



Traenáil Aontas na Mac Léinn
Students' Union Training
2023

A Trilateral Event
USI | NUS-USI | NUS

Before we begin - a reminder to all Students' Union Officers:

You are human. You are one person. Things will change a lot over the coming year. It's ok to feel overwhelmed or disappointed if your plans end up having to change.

All you can do each day is your best. Not getting everything done is not being a failure. There is only so much you can do in a given year, try not to be too hard on yourself if you don't get everything you wanted done. It's impossible to fulfil all your manifesto promises in a given year.

Your work builds on existing work from previous years and is about implementing newer and more modern structures and initiatives which will evolve and continue to be built upon after your time. An SU sabbatical role is never fully complete; it's always being reshaped, refined, adapted and part of a continuous cycle of enhancement to reflect the needs of the student population.

Know that your work is extremely important and meaningful. You are helping so many students and are making a remarkable difference which will be felt for many years to come.

We hope this workbook gives you the encouragement and tools you need to reflect, prioritize and make the most of the semester/ year.

*"Self-reflection is the engine of personal growth,
a journey which we all have a ticket for."*

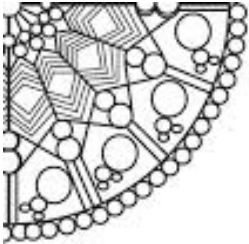
USI wishes to acknowledge the contribution of
the USI Mental Health Manager **Sarah Hughes** in the development of this workbook.

Let's start with the main thing here – you.

What interests you about the student union movement?

What does being a good SU Officer mean to you?

What do you think is the best thing about your particular role? Why?



What aspects of being a SU Officer are most important to you? Why?

When you decided to become an SU Officer, what made you want to do that? Why?

What were your first thoughts and feelings when you found out that this would be your role for the year?

What is a time when you felt **most confident**?

What are you worried or nervous about this year?

Consider writing a job description for your role: What would it say?



We've a shiny new semester and a whole new year laid out in front of us, and we want to make the most of it.

There will be some tools and tips throughout this section that will hopefully help you to feel fully ready to take on semester one.

When you imagine yourself this time next year, what are you most proud of when you look back over your full term?

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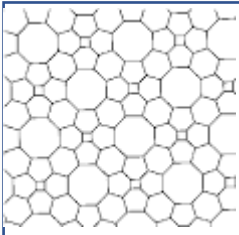
What skills/qualities have you learned/ developed?

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What has your overall experience taught you about yourself?

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What do you admire about yourself?



What are some things that you have accomplished that you are proud of?

What compliment would you give yourself?

What abilities feel natural or easy for you?

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What are your overall goals as an SU Officer?

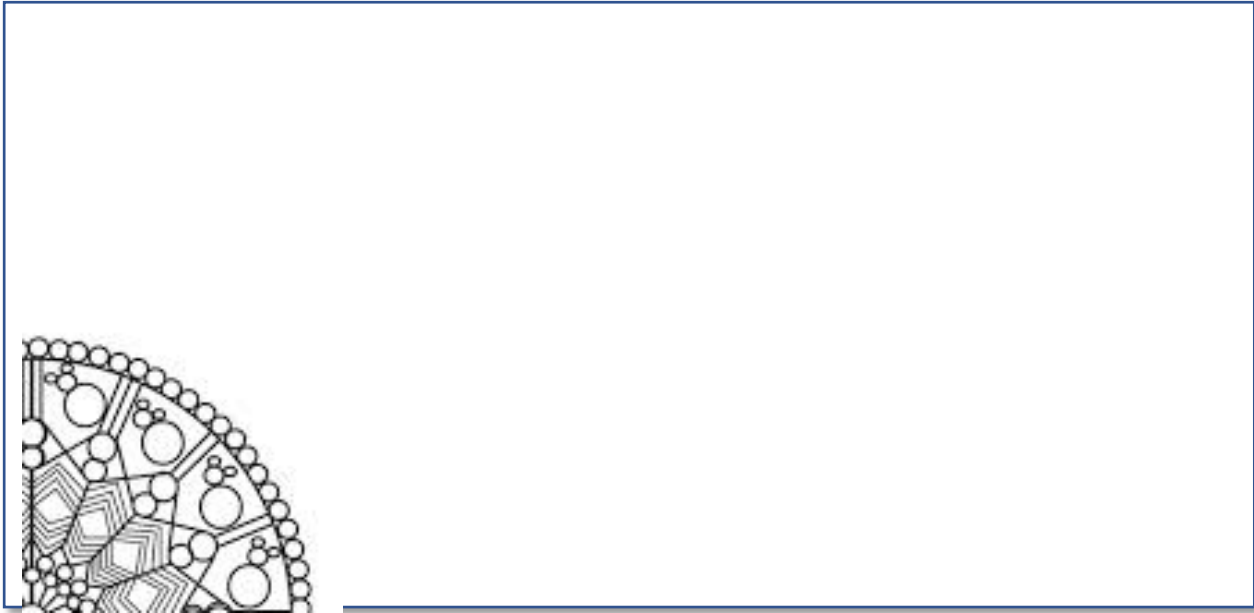
A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their answers to the question above.

