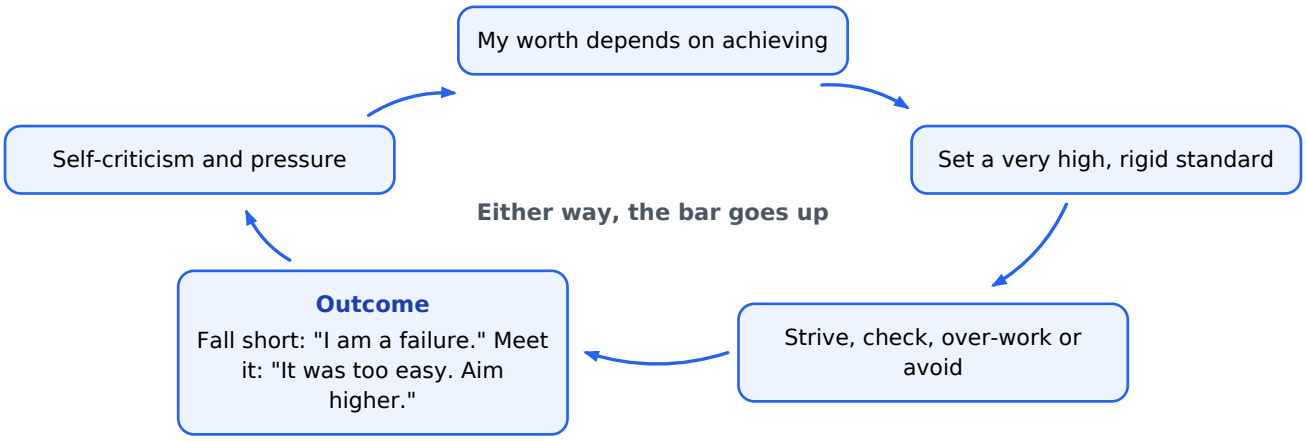
Understanding perfectionism

When high standards start to do more harm than good.

Wanting to do things well is healthy. Perfectionism is different. It means setting standards that are relentlessly high, judging your worth by whether you meet them, and carrying on even when it is doing you harm.



How it shows up

- [ ] All-or-nothing thinking: perfect or worthless
- [ ] Spending far too long on tasks
- [ ] Checking, redoing, tweaking
- [ ] Putting things off for fear of not doing them well enough
- [ ] Finding it hard to delegate
- [ ] Rarely feeling satisfied, even with success
- [ ] Harsh self-criticism over small errors
- [ ] Avoiding things I might not excel at
- [ ] Difficulty resting without guilt

What it costs

Exhaustion, anxiety, low mood, strained relationships, missed deadlines, and a life with very little room for enjoyment. Often, in the end, worse work too.

What change looks like

You do not have to stop caring about quality. The aim is:

1. **Flexible standards.** Different tasks deserve different levels of effort.
2. **Worth that does not depend on results.** You are more than what you produce.
3. **Experiments.** Trying "good enough" and finding out what really happens.
4. **A kinder response to mistakes.** A mistake shows you what to change. It is not a verdict on you.

> **A useful question**
> "What would good enough look like here, and what would I do with the time I saved?"

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The costs and benefits of my high standards

What perfectionism gives you, and what it takes.

Name _____ Date _____

Perfectionism has benefits, which is why it is hard to give up. An honest look at both sides helps you decide what is worth changing. Tick what fits and add anything else.

What my high standards give me

- ☐ Good results
- ☐ A sense of control
- ☐ Pride in my work
- ☐ Praise or respect
- ☐ Safe from criticism
- ☐ Being relied on

What they cost me

- ☐ Time
- ☐ Sleep
- ☐ Enjoyment
- ☐ Peace of mind
- ☐ Energy
- ☐ Health
- ☐ Time with people

Area of life	Effect of my perfectionism
Work or study	
Relationships and family	
Health and rest	
Hobbies and enjoyment	
How I feel about myself	

What am I afraid would happen if I eased off?

Is that definitely true? How could I find out?

What I would like to be different

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My perfectionism behaviours

Tick the things you do that keep perfectionism going.

