

## Overcoming Perfectionism

### What is perfectionism?

**Perfectionism** is defined as the refusal to accept any standard short of perfection. You might be experiencing perfectionism if you:

- Have unrealistic standards for yourself and/or others.
- Experience high levels of anxiety and/or frustration when you make mistakes.
- Are highly critical of yourself.
- Worry about failing.
- Take a long time to finish school/homework.
- Find it difficult to complete task.
- Are sensitive to criticism.

There are three main types of perfectionism that people experience:

1. **Self-Orientated Perfectionism** – Having the unrealistic desire to be perfect.
2. **Other-Orientated Perfectionism** – Having unrealistic standards of perfection for others.
3. **Socially Prescribed Perfectionism** – Believing that others have unrealistic expectations of you.

**Do you experience any of these types of perfectionism? If so, which ones?**

**What does perfectionism look and feel like for you?**

**How does this impact you?**

**Do you think the standards you set for yourself are fair?**

**Are others able to meet the standards that you set for them?**

**Do your high standards help you to reach your goals or get in the way of achieving them?**

**What do you think would happen if you were to relax your standards?**

Costs	Benefits

**If you were to let go of your perfectionism what would your life look like?**

**How you can overcome your perfectionism and relax your perfectionist standards:**

1. **Experiments** – We can use experiments to challenge our perfectionist beliefs. For example, if you are struggling with academic perfectionism, you could change your style of working by either reducing the amount of time you spend on your work or increasing it, depending on what your perfectionism looks like. You can then reflect on how doing this made you feel and what the outcome of doing so was. You may find that it was difficult and uncomfortable to challenge your perfectionism and reduce your standards of working, but may find that in the end, it does not affect the outcome of your grade. After reflecting, you can repeat the experiment or try out a new style of working to see if that fits better.
2. **Reflect** on what is desirable and what is a need (for example, it may be desirable to achieve all A\*'s but it is not necessarily a need).
3. **Replace** negative self-talk with positive self-talk – perfectionism often comes from an insecurity of not being good enough. Identify when you are experiencing negative self-talk, acknowledge that those thoughts are there (“I acknowledge that I am thinking that I am not good enough”) and try to distance yourself from those thoughts (“but this thought is not necessarily true”).
4. **Set Realistic Goals** – See our goal setting workbook for advice on SMART goal setting.
5. **Celebrate all your successes.**