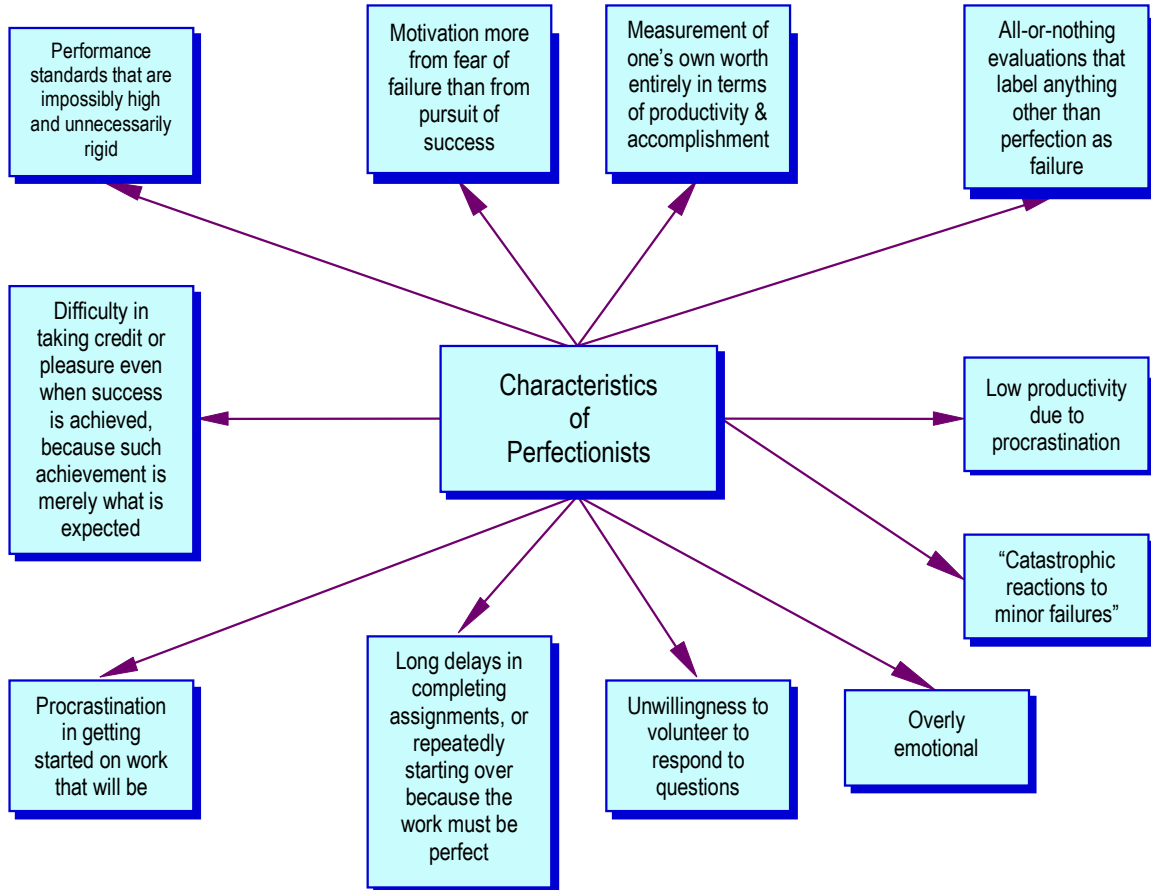


## Perfectionism

Perfectionist students are not satisfied with merely doing well or even with doing better than their peers do. Fear of failure can be destructive to achievement motivation, especially if it is powerful and persistent. Many students become alienated underachievers. Perfectionists are more concerned about avoiding mistakes than with learning.



Brophy, J. Workegw/Perfectionist Students VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabled & Gifted Education

What does Perfectionism look like?

