The more you combine verbal and non-verbal communication with each other, the easier it is for others to understand what you want to tell them.

During **online classes, communication is more difficult** than when meeting in school. Usually, you don't see all your colleagues at the same time, and the same applies to your teacher. And sometimes, it is also difficult to understand people talking because of a poor quality of their microphone or some background noises. Thus, try to contribute to a clear communication:

- If you can't hear your teacher or colleagues well, inform them immediately about it.
- When you are talking, try to avoid any background noise and speak loudly, slowly and clearly.
- If you have a headset, use it.
- Mute yourself when you are not talking.
- Turn on your camera, so that the others can also see your facial expressions and gestures.
- Use the reaction function to raise your hand.
- Use the chat to ask questions or contribute to discussions.

1.3.3 Interpersonal factors

If all members feel comfortable when learning in a team, they can work together more successfully. With the interpersonal factors of empathy, reliability and honesty, you can contribute significantly to this!

By showing empathy to others, you can create a positive learning environment. Empathy means that you try to see things from the perspective of another person and respect their personality and their point of view.

Example

One group member needs more explanations to understand a topic. In an empathetic atmosphere, the others show patience with this one person who asks for help more often.

A person is ill and therefore cannot attend one of the common learning meetings. Empathy helps to find alternative ways for the member to continue to participate. For example, the person who is ill can be provided with a written version of what have been worked out together, so that he/she can deal with it on their own until the next meeting.

By working together empathetically, you avoid conflicts and strengthen cooperation. Since all participants feel valued with their contributions, each person is particularly happy to contribute to the teamwork.

In order to learn successfully together in a team, it is **important that each person participates and that you can rely on each other.**

Example

A learning team has agreed that each person will prepare a task at home to be able to discuss solutions in the next joint meeting. One team member has not prepared. This leads to a bad mood in the team because the other members who did their job feel unfairly treated. Now, the whole team can no longer keep to the schedule.

In a learning team consisting of four people, there are two members who are repeatedly unreliable. The other two members lose confidence that the learning in the team works well and look for a new team with whom they can prepare for the next exam.

Of course, it may be that you are unable to keep to an agreement previously made with your learning team. In this case, inform the team members as early as possible in order to find a solution together on how to continue working!

When team members are honest with each other, they can better understand and support each other. "**Constructive feedback**" has proven to be very beneficial for this.



It is an appreciative kind of personal feedback that provides information on what **works well and what can still be improved.** The more open and honest we are with each other, the better the cooperation is. However, a few essential aspects have to be considered, as the following examples show:

Example

Be specific!

"I appreciate your idea very much, but I think we should spend more time discussing the pros and cons before we decide."

Be positive and suggest ways to improve!

"You did a really good job with the presentation, but I think we should go a bit more into question XY."

Be empathetic!

"I understand that you are busy, but I think that your participation in every learning meeting is important so that we can prepare well for the exam."

By giving each other constructive feedback, listening carefully and being willing to learn from it, we grow beyond ourselves. **Every single person begins to "blossom" beyond his/her limits** when contributing to the team with his/her ideas and skills. If constructive feedback is cultivated with each other, there is an **extraordinary shared success in the team**. We can imagine this as a beautiful bouquet of flowers that grows out of the joint work.

Giving and accepting constructive feedback helps all team members to **develop their own personal skills** on the one hand, and to **improve the common work result** on the other hand.

When your colleagues or your teacher give feedback on your work, don't see it as something negative. And don't perceive it as something against your personality. They only want to support you in improving your work. So, take their feedback as possibility to further development.

Here's what you should keep in mind when learning in a group:

Choose your group carefully! The group should not be too big and not too small. Ideally, there should be 4-5 people. In addition, you should have the same goals (Do we want to get the best grade at the exam, or just pass?) and the learning level or strengths should be immediately distributed so that everyone can benefit from learning together.	Be careful not to lose focus! Just as you can motivate each other, you can also distract each other. For example, agree on a sign beforehand if you notice that private conversations are getting out of hand and you no longer get to study, or plan "gossip breaks" from the outset.
Set goals and framework conditions together! It should be clear to everyone from the beginning what you want to achieve in the learning group. Also agree on how long the learning sessions should last and what you want to achieve in this time. Agree on what the members should prepare at home before coming to the meeting. This prevents conflicts and loss of motivation.	Show commitment! In a learning group, all participants must be willing to work together and actively contribute. If one person does not stick to agreements, this has a negative effect on the whole group and quarrels are inevitable.

