

The Stoic Fear-Setting Guide

CALM VERITAS · AN EVIDENCE-BASED WELLNESS RESOURCE

Based on the Stoic practice of premeditatio malorum and Tim Ferriss's fear-setting framework

Fear-setting is a structured writing exercise rooted in Stoic philosophy. The Stoics practiced premeditatio malorum — the deliberate premeditation of adversity — not to cultivate pessimism, but to strip feared outcomes of their psychological hold. Modern research on expressive writing (Pennebaker, 1997, Journal of Clinical Psychology) shows that structured written confrontation of feared scenarios reduces anxiety and improves decision clarity. Use this guide when facing a difficult decision you have been avoiding.

EXERCISE 1 — Define the Worst Case

Write the decision or action you are considering below. Then list every negative outcome you can imagine.

THE DECISION OR ACTION I AM CONSIDERING:

FEARED OUTCOMES (list as many as possible):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

EXERCISE 2 — Probability and Prevention

For each fear above, assess the likelihood (1–10) and what you could do to prevent it.

FEARED OUTCOME (brief)

LIKELIHOOD (1–10)

PREVENTION ACTION

The Stoic Fear-Setting Guide

CALM VERITAS · AN EVIDENCE-BASED WELLNESS RESOURCE

EXERCISE 3 — Repair and Recovery

For each worst-case outcome you listed, write one action that could begin to repair or recover the situation.

Seneca: 'Omnia aliena sunt, tempus tantum nostrum est.' Most setbacks are recoverable. Map the path back.

OUTCOME 1 REPAIR ACTION:

OUTCOME 2 REPAIR ACTION:

OUTCOME 3 REPAIR ACTION:

OUTCOME 4 REPAIR ACTION:

OUTCOME 5 REPAIR ACTION:

OUTCOME 6 REPAIR ACTION:

EXERCISE 4 — The Cost of Inaction

The Stoics feared paralysis more than failure. What is the cost — emotional, financial, physical — of not acting?

Write what your life looks like in 6 months, 1 year, and 3 years if you do nothing.

IN 6 MONTHS IF I DO NOT ACT:

IN 1 YEAR IF I DO NOT ACT:

IN 3 YEARS IF I DO NOT ACT:

EXERCISE 5 — The Decision

Having mapped the fear, the prevention, the repair, and the cost of inaction — what is your decision?

MY DECISION:

FIRST CONCRETE STEP I WILL TAKE (with date):
