

How to Overcome Perfectionism: 21 Tips for Success

1. Separate Yourself From Your Inner Critic

Perfectionism is a loud inner critic telling you you're not good enough no matter what you

do or how hard you work. It's very difficult to like who you are and feel competent and confident when **negative self-talk** is constantly screeching over the top of other thoughts

and emotions. Therefore, an important first step in overcoming perfectionism is distancing

yourself from your inner critic. Recognize that your thoughts about yourself, including the

belief that your worth is dependent on your performance and results, are only that—unreliable ideas that, while loud and

incessant, do not represent reality.

One simple way to begin distancing yourself from perfectionism is to notice your thoughts

and beliefs and remind yourself, “I’m having the *thought* that I’m not good enough (or whatever lie your critic is feeding you at the moment). It’s a thought and isn’t necessarily true.” Doing this over and over again begins to turn the tables on your self-doubt. You’re gently taking a few steps back and making room for different thoughts to begin to replace

perfectionistic ones, including thoughts of self-compassion.

2. Foster Self-Compassion

Building and embracing self-compassion is key in overcoming perfectionism because the

two concepts are closely linked. In fact, self-compassion is one of the greatest

protections

against perfectionism and its unhealthy effects; **self-criticism** and perfectionism are factors

in many mental health disorders, and self-compassion is a buffer.¹

Fortunately, self-compassion can be learned and nurtured. To foster self-love and replace

self-criticism and the drive to avoid failure and other imagined negative consequences,

begin adding these strategies to your life:²

- Notice how you talk to yourself, and after distancing yourself from your inner critic, begin to

replace harsh belittling with realistic and encouraging words

- Consciously begin to treat yourself with kindness, **forgiveness**, and understanding
- Connect to a sense of shared humanity,

looking at others' mistakes and granting yourself

permission to make your own

3. Remember: Perfectionism Leads to More Work!

“A massive pitfall of striving for perfection is what it communicates to the people around you. If you are constantly producing work that is seemingly effortless but is actually requiring a ton of your time and energy, the people around you only see that you can complete the task. The consequence is you are given more work with fewer resources, and

people expect you to take care of problems for them. People often take advantage of perfectionists in this way, so while perfectionism may seem like an attractive characteristic,

it may actually be making you more vulnerable to being taken advantage of and

given more
work than you can realistically handle.” —

GinaMarie Guarino, LMHC at [PsychPoint](#)

4. Tune In to Yourself & Keep Track of Your Thoughts

Begin to listen to yourself so you can catch your bully in the act and bring it into your full

awareness so you can actively deal with it.

Consider keeping a daily journal to recognize,

track, and reflect on your thoughts. You can set aside time for a journaling practice, or you

can jot down thoughts on-the-go, using your phone or notebook that you always have handy to record your self-talk as it occurs.

Catch your thoughts in a way that works for you (there isn't a right or wrong—or perfect—

way to do it). Instead, what matters is that

you begin to notice your thoughts, feelings, and self-talk and look at them objectively rather than just accepting them as true. This way, you can then take steps to change them and overcome perfectionistic beliefs.

5. Let Yourself Get Depressed

“Perfectionists typically refuse to get depressed. They’re fighters, and they will work as hard as they can to avoid conflict, disappointment, and vulnerability. But sometimes, it’s more appropriate to get depressed. Like if you have an overly critical parent. Or a very demanding job. Allowing yourself to be depressed then makes it possible for the perfectionist to choose to take care of themselves instead of trying to make the world a

better place.

When the perfectionist can be guided by their own depression, to be able to cry, feel betrayed, or disappointed, experienced the limits of their own physical energy, and even

get mad that other people aren't helping more, the perfectionism makes way for self compassion, a focus on getting needs met and a softer life that is less punishing.” –

Claudia

Luiz, Psychoanalyst

6. Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness helps prevent people from overidentifying with their thoughts, feelings, and

beliefs, and as such is an important element in self-compassion.³ Use your senses to ground

yourself in the moment (for example, focus on an object, someone you're with, or your

surroundings and notice visual details, textures, smells, and sounds, giving them your full attention). This helps shift your focus from negative thoughts and self-criticisms and lets you just be present in what you're doing without judging yourself or your work.

