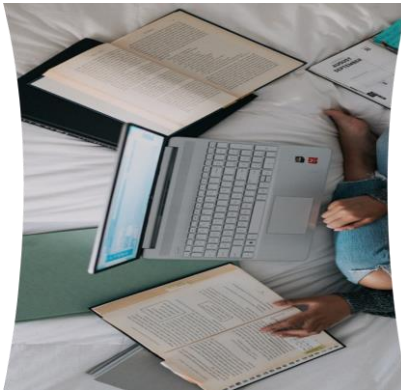


Changing Perfectionism: An Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assisted Self-Help Guide

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Acknowledgements. We thank our lived experience youth advisory committee for co-designing this booklet.

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Disclaimer

The advice and information contained in this booklet is the best we can give based on research evidence and clinical experience at the time of writing. However, the authors cannot know the individual circumstances of readers, and therefore cannot accept any liability to readers or others for the consequences of following this advice.

If you are in any way uncertain about the best course for you, you should consult your doctor or mental health professional for an individual assessment of your needs.

Getting professional help

If you want to get further help with mental health, and you are not already seeing a mental health professional, talk to your primary care physician (general practitioner) to discuss a referral.

If you need immediate help and support in Australia or the UK:

In Australia: call Lifeline for immediate support (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) on: 13 11 14.

In the United Kingdom: Call 116 123 to talk to the Samaritans or Text “SHOUT” to 85258 to contact the Shout Crisis Text Line.

1. Aims and tips for using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools

The aim of this booklet is to learn practical strategies to overcome the unhelpful aspects of perfectionism. The strategies are based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). It is a way of changing thinking and behaviours. CBT is effective for a range of problems including perfectionism, depression, anxiety and eating problems. The aim is not to reduce striving, but to change unhelpful parts of perfectionism.

Previously, the booklet has been used as self-help resource and while you are seeing a professional. We know from lots of research it can help to have some support as you work your way through. The development of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, make it possible to have guidance to help you if you get stuck on some topics, or need some assistance as you work your way through the booklet.

Here are some general tips for AI tools like ChatGPT:

- Tell the AI tool when it has given you a response that is helpful or unhelpful. Responses can be improved by telling the AI tool that it is doing a good job.
- Be specific and clear in the questions you ask the AI tool.
- Using the term 'evidence-based' in your question appears to result in more accurate mental health information.
- You can make the responses an AI tool gives you as short as you want, for example *'tell me in two sentences'*.
- The more accurate and specific your inputs are, the better responses you receive.
- Provide keywords that are important to the topic.
- If you are not satisfied with the response, tell the AI tool an instruction like *'I don't understand this, it is too complex'* or *'Please re-generate this response'*.
- You can ask an AI tool either to elaborate on a topic, or to break it down and make the response simpler, for example *'make this step by step'*.

- Try asking the question in simple terms e.g., ‘Can you explain _____ for me’.
- Give feedback to the AI tool what was missing in the response that you were looking for if it was not helpful, tell the AI tool when it was wrong.
- You can ask the AI tool to explain something at different levels, for example, ‘explain this to me like I am a college student’ or ‘explain this to me like I am a child’ or the term ‘ELI5’ which stands for ‘explain like I’m 5 years old’.
- Responses from AI tools can be improved by using better prompts, see: www.learnprompting.org. This is a free website to improve your prompting to get better results.
- Look at a video like: [ChatGPT Guide: 10x Your Results with Better Prompts - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZTYffRsKI) or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZTYffRsKI>
- Try our example questions that you could ask the AI tool or try your own using these general tips.

Questions to ask AI tools.

You can try using these general tips to use your own questions to ask an AI tool like ChatGPT about the section in the booklet you are working on. **It is best to ask for information about the technique or content, rather than personalised mental health advice, since AI tools are not able to diagnose and treat mental health difficulties like a person can.** But AI tools can give you information to understand ideas and concepts. You will see this picture each time we suggest an example AI question:



2. What is perfectionism?

The type of perfectionism we are referring to is self-esteem based on striving to achieve goals, despite negative effects (e.g., anxiety, poor sleep, stomach aches). There is nothing wrong with striving to achieve standards.

The strategies are not aimed at reducing your goals, but instead changing the unhelpful aspects of perfectionism like self-criticism e.g., 'I am not good enough'. The goal is to broaden the areas in your life that contribute to your self-esteem, so you can let go of self-criticism. Perfectionism can impact many areas of life.

Feelings:

- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Stress
- Frustration
- Anger

Thoughts:

- Self-criticism
- Focus on mistakes and discount success
- Thinking about failure and mistakes
- Focus on thoughts of being 'not good enough'
- Judging performance in an 'all or nothing' way e.g., as a 'complete' failure as a person over one mistake
- Thoughts of 'should' and 'must' e.g. 'I must not make a mistake'

Behaviours:

- Excessive time spent on goals at the expense of other areas of life (e.g., working very long hours and not seeing friends)
- Checking work a lot (e.g., reading over an email many times)
- Redoing tasks (e.g., rewriting sentences many times)
- Spending a lot of time making lists
- Procrastination
- Avoidance of doing tasks (e.g., not going to an exam)
- Comparing how well you do at tasks to other people
- Asking others for reassurance about how well you are doing

Physical Consequences:

- Exhaustion
- Tight muscles
- Difficulty sleeping
- Tight chest
- Tiredness
- Stomach aches

Perfectionism can also overlap with other psychological problems including anxiety, eating problems and depression:

Social Anxiety –

Social anxiety is when someone is constantly worrying, they will do something embarrassing or wrong in a social situation and that others will think badly of them.