Why are those the things that are important to you?

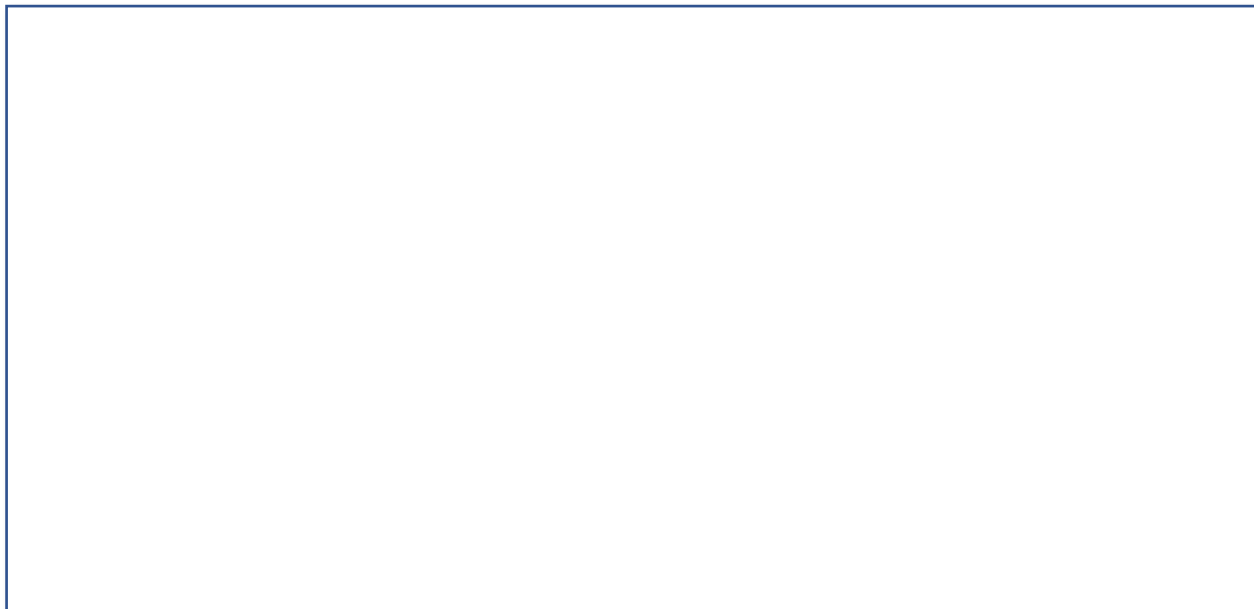
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Complete the sentence: If I do nothing but _____
over the next six months, I will feel I have done ok.

What would you like to achieve by the end of semester 1? What would be a measure of success for these goals?

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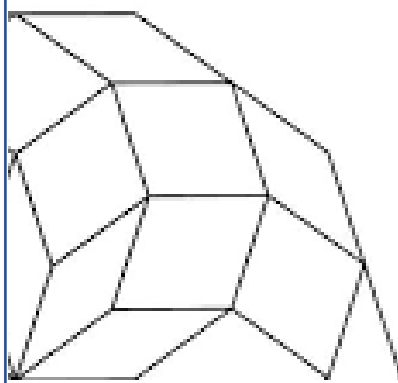
What makes these goals important to you?

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What would help you to achieve these goals? What tools do you have to help you to achieve your goals in semester 1? How can you use them, or learn to use them, to help you achieve your goals?

What does your ideal first semester look like? What makes it ideal? What does your answer to that question tell you about your priorities for the next semester?

Get creative: draw a picture or use another method to visually depict your imagined experience of semester one:



Planning & Goals:

List your goals for semester 1 below. Rank them in order of importance to you. Then rank them in order of how achievable you think these goals are for the coming semester.

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Do the two lists look very different? What is your reaction to how similar or different the lists look?

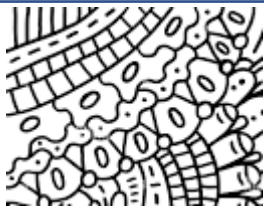
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Look at the goals that you ranked highest in important. Why are they the most important ones to you?

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If the lists look very different, think about what it might be like to take one of your goals off the list, or changing it. What are the emotions that you feel as you consider that?

What would happen if you did take the goal off the list? What would happen if you changed it? Try to consider the possible positive consequences as well as the negative consequences.




What milestones can you identify within your goals to mark progress? How will you celebrate those milestones?

