



“If only I had done it a little better!”

Dealing with Perfectionism

Perfectionism is defined as aiming for ‘perfection at all times’, and trying to ‘make no mistakes’. Naturally, many students may wonder ‘isn’t that a good thing?’ While aiming to produce good quality work and having high standards for self is great, sometimes when we strive for ‘perfection’, the impact it can have on us can be less than ideal.

Often when we aim for perfection in everything we do, it becomes difficult for us to feel like we’re good enough and feel a true sense of satisfaction (if only it were a little better!).

Some common ways that perfectionism shows up:

- No matter how much work one put into a task, the result never feels good enough
- Feeling the need to appear strong, calm, and in control at all times
- Wanting to score good grades in all exams/ assignments
- Feeling like one needs to do more and better
- Finding oneself procrastinating a task because one’s worried the result won’t be up to their standard
- Feeling like one must do and say everything perfectly so that no one can find faults
- Finding it extremely difficult to make decisions/ constantly worry about the same thing/ find it difficult to delegate tasks

If these sound familiar, then you’re not alone. Many of us can probably connect with these. Students also often say that this helps them perform better. However, addressing perfectionism does not make anyone slack or become lazy. It simply means they’ll be motivated to do well without being too hard on themselves.

If this sounds like something you want to work on, try this:

1. Set healthy goals :

Setting realistic, healthy and limited goals can be a good point to start at. Set one or two [SMART goals](#) and break them down into smaller steps that you can take.

My SMART goals:

2. Prioritize starting rather than finishing (in case you tend to delay starting for want of perfection):

You may have noticed times when even starting an assignment or any task was difficult because of wanting the final result to be perfect. Make it your goal to simply start and not wait to ‘feel ready’. If it feels too overwhelming, take a couple of minutes to feel calmer (deep breaths!) and then start.

What are some things I’ve been delaying/avoiding:
(Try to do at least one of these even if it is just for 10 minutes)

**3. Take enough breaks:**

Many students while trying to work on something and trying to perfect it end up spending large amounts of time working on the same thing. Working for long hours without rest is likely to affect your productivity; after which you might get exhausted and take a very long break. Instead, take breaks at regular intervals. During these breaks, go outside in the fresh air, walk, do deep breathing, drink water, eat a healthy snack or freshen up. Avoid going online as your break could extend longer than you planned, affecting your schedule! It could also help to switch between different tasks periodically.

Ways I'll ensure I am taking enough breaks:

(e.g. setting an alarm for every 40-50 minutes and taking a break for 10 minutes)

4. Create a checklist of measurable indicators - once you've achieved these, stop working on that task:

Many perfectionists tend to keep working at a task continuously, trying to make it better and better (this can also make moving on to a new task difficult). It can help to make a list of things you want to achieve on your task before you start and then stick to it.

E.g. one item on the checklist can be "Spell-check my document". Once you have done that, stop it. Don't do it again!

Sometimes, it can also help to set aside limited time for a task and then decide to move on.

My task :

How will I know that the task is complete?:

5. Practice self-care:

While this may feel difficult and against your natural instinct, it can be of great help to consciously set aside and invest time in self-care. Self-care helps cope with the stress and pressure striving for perfectionism can put on someone, as well as prevent feeling burnt out.

[Know more](#)

Ways I'll practice self-care:

6. Working on the thoughts:

This can be done independently or with the help of a mental health professional:

- What are some thoughts that come to your mind when you don't achieve perfection?

Examples of some common thoughts:

- *I must never fail (I am not worthy/good enough if I do)*
- *I must not let people down*
- *My faculty/ loved ones will be disappointed in me if I perform poorly*
- *I should always be the best*
- *Concentrating on the one/two things that probably didn't go right as opposed to the others that did*
- *I'm no good at anything, I'm such a failure/They must think I'm so dumb/lazy (after making a mistake)*



My thoughts:

- Finding healthier alternatives to thoughts like the above:

<i>I must not make a single mistake</i>	<i>It would be nice to make fewer mistakes. But mistakes also give me an opportunity to learn and grow. It's a part of being human.</i>
<i>I have to appear strong all the time</i>	<i>Showing emotions and being honest is strength too</i>
<i>I have to achieve the best possible result each time</i>	<i>I will give in my personal best each time and treat it like a learning experience.</i>

Healthier alternatives to my unhelpful thoughts:

If you're finding it difficult to come up with alternatives (it is not easy), imagine if a friend came to you with the same kind of thoughts. What would you tell them?

Finally, remember that you don't have to do this alone. If you would like some additional support, please don't hesitate in reaching out to the Student Wellness Centre.

Reference: The Perfectionism Workbook: Proven Strategies to End Procrastination, Accept Yourself, and Achieve Your Goals 2018 by Taylor Newendorp