Here are some more rules you should follow when learning in a team:

- Treat everybody equally and with respect
- Communicate openly and address conflicts immediately
- Listen to the others and give constructive feedback
- Acknowledge the work of your team members
- Complete your tasks in time

1.3.4 Learning partnerships

Learning in pairs or longer-term learning partnerships also offers a lot of advantages. As there are not so many people, there are not so many different perspectives and knowledge is a bit more limited, but in pairs you can work in a more concentrated and individual way. You should be careful with whom you enter into a learning partnership. Both people should have similar

ambitions (How much do we want to achieve?) and be able to benefit from the partnership to an equal extent (It should not be tutoring for one person, but mutual benefit). As a learning pair, you should also set learning goals and a timetable and distribute the tasks in a binding way. For joint meetings, set break and end times.

Reflection

Think of the course you are attending at the moment:

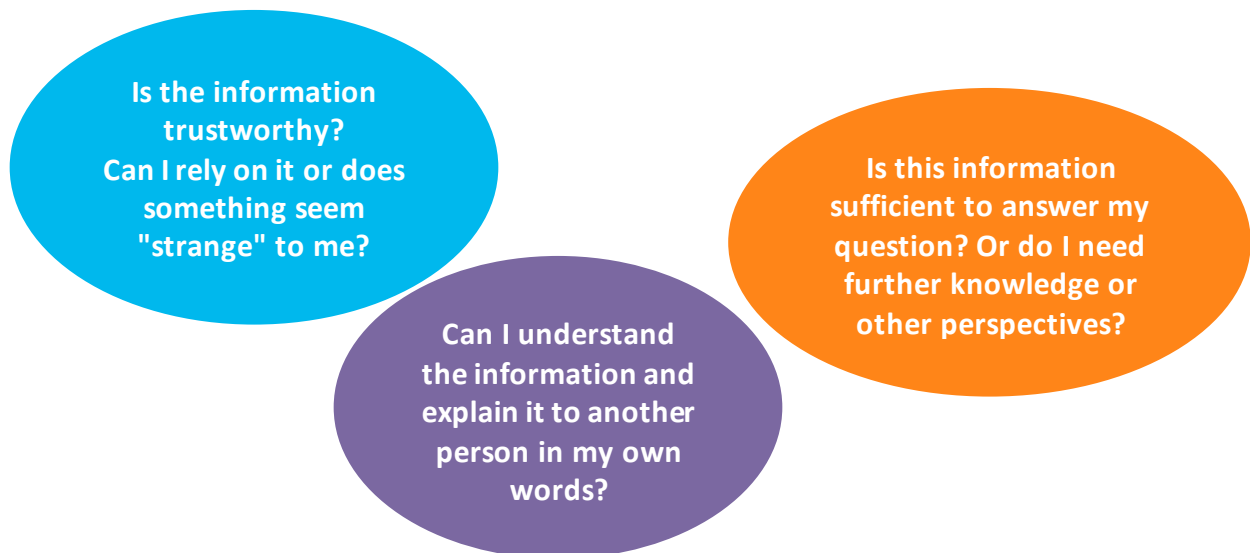
- Could you imagine building a learning team for some topics?
- Who would be the persons you would like to learn with? Why would you like to learn together with them? What are their competences and are they reliable?
- What are the subjects/topics you would like to learn in a team for?
- What rules could you define to learn in a team?

1.4 Critical thinking and problem solving

When we are faced with a problem that needs to be solved, the internet or other people can often be a valuable source of information. But not all information is **credible**, answers our question **clearly** or is comprehensible.