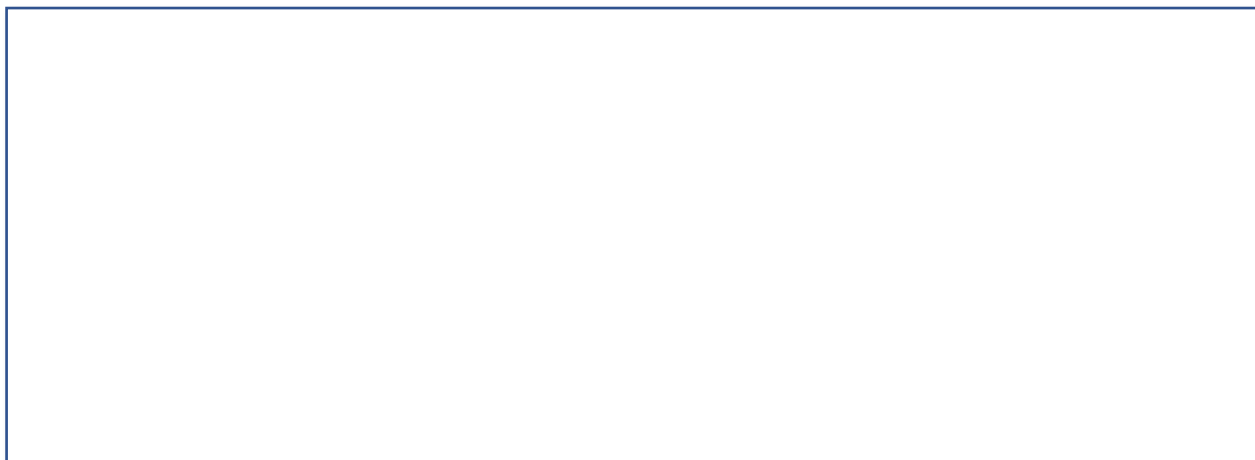
What will help hold you accountable for your goals?

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What might make it difficult for you to achieve your goals?

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Are there things you can do to mitigate those things?

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Time Management

There are some skills that factor in to our ability to manage our time: decisiveness – being able to make decisions;

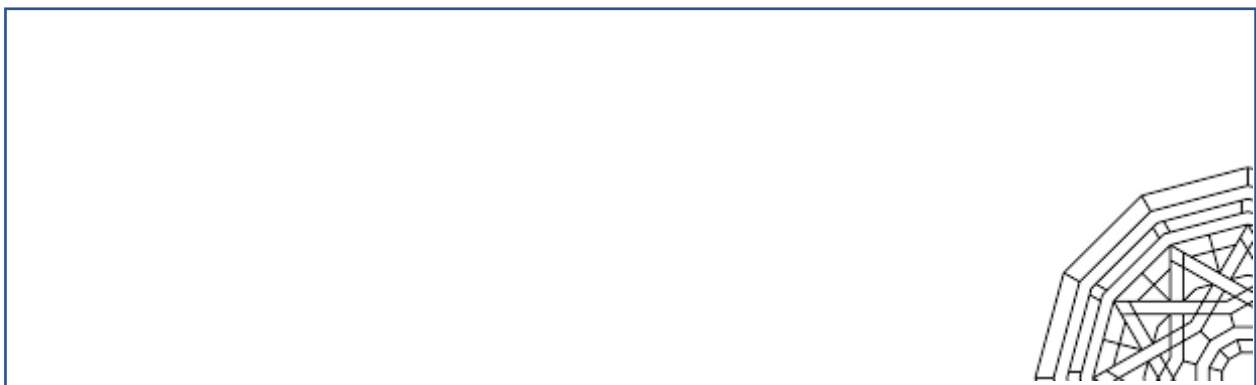
- **strategic planning** – being able to look ahead and set goals and think about what might impact on goals;
- **executive function** – being able to get things done by managing you (self-control, self-regulation, energy, internal resources, etc);
- **agility** – being able to think on your feet;
- **flexibility** – being able and willing to adapt;
- **systems thinking** – being able to see how the whole is the sum of its parts, and how those parts make up the whole;
- **habit building** – being able to automate some behaviours to give your brain space to focus on the harder things; **persistence** – being able to keep going;
- **resilience** – being able to bounce back.

We all have different levels of these skills; it's up to you whether you want to work on strengthening areas, or whether you want to use your other skills to work around those areas.

What skills from the above list are you strong in?



What skills from the above list could you develop?



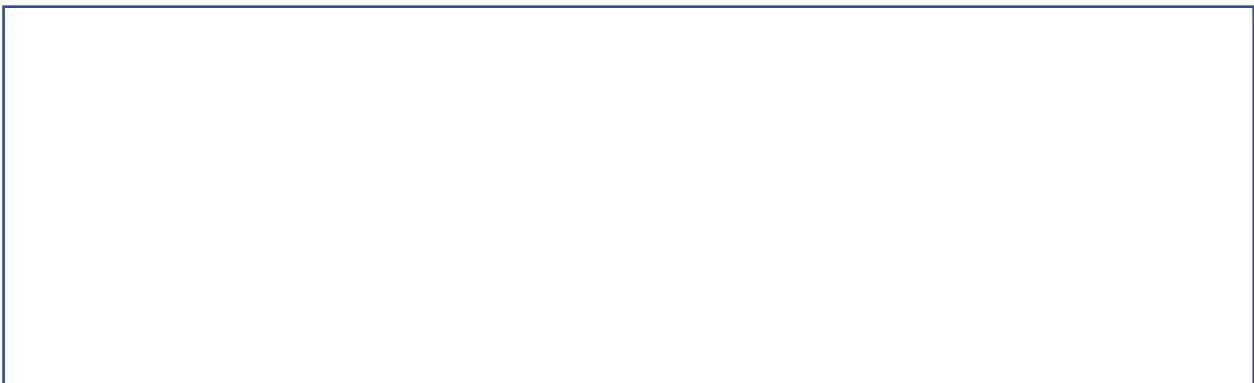
What do you most value about time?