7. Learn How to Prioritize Your Tasks

“Consider how to redistribute your mental, physical and emotional energy toward certain important tasks in order to allow yourself to give yourself a break on less important tasks.

You may notice that you're able to perform your more important tasks with greater clarity, energy, and motivation as you aren't performing at 100% at all times. Remember, things

don't need to be done perfectly for them (or yourself) to have value! It may be uncomfortable at first, however, your future self will thank you for the break.” – **Neha Prabhu**, MS, MFTC

8. Set SMARTer Goals!

“If you previously set goals that you had to be perfect, ask yourself, is this helpful and realistic? The expectations you've learned or created for yourself might not be setting you

up for success. As a result, you might be driven by a fear of failure and can't acknowledge

the small wins. One way to manage perfectionism, reduce stress, and feel more confidently

in our successes can be obtained by setting SMART goals.

SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic/Relevant, and Time-

bound. Be

Specific, so when setting goals, focus on exactly what you're trying to accomplish.

Make

your goals Measurable by setting methods to track the progress you've made. Create an

Achievable goal, balancing between something easily attainable and stretching to challenge

yourself. If your goal remains too big and out of reach, it'll be more difficult to maintain your commitment towards long-term objectives. By creating Realistic and Relevant goals,

they are grounded in reality and carry meaning and purpose for you, making you more

likely to meet them. Lastly, if your goals are Time-bound and you're using timelines that will help keep you on schedule, you'll know

exactly how long before you hit your goals!”

– **Jamie Steiner**, LCSW

9. Cultivate Acceptance

Acceptance is a component of mindfulness and self-compassion that involves

becoming

aware of your perfectionistic thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors without judging

them. Instead of denying difficulties, which only makes them grow stronger beneath the

surface, acceptance allows you to face them and deal with them.³ It also means accepting

yourself fully for who you are, approaching yourself with understanding and forgiveness

rather than criticism.

10. Practice Self-Care Activities on a Regular Basis

“Perfectionists are often so focused on accomplishing more that they neglect to take time for themselves. Make sure to incorporate daily activities into your routine that help you relax and recharge, such as yoga, spending time in nature, reading a book, or writing in a journal.”

11. Remember You Are NOT Special!

“Have you ever met any perfect people? Know anyone who has never ever made a mistake?

I didn't think so! You are no exception. You're unique, you've got strengths and talents, but you do not get to be the special human unicorn who never messes up. You WILL make mistakes. You're not alone, because we all

miss the mark sometimes. You don't have to like

it, but it sure helps to accept it.” – Tara McGrath, MFT

12. Focus on Your Strengths

Often, trying to tell a perfectionist that they're good enough or that they're human, imperfect like everyone else, doesn't work. Instead, identify your strengths and what you

do well in all aspects of your life, and use them as concrete evidence of your abilities. Knowing and embracing your strengths is a powerful way to build self-confidence and self-efficacy because they're an inherent part of who you are.

Your character strengths aren't conditional. They aren't dependent upon achievement, and

they don't have to be earned or proven.

Focusing on your strengths allows you to

embrace

the positive aspects of *you*. It's a realistic way of reducing perfectionism that goes beyond

the hollow statement that "you're human."

13. Remember That Perfectionism Is Not the Same as Striving for Excellence

"Perfectionists tend to set unrealistic goals and standards for themselves, which makes them feel like they always fall short of their expectations. Instead of aiming for perfection,

set realistic and achievable goals that help you move forward and achieve success.

For

example, instead of trying to finish an entire project in one day, break it down into smaller

components and focus on completing each component to the best of your ability. Doing so

will help you feel less overwhelmed, more accomplished, and more motivated to work towards your long-term success.” –

Candace Kotkin-De Carvalho, LSW,
LCADC, CCS, CCTP,

Clinical Director of **Absolute Awakenings**

14. Stop Comparing Yourself to Others

As you embrace your strengths, focus on yourself and what you do well rather than on

whether you measure up to others. One of the biggest traps of perfectionism that continually fuels the fire is social comparison, scrutinizing what others are doing and

deciding that you fall short. Breaking the habit of comparing yourself to others involves

mindfulness, using kind, compassionate self-talk to replace self-criticism about how you're

inadequate compared to everyone else,
and challenging negative self-judgments.