Name _____ Date _____

Perfectionism is kept going by two kinds of behaviour: doing too much, and avoiding. Tick the ones you recognise.

Doing too much

- ☐ Checking work over and over
- ☐ Rewriting and redoing
- ☐ Over-preparing
- ☐ Making lists of lists
- ☐ Working long hours
- ☐ Researching far beyond what is needed
- ☐ Correcting other people
- ☐ Tidying and organising excessively
- ☐ Seeking reassurance that it is OK
- ☐ Taking over, not delegating

Avoiding

- ☐ Putting tasks off until the last minute
- ☐ Not starting unless I can do it perfectly
- ☐ Giving up early when it is not going well
- ☐ Not trying new things
- ☐ Avoiding being evaluated
- ☐ Not finishing, so it cannot be judged
- ☐ Being indecisive
- ☐ Hiding my work

The behaviour	What I fear would happen if I stopped	How hard to change (0 to 10)

The first one I will work on

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Good enough experiments

Do it less than perfectly, on purpose, and see what happens.

Name _____ Date _____

The fear behind perfectionism is that anything less will lead to disaster: criticism, failure, being found out. The only way to check is to try.

Ideas

- [ ] Send an email after one read-through
- [ ] Set a time limit for a task and stop when it ends
- [ ] Leave one small thing untidy
- [ ] Hand in something at 80%
- [ ] Say "I do not know" in a meeting
- [ ] Ask for help with something
- [ ] Leave on time
- [ ] Try something I am not good at
- [ ] Let someone else do it their way
- [ ] Make a small mistake deliberately

What I did differently	What I predicted would happen	What actually happened	What I did with the time or energy saved

What am I learning?

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How good is good enough?

Decide how much effort each task really needs.

Name _____ Date _____

Perfectionism treats every task as if it mattered equally. In reality a few things deserve your very best, most need to be decent, and some just need to be done.

Needs my best	Rare. High stakes, hard to undo, or very important to me or others.
Needs to be good	Most things. Solid, accurate, on time. Small flaws do not matter.
Just needs doing	Routine, low stakes, nobody will remember. Quick is better than polished.

Task	Which level?	Time limit	What good enough looks like

Which tasks have I been over-doing?

What would I do with the time I get back?

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A different response to mistakes

Go through one mistake: what happened, how much it matters and what to take from it.

Name _____ Date _____

What happened? Just the facts.

What did my critic say about it?

How bad does it feel right now?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — The worst

Putting it in proportion

What actually followed from it? Who noticed? What was the real effect?

What else contributed, apart from me? (Time, information, other people, tiredness)

How much will this matter in a month?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Hugely

If someone I respect had made this mistake, what would I think of them?