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What is the most challenging thing for you about time management?


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What do you think you will spend the most time on?

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What would you like to spend the most time on?

What could you do to help manage your time? What could you start doing? What could you stop doing?



Planning

At the start of each week, look at your goals in the context of the upcoming week. What takes priority? Make a list of the priority action items from each goal for the week. *Next* start to fill up your schedule:

Put yourself in first (remember we referenced this in the self-care section?) Schedule time to eat and rest, as well as any personal appointments that you might have, and if possible, your downtime.

Next put in pre-scheduled meetings with others.

What time is left?

If you can, schedule a meeting with yourself towards the end of the week – this is protected catch-up time.

Look at the to-do list of priority action items.

Consider your energy levels, now, and how you normally find yourself – for example, do you tend to feel most energised in the mornings or evenings? Do you start the week strong but run out of energy by Thursday? Maybe you get a second wind come Friday morning? Fill the gaps that are left in your to-do list with the action items, considering your energy levels.

Try to overplan for how much time something will take. For example, if checking your emails normally takes about an hour a day, put it in your schedule for an hour and a quarter, or an hour and a half. You might not use that extra time, which will mean you can take a break between things, or get ahead on other things, but if you end up needing it, you will thank your past self for building it in.

It may be the case that you have less gaps to be filled than you have things to do. That's ok, but there is only so much time in a day and in a week. Sometimes you simply cannot fit everything in, and trying to squeeze them in will not work out well in the long run.

Consider the list of action items again on it's own. Are there any things that could be put into next week? Are there any things you could delegate or ask for help with? Sometimes it might be the case that you just have too much on. If this is the case, it might be that you need to re-assess the feasibility of your goals. Again, that's ok, even if it's disappointing. If you need to delegate, ask for help, or consider changing or dropping something from your plans, reach out to whoever you need to for support/advice/to delegate to as soon as possible, and communicate your needs as clearly as possible.

Self-care

We know that there is a lot out there about self-care; ‘go for a run’, ‘eat well’, etc. and that it can sometimes sound prescriptive and like the assumption is that going for a walk will cure all ills.

We know you know that it’s not that simplistic, but stopping to think about what you are doing to keep yourself well is important to include as part of this workbook, as you can make all the to-do lists and plans, but you can’t pour from an empty cup.

Boring self-care

There has often been a misconception that self-care is spoiling yourself, that it’s all bubble baths and nights off. Then there’s the other misconception that self-care is all about being your best self and living your best life, that if you eat right, drink all the water and sleep right, keep in touch with your mates and don’t overwork, everything will be grand.

However, while self-care can include those things, for many people, it’s much more basic than that. For someone struggling with their mental health, having a shower and taking their medication every day might be as much self-care as they can manage. This type of self-care is known as ‘boring self-care’, because it’s the stuff that for some of us might be habits that we don’t even think about, like taking regular showers, and it’s the stuff that we dread doing, and often put off, like making a dentist’s appointment.

When we think about you as an SU Officer, we see really full days, trying to achieve lots of things, being pulled in lots of directions, etc. In those circumstances, it can happen that the boring self-care stuff can unintentionally fall to the bottom of the priority list.

That’s ok, but it’s important to make sure it doesn’t fall off the list altogether. For example, maybe it’s not possible to eat a super healthy meal every meal – no judgement. But are you skipping breakfast or lunch in order to squeeze in more meetings?

Maybe some days you’ve too much on so you skip that daily workout you promised yourself – again, no judgement. But has it been more than a few days since you went outside, or took a break to move around a little? We have some prompts for reflection on self-care down below, but we have also tried to encourage you to not put yourself and your needs last every time in the section on planning your day.

Being an SU Officer is really important.
Your role cannot be overstated or
overestimated. But this role, or any
other role, is not worth you being
swallowed up in, or compromising your
health and wellbeing.

It's important to remember in order to be the best version of yourself, you need to take care of yourself first to ensure you can function at the best of your abilities.