15. Use Humor to Remind Yourself to Chill Out

“Make fun of your perfectionism and the demanding behaviors that it creates.

Recognize

the absurdity of your perfectionism. Seeing the absurd engages your funny bone.

Perfectionism is based on a rigid self-demanding perspective that is, for the most part,

unrealistic, ridiculous and absurd. When we laugh at ourselves, we reset our

perfectionistic

perspective to a more realistic perspective.”

– Steven M. Sultanoff, PhD

16. Find Your Own Meaning & Purpose

Perfectionism is a trap of narrow, negative, all-or-nothing thinking that causes people to place selective attention on striving to meet

unattainable goals.⁴ It can make it difficult for

people to feel accomplished and enjoy feelings of satisfaction that come with success.⁵ People trapped in perfectionism tend to hyperfocus on the process and become

mired in self-criticism, making it difficult to see the big picture, the reason why they are doing what they do. Perfectionism can thus become a dark pit of purposelessness.

One way to overcome perfectionism is to regain a sense of your big purpose, your “why.”

Having a sense of meaning in the roles you have can help you step back and gain perspective. Logotherapy is an approach to wellbeing that is centered upon living with meaning and purpose; according to logotherapy, a sense of meaning is what empowers us

to overcome any obstacle.⁶ Rather than getting caught up in small details and worrying about mistakes or inadequacies, approaching yourself and your life with a strong sense of meaning can help you loosen yourself from perfectionism's tight, confining trap.

17. Learn to Recognize & Celebrate Your Successes

“Often, perfectionists tend not to take the time to appreciate their own successes as much as they do others' failures or mistakes. Make sure to acknowledge when something goes right and practice self-compassion for any shortcomings or times you fail.” – Jeanette Lorandini, LCSW

18. Rekindle Your Sense of Pleasure & Gratitude

Instead of waiting until you've fully overcome perfectionism before you can enjoy your life, take steps now to allow yourself to experience pleasure now, moment by moment. As you live mindfully, focus your attention on the small things in your life that you enjoy. Use your strengths to spark joy. If one of your strengths is love of learning, for example, allow yourself to explore topics of interest just for fun rather than for an end goal. Hone a sense of gratitude for what is good in yourself and in your life, reminding yourself that there is already good in your life—you don't constantly have to strive for perfection in yourself or in your work in order to notice and enjoy the

good.

19. Think About Your Life at 100

This therapy exercise helps people overcome obstacles like perfectionism by gaining perspective on habits and mindsets that are holding them back. Picture yourself on your 100th birthday, looking back on your life. What were you like? Did you live in a way that you valued, embracing what was important to you? How do you feel both mentally and physically?

Then, reflect on this. Does perfectionism fit into the life you want to look back on? What adjustments can you start making to create your quality life undaunted by perfectionism?

20. Enlist the Help of a Therapist

Perfectionism can be connected to anxiety, depression, shame, and a host of other

negative,
life-challenging experiences. It can be hard
to overcome this on your own. If you're
finding
it difficult to let go of some of your beliefs
underlying your sense of perfectionism,
working
with a mental health professional can be
extremely beneficial. One type of therapy
that can
be especially useful in helping you change
automatic negative thought patterns is
cognitive
behavioral therapy (CBT). This approach
can help you reduce all-or-nothing thinking
and
lift the rules and "shoulds" that you have
imposed on yourself.

21. Let Yourself Experiment

Anxiety and fear, with their "what-ifs" and
worst-case-scenarios, are a hallmark of

perfectionism. Recall that perfectionism is more about avoiding failure than it is about gaining success, and this mindset can prevent people from taking steps to overcome

perfectionism. If you've found yourself instantly coming up with reasons why these tips

won't work for you, developing an experimental mind-set might be helpful.

This involves

meeting your "what-ifs" where they are and turning them around.