



The Different Types Of  
**Perfectionists**

*Which one are you?*

# Different Types of Perfectionists

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## Disclaimer

***We hope you enjoy reading this publication, however, we do suggest you read our disclaimer.***

All the material written in this document is provided for informational purposes only and is general in nature.

Every person is a unique individual and what has worked for some, or even many, may not work for you. Any information perceived as advice must be considered in light of your own particular set of circumstances.

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## Introduction

The definition of perfectionism has been heavily debated among psychologists over the years, and the level of perfectionism is another point of contention. However, we can all view perfectionism as being the driving force to achieve perfection at all costs.



Doing our best has been ingrained in us since childhood, usually by our parents and teachers. As we age, our partners and peers encourage us to strive to be the best we can be, and the older we get, the stronger the striving can become.

For some people, the drive to achieve perfection excels them through life. For example, their perfectionist tendencies motivate them which allows them to attain their goals faster than others.

Perfectionism is different from simply having high standards for success. Perfectionists are people who have very high standards that can be seen as being beyond reach or reason by others.

However, perfectionism can be a curse to some people. Their unending desire to achieve what they believe is perfection can hold them back and actually do more harm than good.

Perfectionists tend to measure their self-worth solely through their accomplishments. For this reason, many perfectionists actually impair their performance as a result of their unremitting drive for excellence. They can also suffer from anxiety, depression, and other social problems.

Attaining perfection is something many of us strive for, even though we know that it's impossible to be 100% perfect at everything we do.

## Why You May Be A Perfectionist

It is still unclear to psychologists how a person becomes a perfectionist. Is it an acquired trait, or do genetics play a role in a person becoming a perfectionist? However, it could certainly be both.

Our genetics can have a significant role in our personality traits, especially as we develop throughout our life. However, even if it is in our genetic makeup, it doesn't mean we cannot overcome perfectionism. It simply means that some people are more predisposed to becoming a perfectionist than others.

Reward and reinforcement from a person's environment can also play a significant role in shaping their behavior and beliefs. Have you ever been offered a reward if you do a job well, or complete it with high marks?

People are often rewarded for achieving high standards, or exhibiting perfect scores. Whether within our family, community, or school, we are constantly reinforced to work hard to earn higher grades, praise, and recognition from adults and our peers.

Alternatively, being punished for committing mistakes can also have the same effect - it further reinforces the idea that perfection is more desirable over flaws and shortcomings.

If you grow up in a household with adults modeling certain types of perfectionist behaviors, it can further emphasize that having high standards and exhibiting flawless behaviors is preferred.

Failure to meet these high standards is always stressful to a perfectionist.

## Three Different Types of Perfectionism

Now we get down to finding out which type of perfectionist you are. You may have noticed how different perfectionistic traits appear to be. Perhaps you show perfectionism in one area, whereas another person tries to be perfect in another area, or with other people. Does that mean they are or are not a perfectionist?



Psychologists Dr. Paul Hewitt and Dr. Gordon Flett have said that perfectionism could not entirely be encapsulated in one definition. Instead, it exists in a spectrum, which means some people are more a perfectionist than others, and their levels of perfectionism vary depending on the situation.

The psychologists developed a *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale* to measure the level of perfectionism in a person. How clever or perfect is that?

Once you read the following three types described you will soon see which type of perfectionist you are.

### **Socially Prescribed Perfectionists**

Socially prescribed perfectionism is when a person feels immense pressure to achieve great results and perform excellently, due to their fear of failure and rejection in society.

People with this type of perfectionism are often very self-critical and highly conscious of their perceived external standards from their family, workplace, and culture in general. As a result, they believe that they must always please others and meet other people's expectations.

Socially prescribed perfectionists have an intense desire to strive hard so they don't let others down, and feel as if the world and everyone in it has too many expectations for them. They seek to impress others and gain their approval, frequently comparing themselves to others, and feeling as if they haven't reached their goal.

As a result of their high standards, many socially prescribed perfectionists often struggle with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

In the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, a person with socially prescribed perfectionism may think the following.

- I find it difficult to meet others' expectations of me.
- The people around me expect me to succeed at everything I do.
- I feel that people are too demanding of me.
- My family expects me to be perfect.

## **Other-Oriented Perfectionists**

Other-oriented perfectionists hold others to high standards, causing them to be critical and judgmental of another person's flaws and shortcomings.

This type of perfectionism is often associated with leaders and high-ranking officials who have difficulty delegating tasks to their subordinates, believing that others cannot perform the job according to their impossible perfectionist standards.