When someone is worried about how well they do in social situations they often aim for a perfect performance, for example thinking 'My speech should be perfect, I must never stumble over my words'.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) –

OCD involves having repeated upsetting thoughts (e.g., of harming someone, of harm coming to a loved one, spreading germs) that cause a great deal of anxiety.

Often people do things to prevent the thoughts from happening or harm occurring (e.g., washing hands excessively, checking locks). People with OCD often think they must do things in a perfect way (e.g., wash hand in perfect sequence, arranging items in a perfect way) to prevent something bad from happening.

Depression –

Depression involves feeling sad most of the time, being less interested in things than usual, increase or decrease in appetite, sleep and weight, feeling tired, poor concentration, and feeling guilty or worthless.

When people are depressed, they can also have thoughts that life is not worth living. If you are currently experiencing these thoughts, then it is very important that you consult your general practitioner and/or mental health professional for further help. Perfectionism can be related to depression e.g., when people procrastinate and avoid doing tasks due to perfectionism this can lower their mood.

Eating Problems –

Are characterised by concern over shape and weight and judging self-worth almost completely on eating, shape, and weight. Typical symptoms include dieting, episodes of overeating and vomiting, and trying to manage weight by excessive exercise.

It is very important that if your body weight is low (a 'body mass index' of below 17.5, which is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in metres squared), or you are regularly

vomiting that you consult your general practitioner and/or mental health professional for further help.

Perfectionism is a common factor that can be a risk for eating problems and keep the symptoms going. This is because people often hold very strict rules. For example, commonly people have a perfect weight or clothes size they think they must be and they evaluate this in an 'all or nothing' way e.g., 'I must weigh my perfect goal weight or I am a complete failure as a person'.

Seeking help for mental health challenges.

If you identify with perfectionism, then it is likely that trying to change your perfectionism will be helpful in addressing these issues. We recommend that if you identify with having social anxiety, OCD, depression, or an eating problem that you also seek support for these topics and/or consult a mental health professional to address these issues first.

It is very important to seek help from a mental health professional if you identify with thinking that life is not worth living or have low weight/vomiting regularly. You might find that when you have tried to address these issues then your perfectionism improves. However, if you continue to have perfectionism that we describe this booklet may be helpful. You might also find this guide useful if your perfectionism is getting in the way of addressing these other issues.

3. Why do people develop perfectionism?

- People can develop perfectionism for a range of reasons that involve both genetics, which are factors that are inherited from parents, and what they have learned from their experiences in life. We do not completely understand what causes perfectionism.

- Some studies show us there is a genetic part to perfectionism which it is passed down from parents. Most studies however show what we learn from our life experience explains most of why perfectionism develops. Some people report parents held high standards for them as a child, or even were critical or punished them if they did not meet the standards.
- Not everyone who has perfectionism reports that their parents held high standards for them, or that they were critical. In fact, some people report that their parents were not like this but from a young age they had a personal and internal drive for perfection.
- We can't be sure exactly what causes perfectionism. The good news is though it does not really matter what causes perfectionism, it is what keeps it going that is the important part, and that can be changed. It is like when a doctor treats a broken leg, they don't need to know the cause of the broken leg to be able to fix it. Psychological problems are similar, it is what is keeping the problem going that is important to know so that it can be changed.



AI question: ChatGPT may be able to give you some ideas on why perfectionism develops. An example question is: *'Tell me the reasons why perfectionism develops'*.

4. Identifying perfectionism

Try this quiz to see if you have unhelpful perfectionism:

- Do you base your self-esteem on how well you meet your standards?
- Do you ignore what you have achieved and instead focus on what you have not achieved?
- Do you spend a lot of time striving to meet your standards even if it means it causes problems or you miss out on things like seeing friends?
- Do you avoid or procrastinate over tasks due to worrying you will not do them well?
- Do you repeatedly check out how well you are going at meeting your standards?
- Are you very worried about failing to meet your standards?

If you have answered yes to some of these questions, and especially the first question about self-esteem, it is likely that you have some of unhelpful parts of perfectionism. It is useful at this point to start to think about the areas in which you are a perfectionist? Is it every area of life? Are there some areas where you are not a perfectionist? The following worksheet helps you to monitor perfectionism to understand it.

First, record the area of perfectionism. An example would be for the case of Amir who works in administration and worries about making mistakes in emails at work. Amir's situation would be 'sending an email to a colleague'. Next ask yourself "what was going through my mind?". Rate how strongly you believe the thought in your mind, 0% = do not believe the thought at all and 100% = completely believe the thought. An example is "I must compose the email perfectly or I will be failing at work". Next record your behaviour, what did you do? An example is spending an hour checking and rewriting the email and avoiding sending it until the end of the day. The final step is to record

your feelings. Examples are: Anxious, Sad, Angry, Ashamed, Depressed, Scared, Embarrassed, Irritated, Happy, Disappointed, Excited. Rate your feelings, 0% = no feeling to 100% = strongest feeling. In this example of worrying about sending a perfect email, Amir rated feeling 90% anxious.