Critical thinking means that we **check information that we have received to verify if it is credible or not**, and only include it in our decisions if it is. When searching for information, ask yourself the following 3 questions:



Take some time to critically examine all information you receive!

Compare different sources of information on the same topic with each other! Then, write down **your thoughts about it!** This will help you to get a clearer idea of the problem and the possible solutions. **Perhaps you prefer to discuss** the problem and possible solutions **with other people?** When working together, more perspectives can be identified and compared, which then serve as a basis for deciding on the best possible solution.



Our ability of critical thinking helps us to elaborate different options based on facts and logical reasoning, compare them and then make decisions.

The following steps will help you choose the best solution:

- 1 Describe the problem to be solved clearly and precisely!
- 2 Collect information and data related to the problem!
- 3 Find out what possibilities there are to help solve the problem!
- 4 Look at each possibility in detail, name the advantages and disadvantages of each possible solution!
- 5 Check what consequences your preferred solution will have!
- 6 Ask yourself two more questions before making the final decision:
Have I considered all relevant information?
Is my decision influenced by my own prejudices or assumptions?

By thinking critically, we reduce the danger of deciding to our disadvantage. Nevertheless, it **can happen that we accept unfiltered information as true, which could have negative effects on us.** However, a "strange" feeling usually signals to us that it is worthwhile to question information more closely. Our critical thinking helps us to ask appropriate questions that bring clarity.

Example

Investigate the suspicion of misinformation

Is the source of information trustworthy?

Are there other sources where similar information can be found?

Understand the logic of the arguments

Are the statements based on valid evidence or just assumptions?

Prevent manipulation

Is someone trying to convince me with the help of emotional language and deception?

Critical thinking can also help us to **recognise our own biases and overcome prejudices**.

Example

Do I tend to believe certain information is true because it corresponds to my beliefs?

Do I immediately reject statements because they do not correspond to my opinion?



We do not always manage to uncover **misinformation** in time. Sometimes we have already considered it as reliable information and **included it in our conclusions**.

If we have fallen for it, we can only try to **minimise the damage**:

- **Accept** that you may have received incorrect or inaccurate information! Take time to check the facts. You can do this, for example, by **asking other sources of information** (people, websites) about the topic. If you get the same information from different sources, you are more likely to assume that it is correct.
- Probably the misinformation has also influenced your personal opinion and views. **Be open and willing to change your mind** when you learn new information!
- Share your awareness that misinformation is existing with others! This way you can **help prevent other people from falling for it**.

But it is not only critical thinking that helps us to solve problems in the best possible way. So-called "**creativity techniques**" help us to deviate from habitual thought patterns in **order to evaluate decision-making options more comprehensively** and to **gain new ideas on how to solve a problem**. Even if we have hardly found anything when searching for information, creativity techniques can help us to reach a goal-oriented solution.



By looking at a problem from different angles, we become more creative and flexible. We suddenly recognise possible solutions that we would not have noticed before. This expanded perception makes us more successful in dealing with challenges, both in our professional and private lives, as we can better evaluate and make use of connections.

