

 PhD Success

PhD STRESS GUIDE

How to deal with Stress and use it as
motivating power



Ewa Pluciennicka, PhD

Dear PhD Friend,

Welcome to your **PhD Stress Guide**.

Stress is a natural part of the PhD journey. It can motivate and energize you, but when it becomes overwhelming, it can drain your energy, affect your wellbeing and make it harder to move forward.

This guide is designed to help you understand stress, take control of your thoughts and reactions, and learn how to use stress as a positive power in your academic and personal life.

Throughout these pages, I invite you to reflect on your own experience and complete the exercises provided. There are no right or wrong answers – just your honest insights that can lead to real change.

Take your time, be kind to yourself, and use the space in this guide to reflect. Small insights today can lead to big changes tomorrow.

To your success,

Ewa Pluciennicka, PhD

Founder, PhD Success

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Understanding Stress

Mechanism of stress & anxiety

Stress is not simply a consequence of events.

Stress is the result of a process that happens inside our mind and body.

It starts with a **Challenge**.

We interpret the challenge through our **Thoughts**.

And then we have a **Reaction** – emotional, mental or physical.

This process happens very quickly, often without us even realizing it.

The good news?

We can learn to influence the most important part of this process – **our thoughts**.



Why does it feel so strong?



Our brain is designed for survival.

It reacts to perceived threats as if they were real.



Our brain still thinks like in the past.

Even when the "lion" is just a deadline or a meeting.



Stress once helped us survive.

Today, we can learn to use it wisely and move forward.



Remember:

The way stress affects us depends on our thoughts.
The good news is – we can learn to work with them.



Let's Start With You



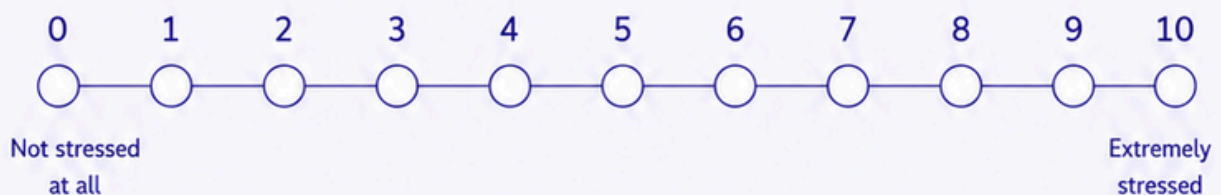
This is where the workbook begins.

1 Where does your stress come from?

Think about the main areas of your life. Write down what causes you stress in each area.

 Work / PhD	 Personal life
 Me	 Other

2 On a scale from 0–10, how stressed do you currently feel?



3 What is currently stressing you the most?

Be as specific as possible.

Challenge → Thoughts → Reactions



Stress is not simply a consequence of events.

A challenge triggers thoughts, and those thoughts influence our reactions.

Use the table below to explore a few recent situations from your own life.

 Challenge / Situation What happened? Be as precise as possible.	 Thoughts What are you telling yourself?	 Reactions How do you react? Fight, Flight or Freeze?

Reflection or Rumination?



Your thoughts influence how you experience stress.

You are not in control of every thought that appears in your mind.

But you can learn to **notice** your thoughts and **choose** which ones deserve your attention.

CONSTRUCTIVE (REFLECTION)

- Realistic problem
- Balanced evaluation
- Action-oriented
- Limited in time
- Leads to solutions

UNPRODUCTIVE (RUMINATION)

- Unrealistic problem
- Unbalanced evaluation
- Worry-oriented
- Repetitive and endless
- Leads to more stress

Think about a stressful situation that is currently occupying your mind.

1 What thought do you find yourself repeating most often?

2 Is this thought:

- Constructive reflection
- Constructive worry
- Rumination

3 Why?

4 If this thought is not helping you move forward:
How could you rephrase it in a more balanced and useful way?

Examples

CONSTRUCTIVE WORRY

- *I don't know how to analyse data from my last experiment.*
- *I am late with the revision of my article.*

RUMINATION

- *I'm doing something wrong. I'm lost with this data.*
- *I'm late. As always.*



Cognitive Reframing



You have more control over your thoughts than you think.

Cognitive reframing means noticing unhelpful thoughts and replacing them with more realistic and constructive ones.

You can't always control what happens, but you can choose how you think about it.

EXAMPLE

Old Thought

*"Oh, I'm so disorganized,
I will never finish it."*



New Constructive Thought

*"I'm creating.
It's always a messy process,
but I always end up with work
that's appreciated."*

1 What thought would you like to replace?

2 What could you tell yourself instead?



Remember

Small shifts in your thinking can lead to big changes in how you feel and act.

Working With Stress



You can't always eliminate stress, but you can work with it.
Use the space below to reflect on what helps you cope, reset, and move forward.

1 What are your natural coping strategies?

2 What helps you release stress?

3 What helps you regain control?

4 What can you do this week to reduce your stress level?

Stress Can Be Your Ally

Dear PhD Friend,

If there is one thing I would like you to remember from this guide, it is this:

Stress is not a sign that something is wrong with you. It is a natural response to challenge, uncertainty, responsibility, and growth.

Stress Can Be Your Ally

Dear PhD Friend,

If there is one thing I would like you to remember from this guide, it is this:

Stress is not a sign that something is wrong with you.

It is a natural response to challenge, uncertainty, responsibility, and growth.

The challenge itself may not change.

- A deadline will still be a deadline.
- A difficult conversation will still be difficult.
- A demanding project will still require effort.

What can change is the position from which you approach that challenge.

When we approach challenges from a position of fear, self-doubt, or helplessness, stress often becomes overwhelming.

When we approach the same challenge from a position of **strength, curiosity, confidence, and self-compassion**, our experience can be completely different.

Sometimes stress can even become a source of motivation, **energy, focus, and personal growth**.

The goal is not to eliminate stress.

The goal is to understand it, work with it, and use it as a positive power.

The challenge might not change, but the way you approach it can completely change your experience.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this guide. I hope it has helped you better understand yourself and your relationship with stress.

You are doing meaningful and important work. Keep going. Your work matters.

To your success,
Ewa

 **PhD Success**
Guiding your success

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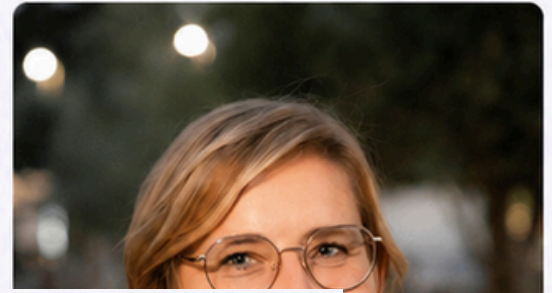
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I am here to support you throughout your academic journey.

Feel welcome to reach out to me regarding stress, productivity, confidence, wellbeing, or any other challenge related to your PhD journey.

Website

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