Area	Thoughts (rate 0-100%)	Behaviours	Feelings (rate 0-100%)
Sending emails	I must compose the email perfectly or I will be failing	Spend an hour checking an rewriting email, avoid sending it	Anxious 95%

Now try completing your own monitoring record. Try and do a few during the week. Doing this will help you to understand your perfectionism and what areas you need to change with the strategies that are covered in the rest of this booklet.



AI question: Try asking an AI tool like ChatGPT to help you with monitoring your perfectionism.

An example question is 'I am meant to be monitoring my perfectionism thoughts, feelings and behaviours but it is really hard. Sometimes I forget, at other times I feel I am not doing it right. Can you suggest solutions to help me monitor my perfectionism in real time?'

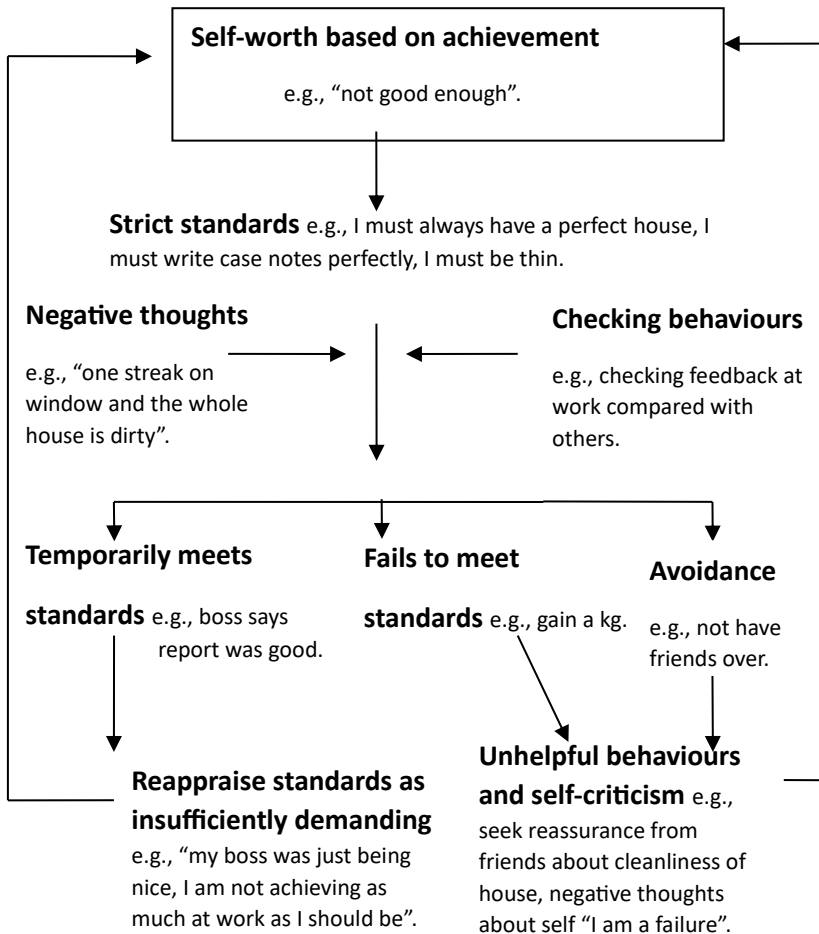
5. What keeps perfectionism going?

There are various factors that can result in people getting locked into a pattern of perfectionism. The exact factors that are keeping perfectionism going will be different for each person.

There are some common factors that we often see keep perfectionism going, so if you can identify and change these, it will help to break the pattern of the unhelpful parts of perfectionism.

We have put these factors that keep perfectionism going into a diagram as you can see in the example.







AI question: ChatGPT may be able to give you some ideas on why perfectionism keeps going.

An example question is 'I am trying to understand evidence-based ideas about what keeps my perfectionism going. Factors such as self-worth based on striving, evaluation of standards, avoidance, all-or-nothing thinking and self-criticism are all relevant. Can you help me understand how these fit together?'

6. Pros and Cons of Perfectionism

It can be helpful to write a list of advantages and disadvantages of changing perfectionism (pros and cons).

Consider the lists when you have written them and think about what the most important disadvantages are and focus on these as this can help you to feel ready and motivated to change perfectionism.

Put your list in a prominent place (e.g., on the fridge) or in the notes section of your phone, to help keep your motivation going to change perfectionism.



AI question: An AI tool like ChatGPT may be able to give help you.

An example question is 'I need to work out the pros and cons of having perfectionism. I am not sure what they are for me personally. I am successful but also lack self-confidence. Are these my pros and cons?'

7. Challenging perfectionism myths

There are beliefs that people hold about work, performance and striving that can keep perfectionism going. Often these we think are common sayings or principles, but when we look more closely, in fact they may be closer to myths than truths! Some of the common myths that can be useful to challenge are:

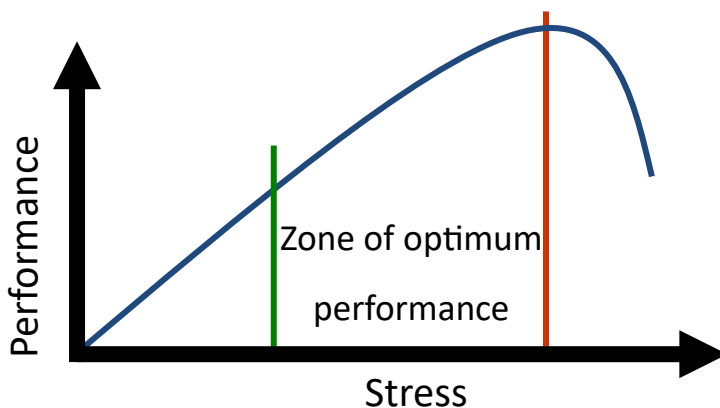
The harder you work, the better you will do –

Most of us have been told this message. But it's not as straight forward as we might think. Sometimes working too hard can backfire and cause poorer performance.