They often hesitate to ask for help as they consider their colleagues are not up to par with their expectations, and that they can do it better and faster. The lack of trust and confidence in others often leads to problems, as not everyone has standards as high as theirs. This also causes challenges in building strong, trusting, and professional relationships in the workplace.

Other-oriented perfectionism is not only limited to relationships with colleagues in the workplace. Other-oriented perfectionists also have issues with other people with whom they interact.

They also feel bothered by people who they perceive as not trying to be the best they can be. They may get frustrated whenever they come across someone they believe is not working to their full potential. Mistakes and shortcomings of other people tend to upset them as well.

In the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, a person with other-oriented perfectionism may think the following.

- I can't be bothered by people who won't strive to better themselves.
- I cannot stand to see people close to me make mistakes.
- If I ask someone to do something, I expect it to be done flawlessly.



## **Self-Oriented Perfectionist**

People who are self-oriented perfectionists may be what others see as high-achieving individuals. They are often described as organized and conscientious. They set high standards in different aspects of their lives, and strive to achieve their goals.

These individuals are often associated with 'adaptive perfectionism' traits, which are seen as healthy. They strive for high productivity and success and are resourceful and assertive. Self-oriented perfectionists are your typical 'go-getter' who are motivated and positive. They see the glass as half full, not half empty.

Self-oriented perfectionism may be viewed as the 'good' side of perfectionist ideals. Self-oriented perfectionists usually suffer from stress significantly less than the other perfectionist types. That doesn't mean they don't suffer from stress! They do, as they place high demands on themselves.

However, there are possible downsides to setting high expectations of yourself. Self-oriented perfectionists feel the need to give their best in everything they do, leading to burnout. They can't do anything half-heartedly, even if they wanted to.

They are highly critical of their work and fear making a mistake. The fear of making a mistake can cause them to suffer from analysis paralysis because they don't want to start something or make a decision in case it's the wrong one.

They can become extremely anxious about the choices they have to make, which can cause them to ask for other people's opinions, which gives them the confidence boost they need to get started or finish a task.

In the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, a self-oriented perfectionist may think the following.

- I strive to be as perfect as I can be.
- It makes me uneasy to see an error in my work.
- I must work to my full potential at all times.
- I set very high standards for myself.



## Disadvantages of Perfectionism

There are downsides to being a perfectionist. Having high standards for achievement can push you to be productive, which is a good thing, but perfectionism goes way beyond those limits. This is why perfectionists often suffer from various health issues.

Psychologists have made several links between perfectionism causing mental and emotional health issues, which makes perfect sense! They put so much pressure on themselves that their mental health can 'break.'

Perfectionists have a higher risk of developing behavioral or psychological problems, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety including social anxiety, depression, and elevated stress levels.

It is common for perfectionists to suffer from the intense pressure put on them by others, and also by themselves. It can cause them to feel helpless and hopeless. Perfectionism can have an impact on a person's self-esteem and relationships.

They may believe they are not good enough, and that no one will want to be with them, all because they see their flaws that are not perfect. Or, they expect so much of another person, who could be a potential partner, but that person feels they cannot live up to their perfectionist ways, so they lose interest.

The 'other-oriented perfectionist' can also have anger management issues and get frustrated easily if their partner does not strive for excellence to the degree that they would expect.

## Conclusion

Perfectionism will always be considered a double-edged sword. Some think it is great to be a perfectionist, while others see it as a curse. While perfectionist traits can fuel your desires to achieve great things in life, the pursuit of perfectionism can also cause damage to your mental health.



So how do we strike a balance between keeping our high standards and living our life the way we desire, in a not-so-perfect world?

One of the best ways is to strive for excellence, not perfection. You can still achieve everything you set out to do, but you don't have to get that 100% tick all the time.

You have to find a balance where you can be happy with what you have done, without the stress and the damaging effects of it on your health. If you can do that you will remove so much of the fear of failing your 100% perfection target, and your anxiety levels will reduce significantly.

Perhaps one way to channel your perfectionist tendencies more healthily is to focus on the process rather than the outcome. It will help you to set realistic goals for yourself and others.

Realistic goals are more flexible, attainable, and sustainable, as they are goals you can reach with excellence, if not perfection. Wanting something to be done well or having high standards is not a bad personality trait at all!

Don't think that you have to change your want to achieve the best you can, you just need to be able to relax a little so it doesn't cause you emotional harm and angst.

If you have unrealistic and impossibly high standards of yourself and others, that is when it can potentially damage your mental and emotional health, and none of us want to see that happen.

So relax, strive for your high standard, but don't beat yourself up if you attain less than a perfect score. You are a winner if you can do that!