

Ask Yourself These 20 Questions to Improve Your Self-Awareness

'Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom,' Aristotle said

[Darius Foroux](#)





Photo: Chalabala/Getty Images

It's not exactly a revelation that self-awareness is a key component of success. In fact, we've been extolling its importance for thousands of years. The Greek philosopher Aristotle, who lived between 384 and 322 BC, once said, "Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."

Truly knowing yourself requires serious effort. But unfortunately, there's no set path to self-awareness, no standardized steps you can take to reach it.

That said, taking some time to examine yourself — your skills, your desires, your motivations — helps. It's a way to do the work of getting to know yourself better.

In an effort to become more self-aware in my own life, I developed a list of 20 questions to reflect on:

1. What am I good at?
2. What am I so-so at?

3. [What am I bad at?](#)
4. What makes me tired?
5. What is the most important thing in my life?
6. Who are the most important people in my life?
7. How much sleep do I need?
8. What stresses me out?
9. What relaxes me?
10. What's my definition of success?
11. [What type of worker am I?](#)
12. How do I want others to see me?
13. What makes me sad?
14. What makes me happy?
15. What makes me angry?
16. What type of person do I want to be?
17. What type of friend do I want to be?
18. What do I think about myself?
19. What things do I value in life?
20. What makes me afraid?

If you want to try it for yourself, answer with the first thing that pops up in your mind, and don't think too hard about the meaning behind a question. Everyone interprets them differently. That's the point.

Your initial answers aren't even that important. What matters more is that the questions get you thinking, especially those that might be [difficult or uncomfortable to answer](#), like "What am I bad at?"

Now comes the most critical part: reasoning. Use the thoughts you've assembled to improve your life by applying what Aristotle called "logos" — the capacity for rational speech. Historian Paul Rahe [explained](#) the concept of logos best in his book *Republics Ancient and Modern*. "For Aristotle, logos is something more refined than the capacity to make private feelings public," he wrote. "It makes it possible for him to perceive and make clear to others through reasoned discourse the difference between what is advantageous and what is harmful..."

That's what you're doing in your quest for self-awareness: trying to uncover which things about yourself are advantageous and which are harmful.

Now what?

Once you have an idea of what those things are, act on them. Double down on the advantageous stuff and start eliminating the harmful stuff, as much as you can. Do more things that make you happy or things you're good at. Avoid things that make you unhappy or things you're bad at.

That's it. That's knowing yourself.

Don't take this process too literally. Relationships, for example, can make you both happy and sad. That doesn't mean you should avoid getting close to anyone or ditch any relationships that involve sadness. Instead, try to avoid the specific things that make your relationships bad — things like selfishness, lying, lack of empathy, etc.

How do you practice logos in daily life? Here are some ideas:

- **Read philosophy.** If you don't know where to start, I recommend reading a book like *The Story of Philosophy* by Will Durant. Philosophy is reasoning, so if you read more works by philosophers, you'll learn more about how to present and work through ideas.
- **Become neutral in discussions with people.** Don't just try to prove a point. Always try to reason from different points of view.
- **Journal, and follow through on your thoughts.** Always ask yourself, "Why?" For example: John made me mad. Why? Because he lied. Why? Because he didn't want to upset me. Why? Because he cares about me.
- **Talk, talk, talk.** With friends, colleagues, mentors, coaches. Just by vocalizing your feelings, you discover new things about yourself. Especially when you talk with people who ask questions that make you think.

There you go. That's my process for self-awareness. Introspection is difficult because you must be honest with yourself, and most of us prefer to lie because the truth is scary. But since I've begun practicing self-awareness more deliberately, my life has massively improved.

Knowing yourself makes living easier.