For example, if a student stays up all night before a presentation, they may put in a poorer performance due to being tired and having no sleep than if they had taken a more balanced approach and prepared their work but also had a few hours sleep.

Another example is in athletes, where if an athlete over-trains they can end up injured or performing poorly. The same principle is true of many areas, for example an artist may go over and over trying to improve a painting, but then end up with a piece that is not as good as if they had stopped earlier.

This can also be understood through the 'Yerkes-Dodson Law'. This theory shows performance is best when there is not too little, or too much stress. It can be seen in the following diagram:



The important part to notice is that as effort and stress increase, there is an optimal point in performance, but past a point then putting in more effort/stress results in poorer performance. People with perfectionism often spend many more hours of effort and stress than is required to achieve good performance.

We will cover this later in the booklet when we look at ways to experiment with finding out what happens when you put in less time to a task and see what happens with your performance. People often surprised to learn that by putting in less hours of work or study or training, they achieve the same result or better. Often performance was reduced due to over doing it or spending too much time on tasks.

People can only be happy if they are successful –

The concepts of success and happiness are complex. It is not as simple as success being equal to happiness. For example, can you think of anyone you know who is not very successful at work or another area that is important to them, but who is happy? On the flip side, can you think of anyone you know who is very successful in their work but not very happy?

If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well –

This is one we have often heard growing up, but in fact there may be times when this is not true. For example, it might be worth not doing a perfect job of ironing your partner's clothes if you do not want to be given that job! Or if you are a student living in a flat shared with friends, it might be worth not doing a perfect job of cleaning the house, or you will be the one left to keep cleaning it!

To be good at meeting your goals, you must give up other distractions (e.g., seeing friends, hobbies) –

This one just simply is not the case, but people often think it is true. It can be helpful to think back to the first point about how putting too much effort in can lead to poor performance.

For example, in your study or work can you think of someone you know who puts in many hours of effort and does little outside like seeing friends or enjoying hobbies but is not doing well? On the flip side, can you think of someone you know who puts less effort in and spends a lot of time pursuing other interests like seeing friends and doing hobbies but does very well at study or work?

Often the people who are most successful have many other interests outside of study or work. This is because having fun, socialising and

having a break from striving, particularly when it involves 'down time' and spending time with friends and family lifts mood and helps you have a balanced life.

The more effort you put in, the better it feels when you achieve –

People often say this, but again it is perhaps not that straight forward. While people do feel satisfaction from having put effort in, putting too much effort in can lead to less satisfaction.

For example, if someone spends all night awake going over and rewriting a presentation, they may feel satisfaction when the presentation goes well, but as they are exhausted, may not take in the positive comments, so have less satisfaction and enjoyment. Compare that to the person who spends some hours revising their work but puts less effort in, they may feel the same degree of satisfaction, but also increased enjoyment from taking in the positive comments.

If there was a more efficient way to achieve your goal, rather than put in more time, would it not perhaps lead to more satisfaction to know that you can still get a good result and achieve your goal, but spend less time on it?

If there is any part of this you don't understand or needs further explanation, try asking an AI tool.



AI question: Try asking an AI tool like ChatGPT to help you with understanding perfectionism. An example question is *“can you explain the Yerkes-Dodson curve in relation to perfectionism please?”*

8. Experiments to Challenge Perfectionism

One of the most useful ways to challenge perfectionism beliefs is through “behavioural” experiments. An experiment can be used to test out a prediction that you have by finding out what happens by acting in a different way than usual. For example, if someone was anxious in social situations, and believed that others would stare at them and laugh if they see their hands shaking due to anxiety, then an experiment to test this out prediction would be for a person to go out to a café and shake their hands when paying for a coffee and find out what happens, rather than their usual behaviour of holding their hands as tightly as they can or leaving change on the table and going from the café quickly due to their worry.

The goal of experiments is to test out your negative predictions. A common example in perfectionism is a person who thinks that they will receive a poorer grade if they put in 1 day of work on an assignment rather than 2 days as they usually would. An experiment would be to spend less time than usual doing the assignment and find out what grade is received. This often has surprising results for someone with perfectionism, as typically they have been spending an excessive amount of time on tasks for example in rewriting sentences for little additional benefit, and very often they report getting the same result and often an even better grade.

The steps involved in experiments are to:

1. Identify a perfectionist thought to test (this can come from your monitoring forms).
2. Set up an experiment to test the thought.
3. Specify the prediction of what you think will happen and rate how strongly it is believed and your feelings.
4. Record the results of the experiment.
5. Develop a revised belief.

In perfectionism, three types of experiments can be useful.

- experiments to address doing things less than perfectly.
- experiments to reduce time spent in doing tasks.
- experiments to reduce avoidance and procrastination.

A really good way to change your perfectionism beliefs is by doing a range of experiments aimed at doing things less than perfectly and find out what happens.

An example of how to do this can be seen in the case of Deepti who had perfectionism about many areas of life, including being a good friend and entertaining. One of the behaviours that happened due to this is that if Deepti was going to a friend's house where everyone brought a dish to share, then Deepti would spend many hours preparing an elaborate dish until it was perfect.