Example

Put yourself in the perspective of another person who could solve the challenge

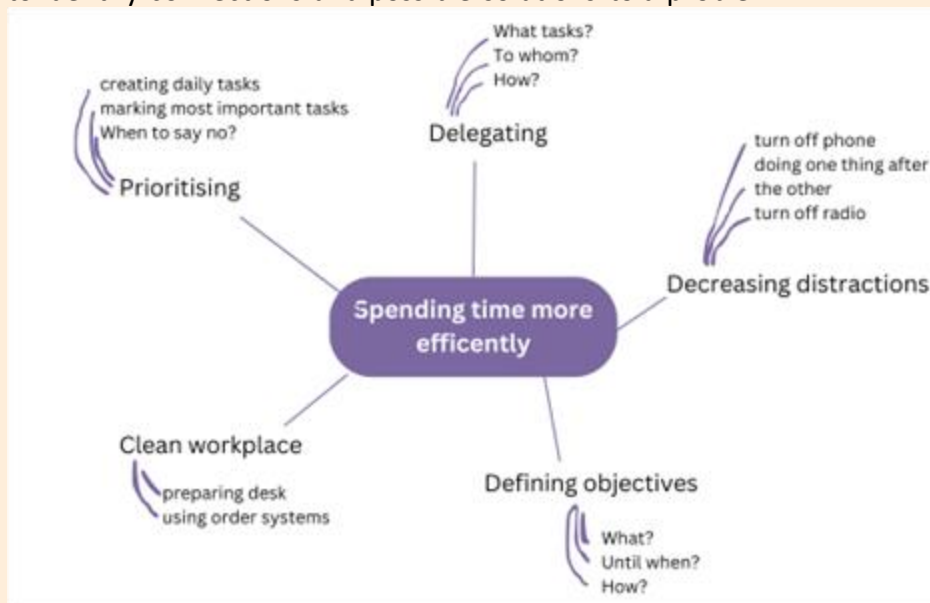
How would he/she approach the problem? What ideas or solutions would he/she suggest?

Let your own thoughts flow freely (alone or together with other people)

Write down as many different ideas and possibilities as you can think of - regardless of whether they seem useful or can actually be implemented! The ideas may also build on each other. Afterwards, check the ideas you have collected, choose the ones that make the most sense and develop them further!

Create a mind-map

to identify connections and possible solutions to a problem



Gain new experience

Attend a course/workshop that deals with the content you need to solve the problem!

In order to better deal with challenges and solve related problems, it is worthwhile if we develop ourselves further. This can concern our professional skills as well as our personality.

Further education, courses and workshops serve as valuable impulses. But **how can you recognise whether the respective educational offer is useful for you or not?** Here, too, your critical thinking, together with careful reflection, can help you. Below you will find **suggestions on how to** do this:

- 1 What skills and knowledge do you want to acquire?
- 2 What educational offers exist? Are these trainings offered by reputable institutions or professionals? Do these training courses meet your requirements? What content is taught? How is the course structured? Where does the training take place?
- 3 How well does the particular educational offer fit you and your needs? Consider the cost, the duration, the type of learning (e.g. online course or face-to-face course, mainly self-study or learning together with others) and the requirements (e.g. exam or not, what type of exam)!
- 4 Are there any follow-up courses to those educational offers you have now chosen, in which you can further deepen your knowledge and skills?

Reflection

Go to a social media page that you use (e.g. Facebook or Instagram) and scroll down the home page. What kind of information can you find there? Is this information reliable? Why do you think that it is reliable or not – how do you recognise that?

1.5 Exam nerves and relaxed stress management

Especially if we have had bad experiences with exams in the past, a new situation in which we have to prove our performance unsettles us. We often become nervous or even afraid of this situation. But what is the difference between nervousness and exam anxiety?