Self Care

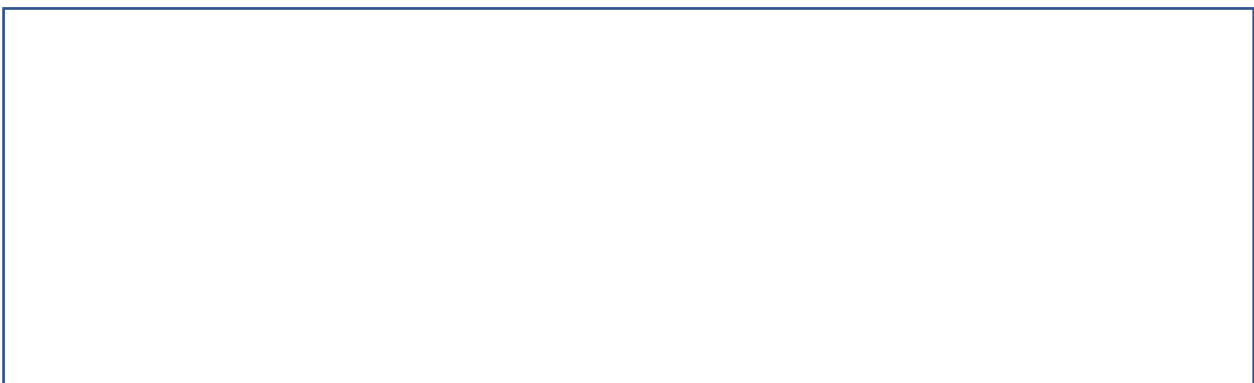
What does self-care mean to you?

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How do you currently practice self-care (don't forget to think about the boring self-care you might do without even realising it!)?

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What is challenging for you about practicing self-care?

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What can you learn about self-care from how you care for others?

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What is your favourite form of self-care?

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How do you think your self-care needs might change with your new role?

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What changes could you make to incorporate enough self-care into your life?



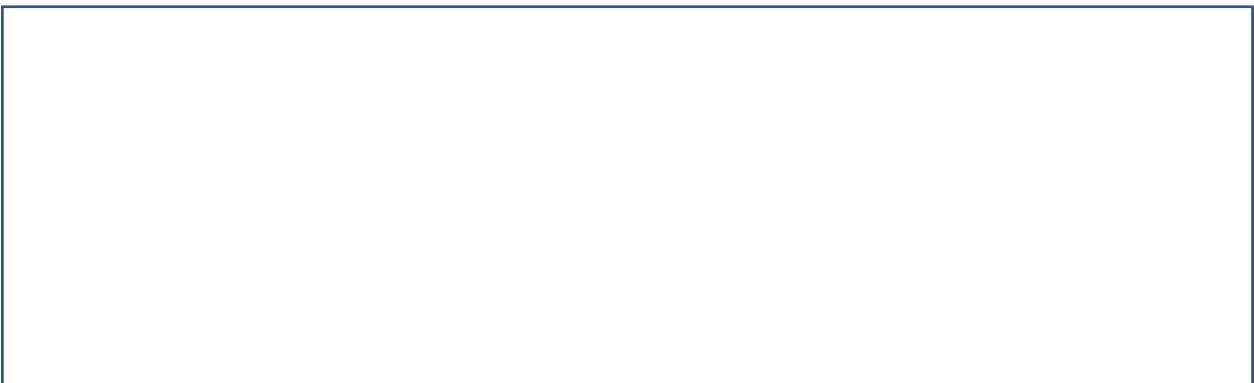
Another part of self-care is giving yourself credit for your wins

We can often put ourselves under immense pressure to do all we set out to do, especially when we are in elected position, because it can feel like we are letting people who voted for us down if we don't. However, it's really important to give yourself credit where it is due – and it is due! You are doing your best. *You are showing up. That counts.*

How do you celebrate a win in your life?



Make a list of the ways you plan to celebrate the wins in the coming semester (big or small!):



The Inner Critic

Let's think about our inner critic, and how we can combat the effects it can have on us.

When you are feeling frustrated, stressed, or burned out, or when things are not going well, what kinds of things do you think to yourself?

What to the things that you think to yourself tell you about the kind of messages you are giving yourself?



What obstacles does your inner critic put in your way of achieving your goals?

Imagine that your inner critic was a creature (real or imagined). If you were to ask it, what do you think it might tell you that it needs? What would you like to tell this creature?

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Imagine where your creature might be at it's happiest. Tell it to go and take a holiday there. How does it feel to release that creature from it's job of criticising you?

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Energy & motivation

Generating and Maintaining Energy and Motivation:

Think about where you normally get your energy from, and what normally might drain your energy. Some of these might have been affected by the pandemic, for example, the stress release of sports or going out, having more frequent changes of scenery, being on campus with the buzz of everything, and being able to disconnect as we want to. Sometimes thinking of ways to energise can involve setting some life rules for yourself – ‘I’ll check in with a friend X times a week’, ‘I won’t check emails after Y time each day’. Sometimes it can involve being a bit creative or a bit silly – dancing to release physical tension, re-arranging our rooms so we’re looking at a slightly different view.

What ways can you think of to energise yourself?

What made you get involved with the Students’ Union?



What made you choose the specific part/role of the SU that you're involved with?

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What do you care most about within your role right now?

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Motivation

Motivation can be internally or externally generated. When you think about what you might gain from completing something, are those gains mostly about personal development, or how you will feel, or are they mostly about achieving things like praise, promotion etc?

Neither is better than the other, but if we understand where our motivation comes from, we can understand what to target when we are feeling unmotivated. People tend to be motivated by one of three main things: competence – wanting to master skills; relatedness – wanting to be in community with other people; and autonomy – wanting to be in charge of your own life.