Example of an experiment aimed at doing things less than perfectly:

Perfectionist thought: My friends will think I am lazy if I do not put a lot of effort into preparing some a perfect dish to share, they may think I am a bad friend.

Experiment: Take a pre-prepared meal from the supermarket to social event with friends. Spend the time in the afternoon usually spent in food preparation relaxing by reading a book.

Prediction: If I take along a dish that requires no effort, my friends will comment that I have let go of my usual high standards and that I am slack (95%), I will be anxious (90%) and embarrassed (100%). Anyway, I will feel bad and won't be able to read the book (100%).

Results: No one noticed that I took something that was not homemade, they did not comment, although one friend said I seemed more relaxed than usual, I felt less embarrassed (50%), and anxious (40%) than I predicted. I also read the book (100%)

Revised belief: I do not have to spend so many hours in preparing perfect food, my friends do not seem to notice. I was wasting time I could spend in relaxing instead (70%).

Another way to test out perfectionism predictions is to do experiments around taking less time to do tasks than usual.

An example of an experiment to reduce time spent on tasks can be seen in the following example of Kai, who worked as a teacher and had perfectionism about work. Kai was spending a long time in report writing and preparation of classes.

Example of experiment aimed at reducing time in doing tasks:

Perfectionist thought: Unless I spend hours writing my notes and reports after work and preparing for classes, I will do a poor job and the children will not learn properly.

Experiment: Spend 1 week writing notes and preparing for only 1 hour per night and not taking any work home to check.

Prediction: If I only spend 1 hour writing my notes and preparing, I will miss something I should be teaching and a parent will complain about my work during the week (95%), the students will not learn anything new for the week (90%) and I will be anxious (90%).

Results: No parents complained about my services, there was no difference in the way they reacted to me. I did not miss anything important, there was no difference in the amount that the students appeared to learn. I was anxious, but it was a 50% level so less than I predicted.

Revised belief: I do not have to spend so long on my preparation. I do not miss things and was wasting time spending so much time preparing before (70%).

Any type of belief you are having might be the subject of an experiment. For example, if someone had perfectionism in the area of appearance and had a prediction that others would think they had let themselves go or are lazy if they did not go out with perfect hair and makeup, they could test this prediction by going to a social event with slightly messy hair and less make-up.

If a person had perfectionism about playing their guitar in front of others and so avoided this due to a prediction that they would be embarrassed by making some mistakes, this prediction could be tested by playing their guitar with friends and on purpose playing some chords wrong and making a few small mistakes and finding out what happens.

Another example for someone who had perfectionism about study and who predicted if they did not spend an entire weekend editing an essay they would fail would be to spend half a day instead of a whole weekend, and find out what grade they received.

The possibilities are endless for what you can test; the main thing is to start giving behavioural experiments a go, use the following blank sheet to get going with testing out some of your perfectionism beliefs;

Experiment Worksheet

Perfectionist thought: _____

Experiment: _____

Prediction: _____

Results: _____

Revised belief: _____

An AI tool like ChatGPT can help you design your own behavioural experiment.



AI question: Try asking an AI tool like ChatGPT to help you with designing an experiment. An example question is *“I need to design a behavioural experiment to help me overcome perfectionism. What I want to try out is what happens if I go out with less make-up. I am afraid people might notice and comment negatively. Can you help me devise a behavioural experiment to test this please?”*

9. Changing unhelpful thinking and self-criticism

In addition to changing thinking through experiments, another way is to write them down and look at the evidence for and against the thought. The aim is to view your thoughts in a more objective and balanced way. This can be helpful as we feel strong emotions (anxiety, depression, anger) due to our thinking.

For example, two students, Jamie and Alex who are top students, and both have received A grades during the whole term, also both receive grades of a B on the same assignment. The first student Jamie thinks *'the result is less than the A that I wanted, but my other grades have all been A so not the end of the world, I will still be at the top'*. Jamie feels a bit annoyed, but it passes quickly. Alex, who is a perfectionist, thinks *'this result of a B is terrible, all my other grades have been an A this term, I am such a failure'*, and then feels anxious and depressed. What accounts for the difference in feelings between Jamie and Alex? It is their thinking and the way they interpret the situation of receiving a B. Jamie feels annoyed but interprets the event in a balanced way and lets it go, however Alex has some unhelpful thinking styles like overgeneralising to conclude they are a failure.

It is the way a person thinks about a situation that causes feelings, rather than the situation itself. These negative thinking styles keep the process of perfectionism going. Some of the most common negative thinking styles that happen in perfectionism are;

All or nothing thinking – Is when someone judges their standards in an extreme way. Alex thought *'I am a complete failure for getting a B'*. Another example *'if I cannot finish the whole document I may as well not even start it'*.

Noticing the negative and discounting the positive - This happens in perfectionism when someone focuses mistakes (no matter how small) and discounts positive aspects. For example, Parvati was worried about sending an email with spelling errors in it, and was focusing on

the negative (one spelling error) and ignoring the positive (boss said in a recent performance review that Parvati was the best worker employed in the last 5 years).

Shoulds - When you have perfectionism you often say 'should'. For example, Alex thought *"I should always study hard and all A grades,* Amir thought *"I should never make an error in my writing, no matter how small,"* Taylor thought *"I should always avoid chocolate or I will gain weight"* and Abdul thought *"I should always spend many hours preparing to be the very best at study"*. Try replacing with thoughts like *"I would like to"* or *"I would prefer to"*.