- Frustration
- Anger
- Sadness during fun activities
- Test anxiety
- Writer's block
- Procrastination
- Underachievement
- Not handing in assignments
- Self-deprecation
- Taking on too many projects
- Not finishing project
- Task avoidance
- Obsessive compulsive behavior

Advantages:

- Eye for detail
- Self-motivated
- Able to motivate others
- Thoughtful and reflective
- Neatness
- Organized
- Dependable
- High expectations
- Cautious
- Personal satisfaction when successful
- Accomplishments
- Careful
- Driven

Disadvantages:

- Fear of risk taking
- Take on too many commitments
- Set self up for failure
- Difficulty delegating
- Hung up on details
- Don't finish projects
- Exhaustion
- Impose perfectionism on others
- Stress caused by disorganized surroundings
- Too picky
- Distrust others to follow through

Why some gifted children suffer from perfectionism:

- They possess an innate need to excel
- Adult response to child's early talents can be blown out of proportion

- Child begins to believe that her achievement is what people like best about her
- Child spends so much time interacting with adults that she judges herself by adult standards
- High level of task commitment in areas of interest causes child to set overly-high personal standards for success
- Adult expectations are too high or too difficult to sustain
- Drive to please parents begins at young age based upon early attention given to precocious abilities
- Child becomes used to succeeding in almost everything he tries
- Elementary school curriculum is generally not challenging
- Child feels not excelling equals failure, failure lets parents down, child feels guilty
- Child's skills do not develop at the same rate, leaving her frustrated when she can't do something

How do schools perpetuate perfectionism?

- Constantly use bright children as tutors
- Lavish too much praise
- Use too much "healthy" competition to motivate students
- Offer too many extrinsic rewards
  - High honor roll
  - Student of the Month

Ways to help:

- Don't assume bright children always have great study skills
- Don't expect children to do everything— well-roundedness should NOT be a goal
- Do value quality rather than quantity
- Do teach time management and study skills
- Do set limits and watch for burnout
- Do not react too emotionally to success or failure

## Perfectionism Quiz

Adapted from:

Orange, C. (1997). Gifted students and perfectionism. *Roeper Review*, 20, 39-41.

This is not the perfect perfection quiz. It does break down some of the characteristics into key factors. Rank each of these areas with a 4 for always, 3 for sometimes, 2 for not often, and 1 for never. There is not a magical number, but the higher the score the more dangerous and defeating the perfectionism may be. Remember if you get a 4 in one area, you should address that specific area.

### Factor 1 - Need for Order, Organization

1. I like to pre-plan and schedule most of my activities very carefully.
2. I am meticulous and orderly with most of my possessions.
3. It is important for me to have a place for everything and everything in its place.
4. I like to make lists of my daily chores and activities.
5. I tend to get upset if things don't go as planned.
6. When leaving my home I find that I have to check and recheck doors, lights, windows, etc.
7. It bothers me when people do not put things back exactly as I left them.

### Factor 2 - Need for approval of others

8. I'm afraid of being laughed at.
9. I tend to brood too much over what people think of me.
10. I am frequently tense.

### Factor 3 - Obsessive, compulsive demands on self

11. I feel I must strive for perfection in everything I do.
12. I feel uncomfortable when I have to break an appointment.
13. I tend to make strong demands on myself.
14. After completing a task, I am prone to doubts about whether I did it right.
15. I do certain things over and over even though I know it's pointless.

### Factor 4 - Anxiety and excessive worry

16. I find it difficult to relax and do nothing.
17. I tend to worry too much about a lot of things.
18. I often feel anxious or apprehensive even though I don't know why.
19. Unwanted, unpleasant or worrisome thoughts keep coming into my head.

### Factor 5 - Indecision

20. When under stress, I tend to become confused and disorganized.
21. My work tends to pile up so much that I have difficulty completing it.
22. I experience difficulty in trying to make the right decision.

**Factor 6 - High expectations of others**

23. People often disappoint me.

24. I frequently get angry at others for not sticking to plans we've made.

**Factor 7 - Hurried, driven**

25. There is usually a discrepancy between the way I want to behave and the way I actually do.

26. I move walk and eat rapidly because I don't want to waste time.

**Factor 8 - Procrastination**

27. I sometimes needlessly delay doing something I have to do.

28. I feel I miss out on a lot of opportunities because I don't act quickly enough.

**Factor 9 - Low interpersonal confidence**

29. I get very upset when people take advantage of me.

30. Most mornings I spend a great deal of time making sure that I look just right.