

Setting goals and high standards for yourself can help you to achieve and to succeed. Goals and high standards can be helpful if they are flexible and achievable. However, if your standards are set too high you may put your wellbeing at risk while trying to meet them. Perfectionists tend to set very demanding unrelenting high standards for themselves and for others; mistakes are seen as catastrophic rather than an inevitable part of everyday life. Since perfection is often unachievable, perfectionists tend to suffer from stress/ anxiety and often feel a sense of failure.

The unrelenting high standards may not apply to every area of your life. It is possible to be a perfectionist in one area of your life but not another. You may be striving for perfectionism in one or more of the following areas:

- Study
- Work
- Social interactions
- Relationship
- Eating
- Physical appearance
- Fitness
- Cleaning

Perfectionistic Thought Processes

Unrelenting Standards. These standards are unrealistic and unachievable; they leave no room for mistakes and are inflexible. When standards are not met perfectionists will conclude that they themselves are at fault rather than that the standards were unrealistic. Striving to achieve unrelenting standards has a huge impact on your wellbeing i.e. your health, self-worth, and happiness.

Rules and Assumptions. Perfectionists may have rigid rules and inaccurate assumptions. An example of a rigid rule is “I must get HD’s in every unit” and an example of an inaccurate assumption is “If my assignment is not perfect my lecturer will think I’m stupid.”

Unhelpful Thinking Styles.

- Black and white thinking for a perfectionist may involve having an extreme view of what success and failure is, with no middle ground i.e. receiving a credit result is seen as the equivalent to failing because the goal of a HD was not met.
- Catastrophic thinking blows things out of proportion; a student who wants to drop out of their course because they have to repeat a unit is using catastrophic thinking.
- Jumping to conclusions may involve assuming that you know what others are thinking or that you can predict the future.
- Using “should” statements is unhelpful because they are often unrealistic standards e.g. “I should never make mistakes.”

One way to manage perfectionistic thoughts is to find more helpful and balanced ways of thinking. A thought diary may help you to become aware of your negative thoughts and notice how these thoughts affect how you feel and behave. Thought diaries can also help you investigate the accuracy and helpfulness of your negative thoughts.

Below is an example of a thought diary:

Situation that triggered the thought	Thought	Feeling elicited by the thought	Behaviour performed as a result of the thought	Evidence For the thought	Evidence Against the thought

Perfectionism Behaviours

Behaviours that maintain your perfectionism can be problematic because they are often time consuming. Due to the amount of time you spend trying to achieve your standards in one area, you may be neglecting other important areas of your life.

Some common types of perfectionism behaviours include:

- Struggling to make decisions in a timely manner.
- Reassurance seeking (asking others to check your assignment/ outfit).
- Excessive organising and list making.
- Giving up easily.
- Procrastinating; putting off starting an assignment for fear that it won't be good enough.
- Not knowing when to stop; rewriting an assignment several times.
- Avoiding situations in which you may fail; delaying enrolling in a particular unit.

It is often helpful for people to do experiments to test what would happen if you didn't perform your perfectionism behaviours. This may also help you to test the accuracy of your perfectionism assumptions and beliefs.

Below is an example of a behavioural experiment worksheet that you can use to test what happens when you don't perform your perfectionism behaviours:

Behaviour	Experiment Choose a specific situation in which you will decide not to use the perfectionism behaviour.	Predictions What do you think will happen? How do you think you will feel?	Outcome What actually happened? Were any of your predictions correct?	What I Learned What did you make of the experiment?

If you would like to speak to a UNE Counsellor about any of the issues covered in this tip sheet, please call UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) on 02 6773 2897 and arrange a face-to-face or telephone appointment.

The support you need to succeed.