What makes you feel fulfilled as a person?



What motivates you? Does that change for different goals?

What has motivated you in the past?

Where do you think your motivation mostly comes from – external or internal sources?

When you think about what made you want to become an SU Officer, how did competence, relatedness and autonomy factor into your decision? Are there particular parts of this you'd like to focus on in the first semester? How might you like to focus on them?

Sometimes it can help to shift perspective. Pick someone who you trust in your life – ask yourself what advice they would give you right now (if it's possible, and you feel like it, you could ask them directly!)

It's important to consider our limitations – they aren't pleasant, but some thing are out of our control, and if we acknowledge then, it becomes easier to work within and around them, and can sometimes free us up to think creatively about solutions. What might your limitations be for the coming semester?



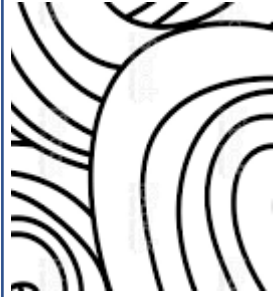
Naming fears

It's important to name your fears. Saying them out loud, or writing them down, will not increase the likelihood of them coming true, but it can help to release the power our fears can often hold over us. Once we acknowledge our fears, we can assess how we can face them, or decide how best to seek help with them

My fears in relation to my role as an SU Officer are:

I fear these things because:

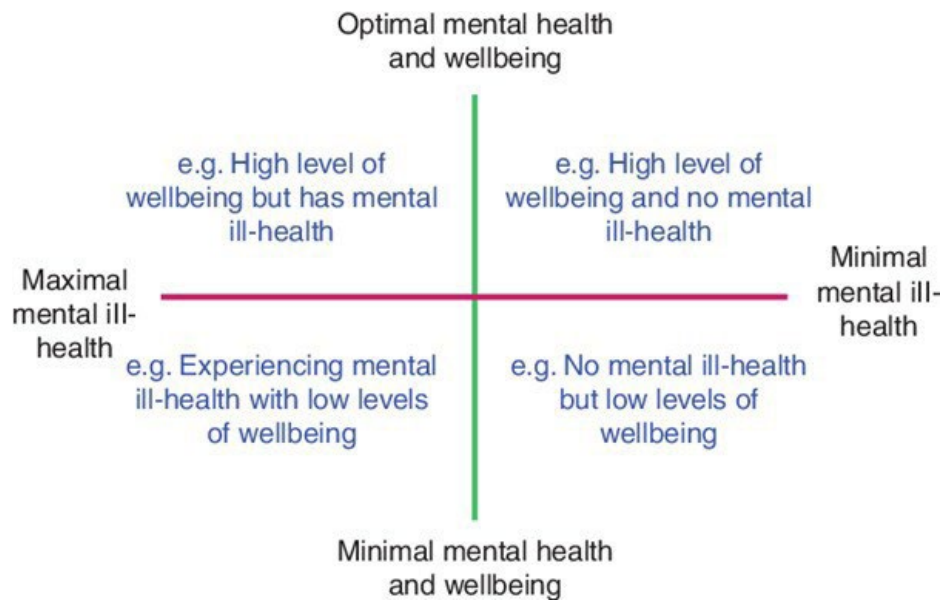
Look at each fear you have listed. Is there something you can do about it?



Is there someone you can talk to who can help you allay that fear, or help you work through it?

Your Wellbeing

The next section allows you to check in with your wellbeing and mental distress levels. Again, it helps to check in with this tool at regular times to see how things are fluctuating or staying the same. If you are consistently in the bottom left corner, please reach out for help, and make sure you are getting the support that you need.



