

Introspection isn't a sure path to insight, so we need to do it right.

If we spend enough time and effort navel-gazing, we'll eventually come to understand ourselves, right?

Not necessarily.

Yes, examining our thoughts, emotions and habits can lead to greater self-awareness, but the wrong type of introspection can have the opposite effect. In fact, there's even research that shows self-analyzers have higher levels of anxiety, less positive relationships and a lower opinion of themselves. The problem is that, while we may be quick to grasp at any insights gained from self-analysis, we don't often question their validity.

So, how can we use introspection to become more self-aware?

For introspection to be successful, we need to have a flexible mindset. When we accept that we may not find one definite answer, we can let our curious mind wander and explore various perspectives.

Another common mistake people make is to ask themselves why they are the way they are. They look for the causes of their thought patterns and behavior. But the human brain is lazy, and often just presents us with the most convenient answer. Therefore, it's more helpful to ask what kind of person we are. What do we feel and think and do in any given situation?

The benefit of asking what rather than why is that we begin to put names to our emotions. Research shows that when we name our feelings – especially the less positive ones – we're in a better position to recognize them, rather than letting them set off a fight-or-flight response. When it comes to positive thoughts, we should be aware of the risk of over-analyzing. When we try to rationalize our positive experiences, we're in danger of taking the joy out of them.

Lastly, watch out for introspection's evil twin – rumination. The author defines rumination as a fixation on our anxieties,

weaknesses and insecurities. Not only does this prevent us from gaining insight, it could have damaging consequences, including depression.