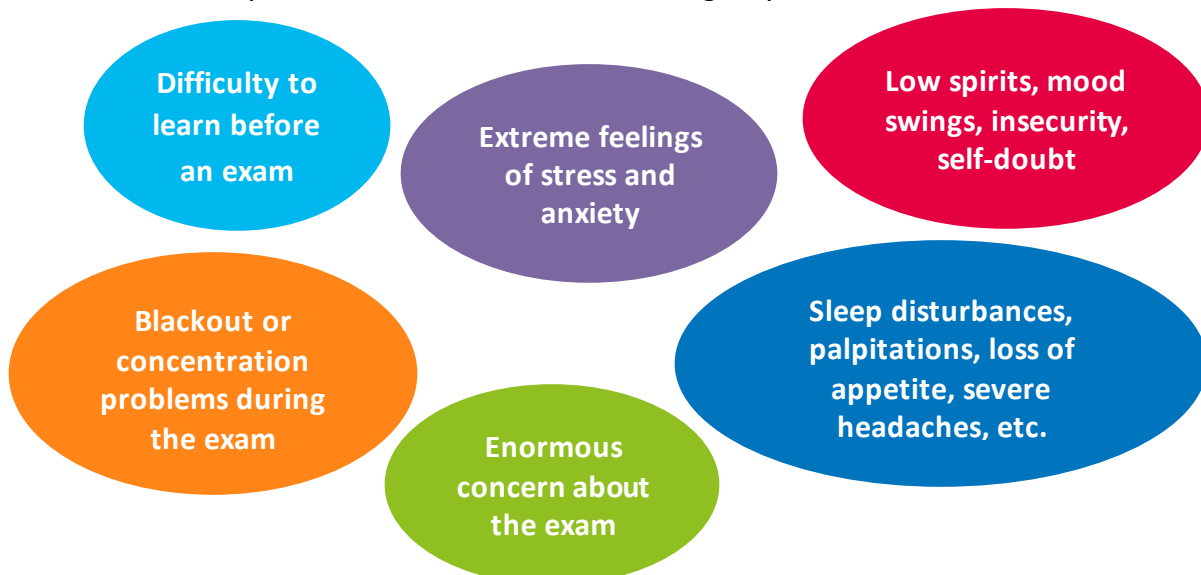
Nervousness often occurs before events that are important to you and manifests itself, for example, in the form of an increased pulse, tenseness, cold hands, sweating or stomach pain. Although we often perceive the feeling of being nervous rather negatively, nervousness does not affect our performance in a negative way.

In general, it is good to be nervous before an exam. This improves the blood supply to your brain and makes it easier for you to concentrate.

Exam anxiety, on the other hand, affects your performance. This means that people who suffer from this anxiety only focus on the fear and are thus prevented from retrieving their knowledge and skills during an exam.

This fear often arises from having had a bad experience, hearing negative things from others, getting pressure from outside, being too perfectionist or not believing in oneself.

Exam anxiety can manifest itself in the following ways:



Practical relevance

Do you also feel that you suffer from exam nerves? If so, how does this affect you?

Exam anxiety is really not pleasant. However, there is good news: There are many effective **methods against exam anxiety!** So if you suffer from exam anxiety, you can do a lot about it!

The following things can help to reduce or manage exam anxiety:

- Learn a relaxation technique that suits you.
- Body and mind are connected: Eat healthy and get enough exercise.
- Prepare well for the exam - plan your learning process up to the exam.
- Breathe in and out deeply in a situation where you panic.
- Talk yourself into a good mood - tell yourself that you can do it.
- Don't set your expectations too high.

If you suffer from particularly severe exam anxiety that noticeably affects you, you can also seek professional support from a doctor, psychologist or psychotherapist.

Practical relevance

Do you also suffer from exam anxiety? If so, think about the reasons for it. Make a note of this reason and write down what you could do about it.

Here you can some techniques for relaxation:

Music	Listening to your favourite music before an exam triggers a positive feeling and your breathing and heartbeat become calmer.
Fantasy journey	Sit in a quiet place, close your eyes and think of something beautiful in your life. Think of your family, experiences with your friends or other relaxing situations. Or think about what your next holiday could be like, for example.
Helpful breathing techniques	Sit upright, put one hand on your stomach and try to breathe through your nose into your stomach. You can use the 4-6-8 method: Take a deep breath while counting to four. Hold your breath until you have counted to six. Then exhale deeply and count to 8. You should repeat this five times or more.

Humming	Singing or humming gives your body the feeling that everything is alright and tension eases.
Yoga/meditation	In yoga or meditation sessions, you concentrate exclusively on your body and the necessary movements, which creates inner peace and makes you forget other things.

Example

Another possibility for relaxation is progressive muscle relaxation according to Jacobsen. Here, the muscles are gradually tensed for a certain time and then relaxed again. This conscious control of tension and relaxation creates inner peace in the body.

Here, you can find instructions on how to do this:

<https://www.meinmed.at/gesundheit/progressiv-muskelentspannung-jacobson/1452#wie-funktioniert-progressive-muskelentspannung-41527>

Besides the nervousness or fear of exams, however, there is often another issue that concerns us: the stress associated with studying and the exam itself.