HSE

yourmentalhealth.ie

Bodywhys

01 201 7906 | bodywhys.ie

Samaritans

116 123

jo@samaritans.ie

LGBT Ireland Helpline

1890 929 539 | Online chat at lgbt.ie

info@lgbt.ie

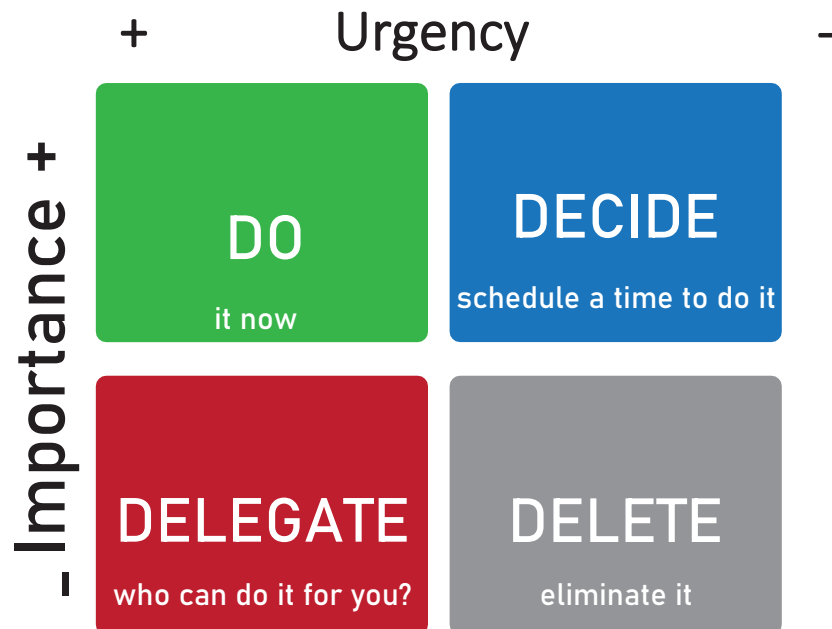
Rape Crisis Helpline

180 77 8888 | counselling@rcc.ie

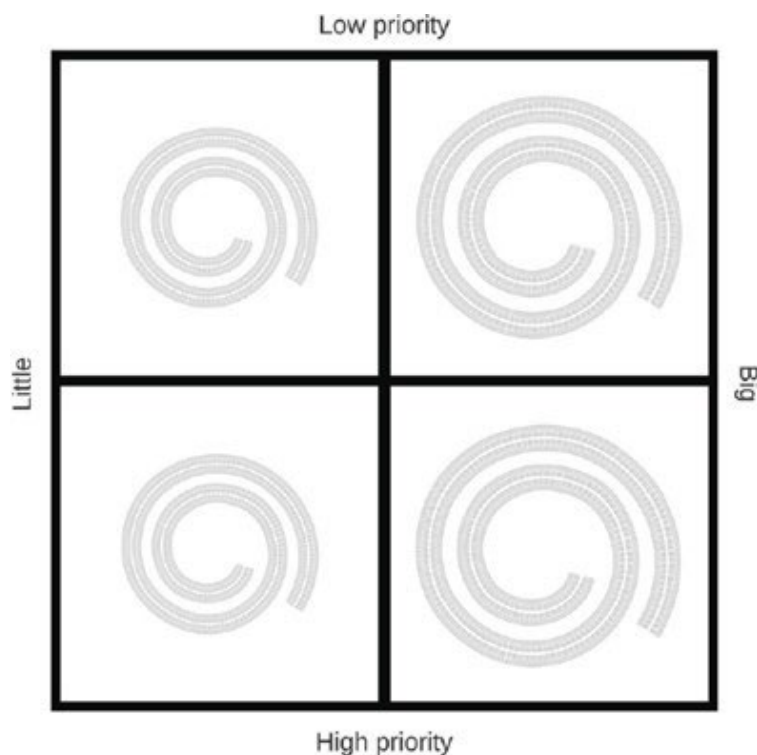
Priorities

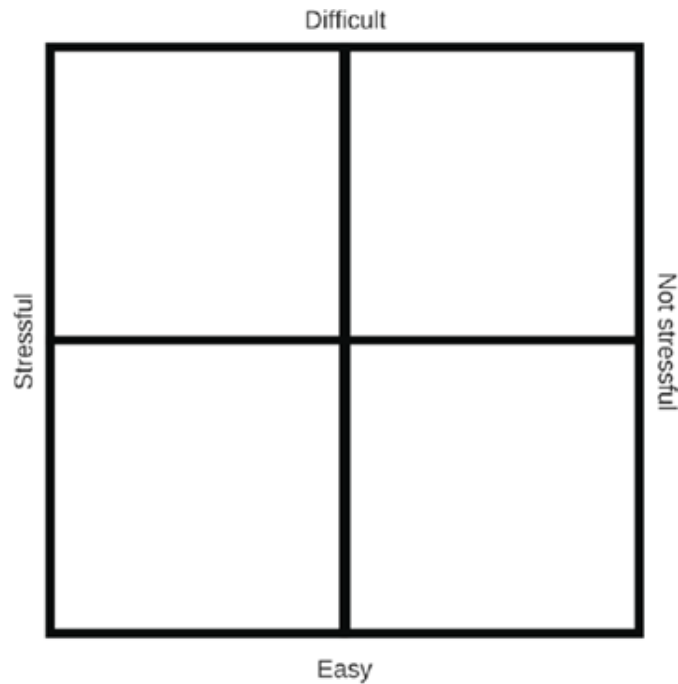
It can sometimes be difficult, when we are juggling multiple things, to know what to prioritise, or what to address first. The following tools might help you to narrow things down.

