

Tell us what you think!



SELF-CRITICISM ENHANCES PERFORMANCE: FACT OR MYTH?

Check out the evidence!

As students, we are often looking for ways to enhance our performance so that we can achieve more.

We may think that being self-critical is the secret ingredient to:

- helping us perform better
- being more motivated
- maintaining our high standards

"I'm such an idiot, I should have known that would be on the test, how could I be so stupid?"



If we are **not** self-critical, we may think we are:

- letting ourselves off the hook
- or showing weakness

BUT IS THIS ACTUALLY TRUE?

FIRST, LET'S DEFINE WHAT SELF-CRITICISM IS.

WHAT IS SELF-CRITICISM?

Self-criticism includes:

Negative self-talk



Holding ourselves to unrealistic expectations

Negatively evaluating ourselves

Judging ourselves as worthless



Evaluating ourselves as failures

Let's say we miss a deadline, forget to do something for someone, or start feeling overwhelmed by daily life.

"What's wrong with me?"

When this happens, if you are self-critical you might start thinking things like:

"I'm not trying hard enough."

"I'm such a failure!"

"Why do I always mess up?"

"Why can't I cope?"

"I'm so selfish to forget something like this!"

"I will always be alone."

SELF-CRITICISM: FACT VS. MYTH

1 "If I don't meet my high standards, I won't be motivated to reach my goals."



FACT

or

MYTH

2 "If I don't push myself and be self-critical, I won't get things done."



FACT

or

MYTH

3 "I need to focus on my mistakes in order to do better."



FACT

or

MYTH

Actually, ALL of the statements above are MYTHS! In fact, self-criticism negatively impacts our ability to progress towards our goals and perform successfully.^{17, 18}



OUTCOMES OF SELF-CRITICISM

Self critical thoughts can lead to:



negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression



increased self-criticism



lower self-esteem



the overgeneralization of failure^{3, 7}

Caught in this loop of self-critical thoughts, we might also procrastinate or avoid our tasks, like studying for an important exam, because we are so caught up in our thoughts.

Although we may think that being hard on ourselves is helpful, what we're really doing is lowering our productivity and feeling even worse about it!^{1, 17}

View the **Study Skills and Procrastination** resource!



Instead of focusing only on what we see as mistakes, we should see them as **opportunities to learn and grow** instead.⁵

It's completely fine to have high standards, but engaging in self-criticism when we don't meet these high expectations can be **harmful**.¹⁸

View the **Managing Expectations** resource!

SELF-COMPASSION INSTEAD OF SELF-CRITICISM^{10, 16}

Self-compassion gives you a **new way to cope** with challenging situations, with:

- kindness
- understanding
- empathy



Self-compassion can be used in many different contexts where we may feel negatively about ourselves.⁸

It could be coping with disappointment after a difficult exam for instance, dealing with a break-up, or losing a family member...

When something goes wrong, we often react in one of three ways:

SELF-CRITICIZING

Being self-critical and/or lashing out at others



SELF-ISOLATING

Isolating ourselves or avoiding the problem



SELF-ABSORPTION

Getting caught up in our thoughts/emotions and feeling stuck



With self-compassion, we can change these reactions to something that helps us cope better.

Show ourselves **self-kindness** and be kind to others

"I can learn from my mistakes."

"I reacted badly, and I can be more caring and understanding next time."

Recognize our **common humanity**

"Everyone has bad days. I'm not the only one with this problem."

Reframe our thoughts to be more balanced

"Perhaps I didn't do as well as I wanted, but I can focus on what I can control for next time."

WHY IS SELF-COMPASSION BENEFICIAL?

Self-compassion is associated with:^{8, 20}



Greater **intrinsic motivation**, which is feeling motivated to do something because it is naturally satisfying for you..



Perseverance in meeting our goals, even when we encounter challenges along the way.



Fewer feelings of failure, depression and anxiety.

...rather than because of external motives, such as praise.

REMEMBER

Self-compassion is **not** being selfish or letting ourselves off the hook!

In fact, our **self-compassion increases our sense of self-worth**¹³ and allows us to admit our shortcomings more easily!¹⁴

STRATEGIES TO BUILD SELF-COMPASSION

1 NOTICING AND REFRAMING OUR CRITICAL SELF-TALK... by either speaking out loud to ourselves or reflecting silently.¹⁰

Imagine your friend was feeling bad about themselves or struggling in some way.



What would you say to your friend?

See if you can use more self-compassionate self-talk, more similar to how you would speak to a friend.

Now, how would you talk to yourself in the same situation?

If you're self-criticizing, why would you talk to yourself that way and not your friend?



Why do you deserve less compassion than your friend? ?

2 TRY OUT A SELF-COMPASSION MEDITATION.¹⁰

Quick, brief guided audios that you can use when you need!



View the Self-Compassion Meditation resource!

These can help us strengthen our ability to think more kindly towards ourselves and others.⁶



Consequently, they can be helpful when we are feeling angry, irritated, or frustrated with ourselves or others.²

3 EXPLORING SELF-COMPASSION THROUGH WRITING.¹⁰

Journaling or other writing exercises can help us exercise our self-compassion.



Research finds that this activity can:^{4, 12, 15, 19}



feelings of self-isolation



self-esteem



positive emotions

Here are some writing prompts you can try:

Try writing a letter to yourself from the perspective of a loving friend, family member, or even a pet!

1 Is there a part of ourselves that makes us feel inadequate or bad?



3 Write a letter to you from their perspective, with kindness and forgiveness.



2 Think of what a loved one or friend would say to you about this part of yourself.



4 Allow these feelings to wash over you and stay present.



SELF-COMPASSION JOURNALING

Write down anything that you felt bad about, anything you judged yourself for, or any difficult experience that caused you pain.

Be accepting and non-judgmental of the experience and any emotions that arise.



Write down the ways in which your experience is connected to the larger human experience.

Write down comforting words for yourself:

"It's okay that I messed up, it's not the end of the world."



This helps us acknowledge that being human means being imperfect, and others have experienced similar situations.



Remember that even when our immediate thoughts about negative situations involves some kind of self-criticism, we can always take a step back and reflect about how to cope with these situations differently.

FEEDBACK & CONTACT INFORMATION

EDUCATION
FOR
MENTAL
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RESILIENCE

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