There are **several reasons why** we can feel stressed when studying for an exam. Below you will find four of them. **Which of these is most likely to apply to you?**

1.5.1 You have invested a lot of time and energy and are now nervous

It is normal to be nervous before an exam, especially if you have invested a lot of time and energy in learning. Here are some tips that can help you to reduce stress and prepare well for the exam:



- **Look for a relaxation technique that is suitable for you and that you practise regularly (not only before the exam).**

Breathing exercises, meditations or yoga, for example, can help you calm down, reduce stress and relax. You can find various options on the internet, especially on YouTube. Just try out the ones that seem interesting to you! By regularly implementing such techniques into your everyday life, you will improve your ability to relax and cope with stress, as well as your concentration and performance.

- **Create a timetable that covers the learning of all the topics in the exam.** This way you can be sure that you have gone through all the areas thoroughly before starting with the exam.
- **Practise with exam questions!** Maybe the trainer can provide you with exam questions from previous courses.
- **Avoid too much learning!** If you learn too long, it can make you feel overwhelmed and stressed because of it. Make sure you get enough sleep, rest and eat healthy!
- **Try to have positive thoughts and remind yourself that you have prepared thoroughly for the exam!** Remember that the exam is only one part of your life and there are many other ways to succeed.
- **Talk with your friends or family members about your worries regarding not passing the exam!** This can help to reduce stress and boost your confidence.

If you are still anxious of an exam or feel overwhelmed while studying, do not hesitate to seek professional help from someone who can give you psychological advice.

1.5.2 You have little time and energy for learning

When you have little time and energy to study for an exam, it can be difficult to avoid stress. Here are some tips that can help you reduce your stress levels and better prepare for the exam:



- **Prioritise your learning tasks!** Start studying those topics that are most likely to come up for the exam and that are most difficult.
- **Use learning materials that help you quickly find important information!** These can be summaries, quizzes, old exam questions or online videos, for example.
- **Set learning goals that you can keep and take breaks!** It is important to rest and take breaks to keep your energy levels high!
- **Minimise distractions!** Turn off all notifications on your smartphone and computer and avoid outside interruptions (e.g. from family members) to be able to fully concentrate on learning.
- **Use memory techniques such as mind maps or mnemonics!** Mind maps make the connections between the contents of a topic easy for our brain to understand and thus recall. A mnemonic works by linking a certain piece of information with an easy-to-remember picture, word or sentence. For example, you can remember the four

cardinal directions by thinking of the first letters of the following sentence: "Never wash without soap" (north, east, south, west). In this way, you succeed in anchoring information in the brain and recalling it later!

- **Ask questions!** If you have difficulties in understanding the material, use an online forum or discuss your questions with your trainer and other learners. This may take some courage on your part, but it is worth it for you and most likely other course participants will be grateful.

Every person has his/her individual preferences regarding learning. Find the best way for you by trying out how you can best gain and retain knowledge in a short time and with little energy!

1.5.3 The material seems to be too extensive or difficult

If you feel that the learning material is too extensive or difficult, it can easily lead to stress and an overwhelming sensation. These tips can help you acquire the feeling that you can manage learning anyway:



- **Divide the learning material into smaller sections and define learning objectives step by step!** Focus only on what is relevant for the exam.
- **Create a timetable that covers all topics relevant for the exam.** Thus, you can be sure that you have gone through everything before the exam.
- **Use learning materials that help you quickly find important information!** These can be summaries, quizzes, old exam questions or online videos, for example.
- **Learn together!** Working together with other learners usually makes it easier to understand the contents. By asking and answering each other's questions and discussing a task, you learn automatically.
- **Talk to your trainer about the content that is difficult for you to understand!** He/she can give you additional explanations and help you to understand the material better.
- **Stay confident!** Keep reminding yourself that you are able to learn the material step by step. It is normal that learning content is demanding. But with enough time and practice, you can understand it!

Don't give up too quickly – take enough time to learn difficult or extensive content! Sometimes it already helps to divide the learning material into smaller sections and to create a schedule for your exam preparation. If you still have difficulties, be brave and ask your trainer for additional support!