Using it

Anything I need to put right

- [ ] An apology
- [ ] A correction
- [ ] A conversation
- [ ] Nothing

What I will take from it for next time

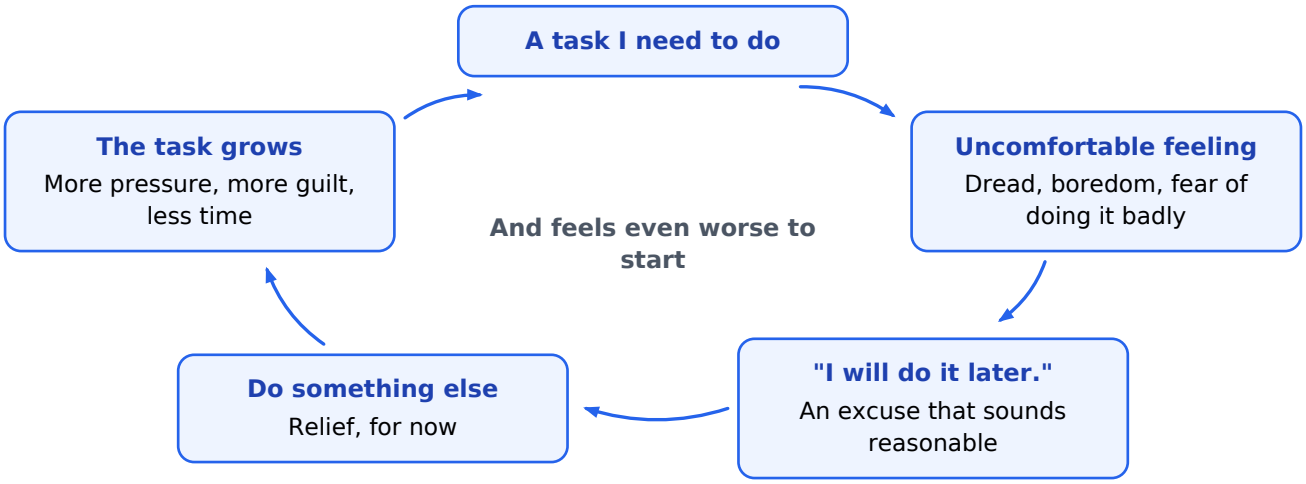
A fair, kind summary to tell myself

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Understanding procrastination

Why we put things off, and ways to get started.

Procrastination is delaying something you intend to do, even though you know the delay will cost you. It is rarely a problem with time management. Usually it is a way of escaping how the task makes you feel: bored, overwhelmed, anxious, not good enough.



What makes a task easy to put off

- [ ] It is vague, or I do not know where to begin
- [ ] It feels huge
- [ ] I am afraid of doing it badly
- [ ] It is boring
- [ ] The deadline is far away
- [ ] I resent having to do it
- [ ] I am tired or low
- [ ] There is something more appealing to hand

Ways through

1. **Make the first step tiny and specific.** "Open the document and write the title."
2. **Five minutes only.** Then decide whether to continue.
3. **Name the feeling.** "I am avoiding this because I am scared it will not be good." Feelings shrink a little when named.
4. **Catch the excuse.** "I work better under pressure" is rarely true.
5. **Set the scene.** Phone in another room. One tab open.
6. **Fix a time and a place.** "At 10, at the kitchen table."
7. **Be kind about past delay.** Self-criticism makes the task more unpleasant and the avoidance stronger.

> **Note**
> You do not need to feel ready before you start. The feeling of being ready usually comes after you have begun.

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Procrastination: excuses and replies

The things we tell ourselves to let ourselves off, and what to say back.

Name _____ Date _____

Most procrastination starts with a thought that makes putting it off sound sensible.

The excuse	A reply
"I am not in the mood."	"I do not have to be. Mood usually follows once I start."
"I work better under pressure."	"I work faster under pressure. It is not better, and it is stressful."
"I have plenty of time."	"Starting now gives me room for things to go wrong."
"I need to do X first."	"Is that needed, or is it a way of avoiding?"
"It has to be done properly, and I do not have a clear run."	"Twenty rough minutes now beats a perfect afternoon that never comes."
"I am too tired."	"I can do five minutes tired."
"I do not know where to start."	"I will start anywhere and tidy it up later."

My excuse	My reply

The task I am putting off most right now

The first two-minute step, and when I will do it

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The five-minute start

A way to get started on a task you keep putting off.

When something feels too big, commit to less. Agree to do it for five minutes. You are not agreeing to finish it.

1. **Pick one task.** Just one.
2. **Decide the very first physical action.** Not "sort the kitchen". "Put the cups in the sink."
3. **Set a timer for five minutes.**
4. **Start.** Do only that task until the timer goes.
5. **Then choose.** Stop, with no guilt. Or carry on for another five.

Why it works

- Starting is the hardest part. Once you are moving, continuing takes far less effort.
- Five minutes is too small for your mind to argue with.
- Stopping after five minutes still counts. You did what you said you would.

Task	First action	Did I start?	Did I carry on?	How I felt afterwards

On the worst days, make it two minutes.

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Breaking a task into steps

Split a job you are avoiding into small steps and tick them off.

Name _____ Date _____

The task that feels too big

What "done" would look like. Be realistic: good enough, not perfect.

List every step, however small. If a step still feels too much, break it down again.

Step	What exactly I will do	How long	When	Done
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

What might stop me, and what would help

How I will mark finishing it

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