Overgeneralising – This is common in perfectionism, when someone overgeneralizes from one behaviour to conclude they are *'not good enough'* or a *'failure'*. People take any instance of a mistake or failure to meet a goal to mean they are not good enough and a failure.

Double standards – When you hold a different set of standards for yourself than others, this is a 'double standard'. For example, Amir held a double standard about making spelling errors in emails, whilst Amir thought it was ok for colleagues to make small spelling errors in their emails, Amir did not think it was ever ok to make even one spelling error.

Challenging unhelpful thinking with thought records.

The first step in challenging thinking is to become aware of the thoughts. If you have been keeping self-monitoring diaries and doing experiments, you will already be aware of noticing negative thoughts.

Thought records are used to challenge unhelpful thinking. It can be helpful to write your thoughts down to evaluate them in a more objective way.

The steps to completing a thought record.

A: Activating event – Record what was happening at the time.

B: Beliefs – Ask yourself “what was going through my mind?”. Rate how strongly you believe the thought (0 = not at all, 100 = completely believe it). Identify any thinking styles e.g., overgeneralising.

C: Consequences – Ask yourself “what was I feeling?” (angry, sad, anxious, frustrated, happy, nervous, depressed, scared, irritated, excited, ashamed). Rate strength (0 = not at all, 100 = strongest).

D: Disputation – Ask yourself questions to think in a more objective way, e.g., what would a friend say about this thought? how else could I view this situation? is this thought helpful? What am I ignoring?

E: Evaluate the outcome - Re-rate how strong your feelings are.

An example of a thought record for Alex who was very anxious over receiving a B grade when Alex always receives A's is below.

You can see how Alex was able to identify unhelpful thinking about being a failure as a person because of having received a B. There is a blank thought record you can use to challenge your thinking.

Example of a completed thought record

A - Activating Event	B - Beliefs	C - Consequences	D - Disputation	E – Evaluate outcome
<p>What was going on at the time? (situation thought, image, memory)</p>	<p>What went through my mind? What does it mean about me as a person? Rate 0 - 100%</p> <p>Which unhelpful thinking styles am I using?</p>	<p>What was I feeling?</p> <p>Rate 0 -100%</p>	<p>Is there another way of viewing this thought?</p> <p>What advice would I give to a friend who had this thought?</p>	<p>How do I feel now?</p>
<p>Receiving a B grade</p>		<p>Anxious (95%)</p> <p>Angry (60%)</p>	<p>I got A's for all term so it's unlikely my average will be bad</p> <p>I don't like getting B's but it does not mean I am a failure</p> <p>No one can always get A's maybe the lecturer marked hard</p>	<p>Anxious (60%)</p> <p>Angry (30%)</p>

Thought record

A - Activating Event	B - Beliefs	C - Consequences	D - Disputation	E – Evaluate outcome
<p>What was going on at the time? (situation thought, image, memory)</p>	<p>What went through my mind? What does it mean about me as a person? Rate 0 - 100%</p> <p>Which unhelpful thinking styles am I using?</p>	<p>What was I feeling?</p> <p>Rate 0 -100%</p>	<p>Is there another way of viewing this thought?</p> <p>What advice would I give to a friend who had this thought?</p>	<p>How do I feel now?</p>

Challenging self-criticism by creating self-compassion.

Through reading this booklet and putting some of the strategies into place like experiments and thought records, you may have noticed how self-critical you can be and have thoughts like “I am a failure”. Another way to reduce self-criticism is to think about it like a self-critical voice on a radio, that you can choose to tune out of by turning the dial down. The power of the self-critical voice can be reduced by turning the volume down on that voice by the process of experiments and thought records to challenge self-criticism. This can break the pattern of self-critical thinking.

Try and think how you can replace the self-critical voice with a more caring voice. Try to use a voice to speak to yourself in your head in a caring way, as you would speak to a friend or someone you loved. Thinking of a list of values that you apply to people you love can help apply these values to yourself.

Values to apply to yourself to increase self-compassion.

Respect – I treat my friends with respect. I can try and treat myself with respect and not beat myself up all the time.

Forgiveness – I try and be forgiving of people I love. I can try and forgive myself also for mistakes and things I feel I have not achieved.

Considerate – I try to be considerate of other people. I can try and be considerate of myself by not putting myself down for mistakes.

Fairness – I always try and treat people I love in a fair manner. I will try and be fair to myself by being balanced in my self-view rather than only focus on mistakes and what I think I have done wrong.

Helpful – I always try and help my friends and people I love. I can try and help myself by being caring for myself rather than being critical.

You can use an AI tool like ChatGPT to help you with your thought record if you get stuck or to help you be less self-critical.



AI question: Try asking an AI tool like ChatGPT to help you with reducing self-criticism. An example question is *“I forgot to save a document and had to re-do it. Although it didn’t take that long, I keep on being very self-critical and unkind to myself in my head. That’s also making me mad as it wasn’t that big a deal and I know I shouldn’t be so self-critical. I’m self-critical for being self-critical. Please help me stop being so self-critical.”*

10. Procrastination and pleasant events

Procrastination is one of the most common behaviours that results from perfectionism. Everyone can relate to procrastination. For people with perfectionism this can become a pattern where many tasks are put off. Some thoughts causing procrastination are;

- If I cannot do the task well I will delay starting.
- If I might fail at the task then it is better to put off starting.
- If I can’t get it right I will put off doing it.
- If I leave it to the last minute and the result is not good then I have an excuse for poor performance.
- Because of my perfectionism the task will take too long so I will delay even starting.