1.5.4 You put too much pressure on yourself

It is normal to feel pressured before an exam. However, too much stress and pressure will affect your ability to prepare well for the exam. Here are some tips that can help you relieve yourself of pressure:



- **Set goals that make sense and that you can actually achieve!** It is important that you do not want too much at once. Focus only on what is relevant for the exam. Divide the learning material into smaller pieces and set yourself learning goals step by step!
- **Schedule regular breaks into your study time!** It is important to take breaks and relax to relieve stress and keep your energy up. Remember that you will be able to concentrate better after a break!
- **Look for a relaxation technique that is suitable for you and that you practise regularly (not only before the exam).** Breathing techniques, meditations or yoga, for example, can help you calm down, reduce stress and relax. You can find various options on the internet, especially on YouTube. Just try out the ones that seem interesting to you! By regularly incorporating such techniques into your everyday life, you will improve your ability to relax and cope with stress, as well as your concentration and performance.
- **Avoid comparisons!** Everyone has a different pace and style of learning. Find out what "your way" of learning is and value your progress!
- **Get support and surround yourself with people who encourage you!** If you talk openly with your trainer that you feel a lot of pressure when learning, he/she can develop learning opportunities with you that support you. Talk about your worries with your friends and family! As social beings we need other people with whom we can share our feelings. Friends and family members will listen to you, encourage you, take your mind off things and/or help you learn. People close to you will thus provide you with healthy food during intense learning times or help you with other tasks so that you have enough time and energy for learning.

- **Focus on your progress and successes! Appreciate yourself; you are doing your best!**
It is normal that you cannot always make the progress you have planned before, e.g. if your children get ill or if other unforeseen things happen. But it is important that you appreciate your performance anyway, even if you are far less than 100% successful!

Tell your friends and family members how you feel before an exam and consider together how you can be helped in the best possible way! If the pressure becomes too much and even everyday activities seem stressful to you, don't hesitate to get professional psychological support!

Important

Try to become aware of the reasons for your stress, so that you can reduce it in a targeted way and feel more joy in learning.

1.5.5 General recommendations for a relaxed approach to stress



We all have phases in our lives that can be particularly stressful. In addition to exam preparations, for example, the workplace, our own family, illnesses, financial difficulties or problems in a relationship could challenge us. This is exactly why it is important to **bring a relaxed approach to stress into your life!** It is therefore worth investing time and energy in the following points from now on to get through stressful phases of life well:

- **By structuring and planning your day well, you will feel more organised.** This can help to reduce pressure.
- **Plan breaks into your day!** Your brain needs regular relaxation. Many people need a break of 10 to 20 minutes after 60 minutes of concentration. Find out for yourself how

long you can concentrate well and how long a break should be so that you can recharge your energy.

- **Physical activity helps you to reduce stress and increase your well-being!** Choose a type of sport that you like to do. Even easy and short activities, like taking a walk, support you in clearing your mind.
- **Get enough sleep!** Try to get enough sleep to be rested and focused during the day. Make sure you keep to your usual bedtimes.
- **Eat healthy and balanced!** Eat a variety of different foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and healthy fats. This will provide your body with enough nutrients to support you in your challenges.
- **Do relaxation exercises on a regular basis!** Breathing techniques, meditation or yoga, for example, can help you reduce stress and improve concentration. On the internet, especially on YouTube, you can find various possibilities. Just try out the ones that seem interesting to you!
- **Talk about your worries with friends or family members!** If you feel stressed, this can help you to clear your head and find new perspectives for solving problems.
- **Try - even in difficult phases of life - to think positively and motivate yourself!** Imagine how you have personally grown from the current challenge and how this will have a positive effect on the rest of your life.

Important

It is yourself that has most influence on how you manage stressful phases in life. You decide whether you grow from it or whether your health and quality of life suffer of it. The sooner you find out you can reduce stress, the easier it will be for you to react to stressful times and recover from them more quickly.

