



How to Challenge Your Perfectionism

Centre for Clinical Interventions.....*Anxiety, CBT Psychology Blog, Lifestyle, Personal Development Counselling*

I've struggled with perfectionism ever since I was a child. Constantly being an academically driven person, I would beat myself up over getting two answers wrong on a math test and do anything to avoid gym class since it was the one subject that I wasn't good at.



I used to view perfectionism as a positive trait, even putting it on all my resumes as a skill. I'm sure I'm not the only one who has done this!

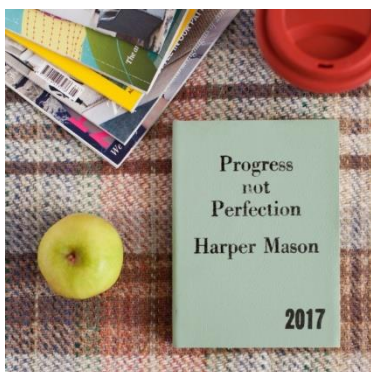
Even though perfectionism can seem like a positive trait, I've learned that it often can lead to several mental health concerns. I've spent the last few years of my life trying to curb my perfectionism and I will share some of my techniques below.

What Is Perfectionism?

Perfectionism is an internal pressure some people put on themselves to achieve an incredibly high and unrealistic standard of "perfection." Perfectionists feel they need to BE and APPEAR perfect. It is frequently viewed as a positive trait because perfectionists are often successful. This success justifies perfectionistic behavior. In reality, perfectionism is rooted in a fear of failure or judgment, and a strong sense of self-criticism and becomes an unhealthy mental pattern.

Here is a video about what perfectionism is and why it isn't as great as you may think:

Overcoming Your Perfectionism



If you are interested in being more efficient and making better use of your time, here is a list of research-based tips that have helped me:

- **Stay Positive:** Try to spend more time acknowledging and actively thinking about the parts of yourself you find "good enough" and "worthy." Make a list of the things you like about yourself and read it often!
- **Attack and Release:** Pay attention to those "all or nothing" thoughts. Being the best at everything is not required to receive the

love and support from your friends and family. Acknowledge these thoughts, but don't dwell on them.

- **Watch and Learn:** Observe how others create “imperfect” work. Most people are able to accept their actions as “good enough” and move on. Ask yourself, are the consequences of acceptance so negative?
- **Prioritize:** Actively try to weed out what is really important and crucial to get done, and what isn’t. Try skipping the more trivial and detail-oriented tasks like extensive list-making and small organizational activities.
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** Think about what you are sacrificing to satisfy your perfectionism. Your social life? Personal relaxation time? Your own sanity? Are the perceived benefits of your perfectionism worth it?
- **Practice the Anti-Perfectionist Strategy:** Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences professor David Burns developed 4 steps to challenging perfectionistic ideas, easily remembered through the acronym **R.A.C.E.**:
 - **R** – *Recognize perfectionistic ideas* like all or nothing thinking, fixation, and control seeking.
 - **A** – *Aiming for perfection:* Instead, look for other goals to achieve.
 - **C** – *Check for underlying fears* like the fear of failure or judgment.
 - **E** – *Expose yourself to the fear:* Let go!

Find A Therapist

I understand that reading an article alone may not be enough to help you change your perfectionistic mindset. Sometimes, we need help in figuring out how to deal with deeper mental patterns, like managing self-criticism and addressing some of the mindsets that come with being a perfectionist. Therapists trained in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy can help you take the steps towards becoming a healthier and better version of yourself

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The Dangers Of Perfectionism



Perfectionism leads to self-defeating thoughts and actions that actually make it more difficult to achieve our goals. These thoughts include:

- Believing nothing you do is good unless it's perfect
- Never being proud of your work or progress
- Focusing on how to make things flawless
- Feeling worthless, afraid, and shameful

Perfectionism also comes with a laundry list of clinical concerns including anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, eating disorders, insomnia and fatigue, [Procrastination](#), self-harm, and suicide.

The Signs Of A Perfectionist

- **All or Nothing:** Perfectionists view all situations in terms of extremes, such as being all good or all bad, rather than on a continuum that ranges in degrees of severity.
 - Here's an example from your designated perfectionist (me): During a job interview, I was caught off guard by one unexpected question. I didn't think I answered it to the best of my ability, and after the interview, I proceeded to conclude that it went terribly.
- **High Standards:** Perfectionists believe in putting 100% of their effort into tasks 100% of the time in order to prevent failure. They expect others to do the same.
- **Self-Worth:** Perfectionists often link their self-confidence and self-worth to their accomplishments. They enjoy the validation they receive from others and struggle to be happy for others who succeed. Comparison is the thief of joy for perfectionists.
- **Control Seeking:** Perfectionists find it challenging to trust others to complete tasks correctly. As a result, they tend to take control of situations instead of delegating.
 - Another example from your designated perfectionist: I often complete group assignments alone to ensure they get done "right," instead of evenly dividing the work.
- **Fixation:** Perfectionists tend to focus on their mistakes, even when they're small. The smallest mistakes are viewed as failures.
- **Procrastination and Avoidance:** Perfectionists may put off tasks or not complete them at all if there is a potential for failure. Instead, perfectionists focus on tasks they know can be completed "perfectly."
- **Excessive Time Consumption:** Perfectionists tend to take longer amounts of time completing tasks compared to the average person, in order to make sure their work is perfect.
 - Here is a final example from your designated perfectionist: I once spent 10 minutes writing and re-writing an email to a professor that only had a couple of sentences, because I was obsessed with making sure it sounded good.



- **Never Finished:** Perfectionists often struggle to determine when they're done with something, as they believe there are always areas for improvement before revealing the task to others. A task is not complete unless it is perfect.