The problem with procrastination is it may cause the very problem that is feared. For example, leaving a report to the last minute so that

there is an excuse if the result is poor, but then making errors due to time pressure. Often people procrastinate because they have beliefs about how procrastination will help their anxiety. For example, people often think that if they put something off like writing an assignment, they will feel better in the short-term and less anxious as they do not have to face doing the task. However, it is useful to also consider the costs of procrastination e.g., not getting the assignment in and feeling terrible.

Use the following worksheet which includes an example of challenging the benefits of procrastination.

Considering the costs of procrastination

1. Consider the benefits and costs of procrastination.
2. Challenges for the benefits of procrastination; are these really benefits to me? What happens in the long term?

Benefits	Costs	Challenges
e.g., feel less anxious	e.g., tasks build up so feel more stressed in the long run	e.g., putting things off only makes me feel better at the time in the long run I feel worse because I have too much to do

Also try experiments:

A behavioural experiment to challenge procrastination

Perfectionist thought: Unless I have my whole house clean and perfectly ordered, I cannot invite a friend over for coffee.

Experiment: Clean only the kitchen and bathroom, but leave other rooms untidy and have friend over for coffee.

Prediction: Unless the house is perfect, I will be embarrassed as my friend will think I am lazy and dirty. My friend might say 'I thought you would be more organised!'. I will feel embarrassed (80%) and anxious (100%).

Results: Invited my friend for coffee, but my friend did not comment on the house. I felt a little embarrassed (40%) when my friend looked at the untidy rooms, but nothing was said about not being more organised. I was less anxious than I thought (60%).

Revised belief: I did not have to clean the entire house. I was able to get started in breaking my procrastination by doing two rooms. My friend did not care about the house (65%)

It is also useful experiments and thought records to come up with a range of 'flashcards' of helpful reminders about procrastination. You can keep the reminders at home on the fridge or somewhere else prominent, or in the notes section of your phone to help kick-start you when you feel like procrastinating. Some examples of this can be seen in the following worksheet.



AI question: Try asking an AI tool for how to stop procrastinating by using AI a lot of the time! An example question is *“I keep using ChatGPT to procrastinate doing my assignment, can you help me not to procrastinate?”*

Getting the balance between achievement, rest and pleasant events.

One of the most common problems in people with perfectionism is that their whole life is involved in achievement which results in very little or usually no time for resting or having fun and doing enjoyable activities.

To help with this think about how you can include time for rest and pleasant events. This is important as having time for rest and pleasant events will help to improve mood and relaxation and achieve a more balanced life that is not all about striving hard.

You can use the worksheet that follows to do this. Try and include some of the pleasant events from the list that follows or think of some of your own pleasant events. Think about hobbies you have stopped doing or something you have always wanted to try.

It is important not to dismiss time to rest and pleasant events as a waste of time. It is a very important way to achieve more balance in your life. Rest and nice events will result in you feeling better and reducing your perfectionism.

The 'list of pleasant events' is intended to serve as an inspiration and a point of reference for enjoyable activities. We recognize that individual preferences, cultural differences, and personal circumstances can influence what one might find pleasurable, feasible or acceptable. The list is not exhaustive, nor is it a one-size-fits-all recommendation. We suggest you adapt, skip, or replace items based on your personal context and preferences. Financial difficulties may mean that suggestions involving buying something or going on a holiday do not apply. Think about what activities you could do that are free and able to be easily achieved that would boost your mood.

The idea is to do something you find enjoyable and that improves your mood that feels right for you in your circumstances.



List of pleasant events

Download music	Play sport
Cook a nice meal	Draw or paint
Go bike riding	Play a musical instrument
Go to a sporting game	Look at the internet
Learn a language	Try an exercise video online
Watch TV	Go for a jog
Listen to music	Have friends over for dinner
Go swimming	Go to the park with a friend
Join a new club	Put music on and dance
Watch a movie	Buy something new for the house
Go for a walk	Bake something you enjoy eating
Have a bath	Play computer games
Plan a holiday	Have a quiet evening at home
Make a gift for someone	Go walking outdoors in nature with friends
Play cards	Buy some new clothes
Do meditation	Join a community group to help others
Go on a holiday	Look at old photos of travel
Read a magazine	Text a friend



AI question: Try asking an AI tool for ideas for pleasant events. An example question is *“Can you tell me a list of pleasant events to improve my mood?”*

11. Self-evaluation

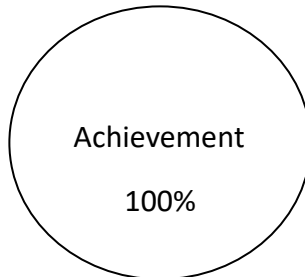
One of the most important factors that keeps perfectionism going is self-worth being dependent on striving. This is where someone bases their self-esteem on achievement. The trouble with basing self-worth on how well you achieve, is that this results in poor self-esteem when you don't meet a goal. Then even when you meet a goal, often you dismiss it as no big deal or easy. It's a no-win situation. Even when you do achieve you are not giving yourself the credit you deserve.

The problem is people put all their eggs in one basket. If you judge yourself in a narrow way based on achievement and you don't do as well as you like, you feel like a failure as a person. For example, *“if I do not meet my goal of winning the race, I am a failure as a person”*.