If you need to figure out what is urgent, what is important, what is both and what is neither, try to place each action or decision in a square on the following matrix:



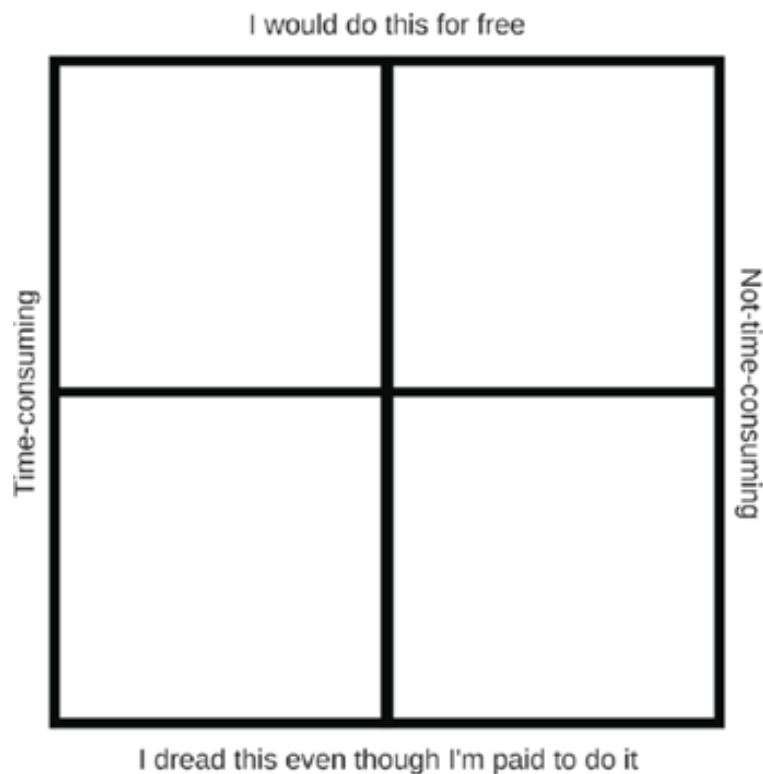
Within the top left square of that matrix, there still might be some competing items. This next matrix might help to prioritise things within that square:





Sometimes it's not really about how important it is to get something done, it's more about how much better you will feel once it's off your plate. If that's the case, this matrix might help you:

That said, make sure to let yourself do at least one thing from the bottom right square every day – those are the easy wins, and that way you'll be making sure to have something to celebrate each day. While not every part of every day of your role can be fun, it's important to allow ourselves to do the enjoyable things that are part of your role. This matrix can help you to identify which of those easy ones would also be fun ones, as well as which harder ones really appeal to you, despite being harder:



Progress Reporting

At the end of each month, check in with how things are going:

What were your goals for this month?

What steps did you take to achieve those goals?

What achievements are you most proud of in relation to those goals?

What challenges have come up in working towards those goals?

What adjustments might you need to make to your goals going forward into next month?

Thinking about to-do lists

Think of one of your goals.

What are the concrete items that will help you to move this forward?

What are all the steps involved in this project?

What are the most important things to do next?

What emotions do you feel when you look at this list? Why?

What on this list concerns you? Why?

What on this list will be the easiest for you to get done?

How do you want to use this list to move forward?

How will you celebrate as you complete this list?

It's important to keep an eye on your mental health, and to check in with yourself now and then. These tools might help you reflect on how you're doing, what you might need to focus on, and when you might want to consider talking to someone or asking for help:

Fill in this blank section with a part of your life that's important but not already listed.



For each of the areas in the wheel, either give each section a score out of 10, or colour in how full you think this area is in terms of how things are going in that part of your life. It works best if you complete this every month or so, so you can see which areas are fluctuating and which are consistently high or low.

What scores stuck out for you as you worked through this? Why?

What was easy to score? What was hard to score? Why?

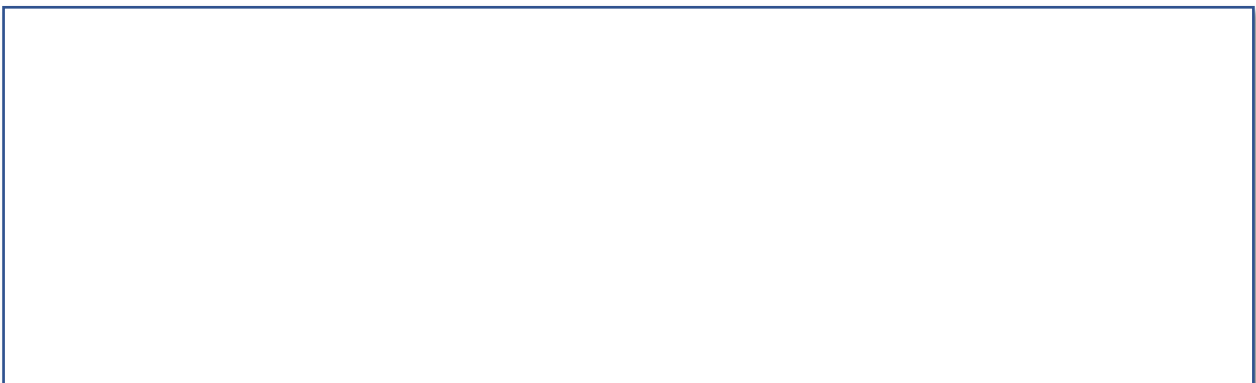
What made you to score each area the way that you did?

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What scores are you happy with?

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What scores are you less happy with?

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Daily Check-in:

Today I am feeling:

My energy levels are:

My main goal today is:

I will take time for myself today by:

The thing that I want to remember today is:

The main actions that I want to complete today are:

Notes