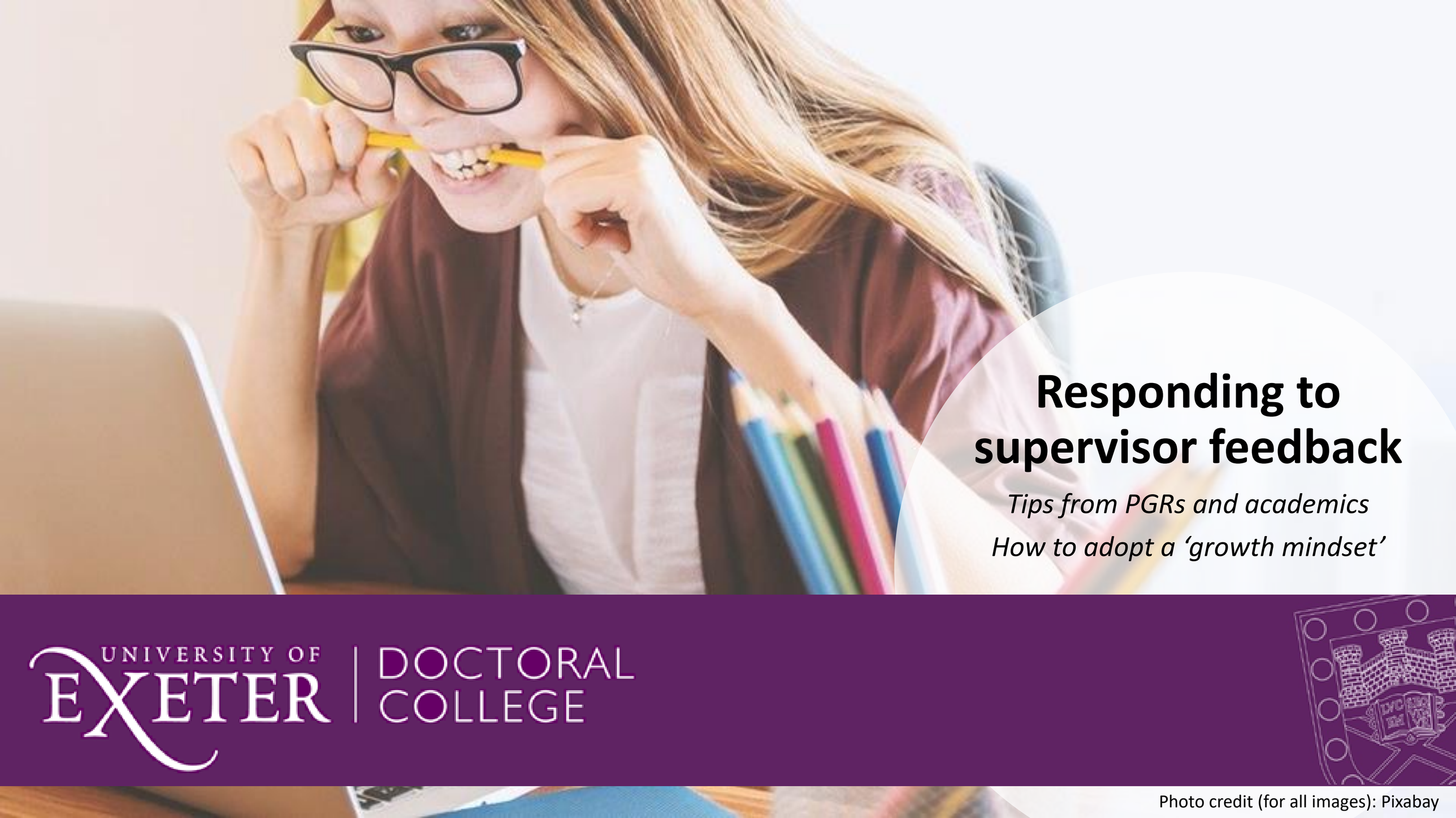

# Responding to supervisor feedback

*Tips from PGRs and academics*

*How to adopt a 'growth mindset'*

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# Do you have a fixed or growth mindset when you read your supervisors' comments?

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Diagram: From Learning Performance

# Adopting a growth mindset: activity

1. Think about some negative feedback you've had

2. How did you tackle this feedback?

3. How could you improve on your response so that it better fits a 'growth mindset'?

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# Tips from other PGRs

‘Make a spreadsheet with several columns: one for the points of feedback that your supervisor's given you, one for what you need to do to address it, and another for satisfying ticks. This also helps to **make feedback more about your work and less about yourself**’

Edward Mills, University of Exeter

‘If there is something you disagree with that your supervisor thinks you should change, explain why you want to stick with what you originally wrote and demonstrate why by producing evidence to back up your argument. Make a strong case. **Own your research**’

Philippa Juliet Meek, University of Exeter

1. I always take notes from feedback so I can reproduce accurate account and ask if not clear about a point.
2. I always draw out sheet in two halves putting ‘positive’ comments on one side and ‘point to improve’ on other after each return from submission combined with meeting (always submit something in good time prior to meetings). There are bullet points and tend to put ‘general’ first and ‘specific’ after. First Checked before next submission (often repeated like passive tense with me!) and rest are ‘crumbs’ to go back and ‘fix’ or rework when return to that section. I do this by hand and attach to printed off copy of minutes which were uploaded. Have folder for these.
3. I ‘fix’ minor errors as first ‘edit’ and leave comments (which are added to those feedback lists) on there until each dealt with on later visit. I have conversations but not had a disagreement yet.
4. If they suggest something different I note it and think about it before responding.
5. I also send agenda few days before meetings. We must take control of our own work. They appreciate work in advance and a plan.

**Pauline McGonagle, University of Exeter**

Main things with feedback (especially tough stuff) is if you have the luxury to take a step back and not work on it a few days to a week that can help. Sometimes when feedback you don't agree with it's hard to read at first as you are so emotionally invested in a PhD. So taking some time away and coming back with fresh eyes I find is a huge help

Also like lots of PhD people we use the comments in word and if I'm not sure I just respond below and remember to flag it in a meeting. It's only in my third year I've got confident enough to challenge comments"

**Nicola Ellis, University of Exeter**

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# Struggling to communicate with your supervisor about feedback?

- If your supervisor is giving you unconstructive or overly negative feedback, try to explain to them how you'd rather receive feedback
- You should be able to have constructive conversations with your supervisor where you don't agree with their feedback; your supervisor should support this and not become defensive or disregard your opinion – remember, it's your thesis!
- Look out for your mental health – doctoral researchers put a high onus on supervisor feedback so take care to

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# Had some difficult feedback?

1) Read through the feedback and then step away from it. Go for a walk, speak to a friend etc.

2) When you come back to the feedback with fresh eyes, pick out the key strengths and weaknesses highlighted in the feedback

3) If you disagree with their feedback, detail a response as to why you disagree to present to your supervisor. If you still can't agree on an outcome, get another person to read through your work to get an another opinion.

4) If you think that their feedback is unconstructive, ask someone else to read through their feedback who is less emotionally connected to your work.

5) If the feedback you are getting is unconstructive/unhelpful/unnecessarily harsh, take steps to address this. In my opinion, supervisors should adapt how they give feedback to the

# In conclusion…

Remember: Your supervisors are there to help!

- Sit back and give yourself time to process feedback
- Try not to take negative feedback personally – read feedback pragmatically
- Use notes/tables to record feedback you need to resolve
- If you disagree with feedback, prepare evidence so you can explain your stance to your supervisors
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand some of the feedback you're given!