Try instead to improve your self-esteem by judging yourself in areas of life not based on achievement. This way you are spreading your eggs across many baskets. Even if one area is not going so well (for example not doing as well as you would like in an assignment), it has less impact.

If your self-esteem is based on many areas, you are less likely to be affected when you feel one area is not going so well. It is useful here to think of your sense of self-esteem like a pie.

If you consider how much of your self-worth is taken up by achievement, your self-worth pie probably looks like this:



Think instead about spreading your view of self across many areas of life, rather than just about achievement in one or two areas.

To help you to do this, think about the following list and think of who it is you want to be in this area, rather than what you want to achieve. This can be tricky, at first as typically people with perfectionism will think about trying to achieve across new areas.

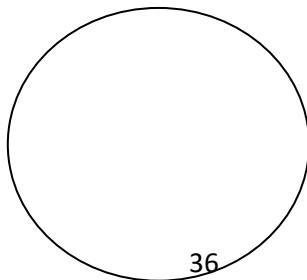
See if you can think of for example rather than the outcome of a domain that may be based on a sense of achievement (e.g., 'to excel at learning a new hobby in playing the guitar') and more of the process (e.g., 'to learn how to play a guitar but not be worried about how good I am, just enjoy it').

Area of life

Who do you want to be in this area?

Work	_____
Education	_____
Exercise	_____
Hobbies	_____
Friendships	_____
Intimate relationships	_____
Contribution to the community	_____
Spirituality	_____
Relationships with family	_____
Finances	_____
Emotional health	_____
Physical health	_____
Achievement of goals	_____

Try and now draw a new pie that represents your sense of self-worth that is not just based on achievement in your goals, but across a range of areas in life. Choose the areas from the list that you completed, also include achievement but leave that until last.



Sense of self-worth based on many areas of life.

A useful way of decrease self-esteem based on achievement is setting flexible guidelines rather than rigid rules. Professor Christopher Fairburn coined the phrase *'rules break, guidelines bend'*.

You might have a rule *'I must always achieve the very best at study to be worthwhile as a person'*, however it is useful to try and replace these rules with guidelines *'I like to try my best at study, but its ok if I am not the very top. My grades do not equal my worth overall as a person. There are many other areas of my life that are also important (friendships, hobbies, physical health)'*.



AI question: Try asking an AI tool for ideas for help. An example question is *"I need to decrease my self-worth being dependent on striving and achievement. I have been trying to use a pie chart, but I am not sure I am doing it right. Can you help?"*

12. Planning for the future

We hope that working through the booklet has helped you to have a sense of freedom from living your life dominated by achievement. It can be useful summarise what you have learned. Write a list of the most important things that you have learned in the process.

My main lessons learned about my perfectionism:

It can also be helpful to think about what you need to keep working on. For example, maybe experiments aimed at doing things less than perfectly, or thought records to reduce self-criticism and increase self-compassion. Take some time to make a list of the strategies you have found useful.

My main strategies to keep changing my perfectionism:

Sometimes you might be tempted to stop using the techniques. This might be the case if you find yourself entering an area of achievement likely to bring up some of your old habits of perfectionism (for example starting a new course of study, a competition). Try not being tempted back into the old habits but keep with changing your perfectionism. Be flexible with your approach towards striving and achievement.

AI tools like ChatGPT may be able to help you with a plan.



AI question: Try asking an AI tool for ideas for help in writing a plan. An example question is *“I’ve done a lot of work and made progress on tackling perfectionism. What can I do to help make sure I don’t relapse?”*

13. Resources

There are some websites with helpful free resources like an Australian website, Centre for Clinical Interventions: www.cci.health.wa.gov.au with worksheets on perfectionism, procrastination, and a range of mental health issues.

There is also a self-help book that is a more detailed version of the techniques that have been covered in a briefer way in this booklet:

Shafran, R., Egan, S.J., & Wade, T.D. (2018). *Overcoming perfectionism: A self-help guide using scientifically supported cognitive behavioural techniques, second edition*. London, UK: Hachette.

You can also access information and cognitive-behavioural treatment (CBT) through the following free websites in Australia and the UK.

Australia:

- Anxiety online: anxietyonline.org.au
- Mindspot Clinic: mindspot.org.au
- Beyond Blue: beyondblue.org.au
- Virtual clinic: virtualclinic.org.au

UK:

- If life-threatening emergency, call 999 or go to A&E.
- If non life-threatening, call your local NHS urgent mental health helpline: www.nhs.uk
- Get self-help – A UK website offering CBT resources: getselfhelp.co.uk/
- British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies: babcp.com – Information on CBT.
- Find a CBT therapist in the UK: cbtregisteruk.com/Default.aspx.
- Anxiety UK: anxietyuk.org.uk/ and napanic.org.uk/ - Information on anxiety.
- OCD-UK: ocduk.org and OCD Action: ocdaction.org.uk - Information on OCD.
- Depression alliance: depressionalliance.org – Information on depression.
- MindEd: minded.org.uk - Resources on youth mental health.
- National Health Service, UK: Information on CBT. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/>

AI question: You can ask an AI tool like ChatGPT to help you with more ideas about how to help with perfectionism. Make sure you use the term ‘*evidence-based*’ to get more useful responses. An example question is “*I’m looking for resources to help me with overcoming perfectionism. I want it to be evidence-based. Can you help?*”