Find out which of the above-mentioned points are particularly good for you and make them your habits already in not so busy times!

Reflection

The points mentioned above contribute significantly to being able to deal well with stress. **Which of these would you like to change in your life?**

- structure and plan the day
- plan breaks
- physical activity
- sleep
- nutrition
- relaxation exercises
- conversations
- thinking positively and motivating oneself.

Take 3 points and describe how you will personalise them for yourself in the future!

1.6 Summary

Our personal mindset has a significant impact on our ability to learn and perform. The key difference between a **fixed mindset** and a **growth mindset** is how we view our skills and talents: as something fixed that is given to us or as something agile that we can develop through our persistence in lifelong learning.

With a growth mindset, we automatically support ourselves to achieve goals: An inner drive pulls us towards a topic to learn something new. Our innate curiosity supports us in this. The growth mindset shows that with our inner attitude, we are essentially responsible for our own success in achieving our goals. This takes away the power of all supposedly obstructive external factors to stop us. And we are finally in a position to align our lives with what is personally important to us!

However, it takes time to meet all challenges with a growth mindset. We can therefore be patient with ourselves! It is completely normal if we have the feeling that changing our patterns is exhausting and if this does not happen as quickly as we would like.

When we **learn together - in a team** - it has many advantages. We support each other, share experiences, are more creative and find a more comprehensive solution to problems together. Group work, discussions, mentoring, learning groups, mutual questioning, online forums and social media groups are proven methods in learning together.

To work on a topic together, we communicate with each other. **Verbal communication** refers to the use of language to make the others understand facts, ideas, thoughts or opinions. **Non-verbal communication** takes place when we do not use words but our body language, facial expressions and gestures, e.g. to convey emotions and to emphasise the meaning of what is said.

The interpersonal factors of **empathy, reliability and honesty** also play an essential role in whether team learning is successful. Being empathetic means that we consciously put ourselves in the perspective of another team member and also respect their point of view and personality. Reliability is important in order to be able to trust each other and keep to the schedule. When team members are honest with each other, they can better understand each other, support each other and find solutions. **Constructive feedback** is an appreciative form of personal feedback that provides information on what is working well and what can be

improved. If we listen carefully and are willing to learn from it, we grow as individuals and as a group.

If we want to solve a problem, the internet or other people are often valuable sources of information for us. Our **critical thinking** helps us to check whether the information we receive is credible, answers our question clearly and whether we can understand it. It also helps us to compare different options on the basis of facts and logical considerations in order to make a decision. Especially when a strange feeling signals us that we should question the information more closely, it is worthwhile for us to consciously take the time to examine it. Our critical thinking helps us to ask appropriate questions that bring us clarity: Are there other sources of information that say comparable things? Are the statements based on valid evidence? Are they trying to manipulate us with emotional language? Do we believe that information is true because it corresponds to our own convictions?

But it is not only critical thinking that helps us to solve problems in the best possible way. So-called **creativity techniques** help us to **deviate from habitual patterns** to evaluate decision-making possibilities more comprehensively and to gain new ideas on how to solve a problem. For example, creating a mind-map is very useful for us to look at a topic from different perspectives and thus make connections and possible solutions to problems recognisable. Our critical thinking, together with careful reflection, also helps us to **choose a suitable training course**: What skills do we want to acquire? Which educational offers are available for this? How well does the respective offer fit us? Can we also connect interesting follow-up courses to it?

Continuing education is often seen as stressful. But it is not only further education, it can also be our workplace, our family, illnesses or financial difficulties that challenge our strength and energy enormously. **The sooner we find out what is good for us to relieve stress, the easier we can react to stressful times and recover from them more quickly.** By making a habit of a well-structured day, regular breaks, physical activity, sufficient sleep, a balanced diet, regular relaxation exercises, deep conversations and positive thoughts, we take care of our physical and mental well-being in and after stressful times.

No matter what challenges life is facing us with, it is definitely worthwhile to expand our strengths and abilities during our lives: **because every step towards personal development allows us to recognise new opportunities to realise what is personally important to us!**

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