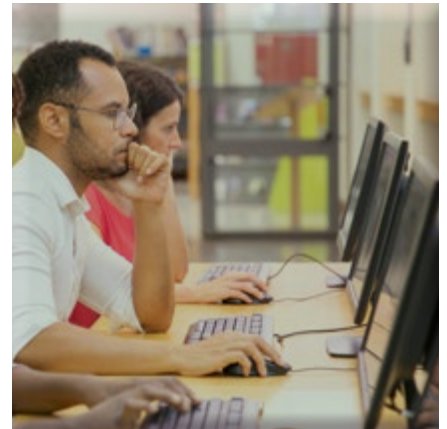



# Personal Standards/ Self-Criticism



Personal standards and self-criticism are components of a larger concept called “perfectionism”. Perfectionism can have negative connotations, but research shows that there are two types of perfectionists: adaptive and maladaptive. Both types have high standards, which is important for self-discipline, confidence, and self-esteem. Indeed, in contrast to students with relatively lower standards, those who strive for excellence in their work are more likely to do better in school (in terms of their grades and scores on standardized tests), are more motivated to seek connections with others, and report more positive mental health.

However, the benefits of having high standards can be greatly diminished if they are accompanied by a high fear of failure, difficulty accepting mistakes, and/or overly focusing on one’s perceived faults. In these cases, this self-criticism can lead to lower academic performance and high personal distress.

The goal of this module is to help students raise their personal standards. Equally important, this module will address instances where students may have high standards, but their quest for perfection in all areas of their lives may diminish their life quality. This is the difference between adaptive perfectionists (high standards, but also accepting that their standards cannot always be met) and maladaptive perfectionists (equally high standards but also high self-criticism). For more information, see .

## OBJECTIVES

Students will learn to:

- Understand the importance of standards through personal and real-life examples
- Identify areas where they are comfortable with their standards, and areas that they would like to improve
- Develop easy and effective ways to enhance standards in targeted areas
- Describe through writing actual examples of how they put their skills into practice (*optional*)

## MATERIALS

### Standards

Raise Your Standards 

How to Have Higher Standards 

Stop Making Excuses for your Actions (*for middle school students*) 

### Self-Criticism

A Short Story about Self-Criticism 

The Present 



## Primary Lesson

**Time: One class period; 20 minutes for initial lesson and the remaining time for discussion**

The facilitator introduces the concept of both standards and self-criticism by providing an overview of both concepts, supported by the videos listed in the Materials section. The goal of the introduction is to have students consider areas where they may have high standards (and areas where they may not), and instances when their self-critical voice hindered their growth.


Facilitators can use the following script:

***Let's consider our standards, or expectations. To have standards means that a line is drawn*** [draw a solid line in the middle of the whiteboard]. ***Above this line, you are fine with the results; you accept them. Anything below this line is unacceptable for you. We all have our lines set differently; some of us have the line set very high standards and some of us have lines set very low.***

***I just drew that line as an example, but it's just one line. Most of us have lines set for specific things in our lives. Maybe some of us have lines set really high for our school work, or friends, or someone who could be a romantic partner, while our lines may be set really low on other things, like how our locker or bedroom looks. The point is that our expectations differ depending on what we value.***

***On a piece of paper, think of major domains in your life, like school, your health, your friends; anything that comes to mind. List them on the left side of your paper*** [give 5 minutes for students to list everything]. ***Now that you have done this, draw a horizontal line on the right side of the paper, about midway on the page. Now, rank order your domains with respect to this line. Which domain do you have the highest standard on? Maybe it's your athletic skills, or what you desire in a romantic partner. You place this domain way above the line. Maybe your lowest standards are your personal appearance, so you place this below the line. You then fill in the remaining space above and below the line with the rest of the domains you listed.*** [give at least 5 minutes for students to list everything]

***What you have listed is a quick way to see areas where you could improve your standards and areas where your standards are high. Why is this important? Having high standards means that you've set expectations for yourself and/or others. This is important for self-discipline and not giving up. It also means that others may not have to pick up the slack.***

[Optional] ***Let's take a look at this video and then discuss its meaning*** [facilitators show the video containing a brief quote on the social consequences of having low standards:  after watching, the facilitator should invite students to discuss what this means to them]

1. Facilitators show selected Standards videos (see the Materials section) that illustrate the importance of having high personal standards. Concepts to emphasize are (a) the importance of having standards to reach personal goals and (b) the importance of taking personal responsibility (which is a component of having high standards).



## Primary Lesson

# 04


Questions that facilitators could ask students (but they do not need to respond to the group) are:

- What information really struck home with you?
- Were there times when having low standards in an area prevented you from getting what you wanted?
- Have there been times when you did not accept personal responsibility for your actions? What happened?

***What you will start doing today is find ways to raise your standards in domains that were below the line. Here's how you will do this: first, take what you've listed on your piece of paper and transfer that information to this sheet*** [hand out the Evaluating my Standards sheet].

2. Facilitators have students complete the Evaluating my Standards sheet, rating their expectation levels across life domains. (Some domains may not apply, depending on the age of the student). Students also have the option of listing another area that is not considered on the sheet. This should be an easy task since the students already provided this information.

***Second, rather than placing these domains above and below the line, rate each domain on this 1-6 scale [review the scoring options]. Let me clarify options 5 and 6. Option 5 is for any domain you listed above the line but you also feel that maybe your standards here are interfering with your ability to enjoy the moment. For example, let's say that you have really high standards for your school performance, but you only are satisfied when you get an 'A'. Even an 'A-' is not satisfactory. In this case, you circle that option. On the other hand, option 6 is for domains that you have high standards, but you are fine when you fall a bit short of your expectations at times. In other words, you can accept a 'B+' or 'A-'. By the way, if you listed other domains on your paper, place them in the Other line on the worksheet.*** [give students 5 minutes to do this]

***Finally, I want to discuss any domain that you gave a '5' to, which means you have a difficult time accepting when your performance does not meet your standards. In fact, many students have a hard time accepting mistakes or fear failing. Rather than seeing mistakes as an important step to growth, they would rather not take the risk of looking bad in front of their peers or parents, or disappointing themselves. This is the wrong way of looking at things. You must be comfortable accepting your mistakes because they are necessary to succeed. Let's look at people have failed-often*** [facilitators can show People who Failed at First (  and students can discuss what they learned from the video].



## Primary Lesson

05

***So if any of you beat yourself up too much, that's your inner critic yelling at you; and it is not helpful. Let's take a look at these videos*** [facilitators show both videos under the Self-Criticism heading, which illustrate the negative power of self-criticism and the trap of thinking that one's perceived blemishes limits personal meaning. Facilitators can discuss student's responses after the videos are presented, emphasizing the setting reasonable standards (i.e., not setting them so high that it will lead to stress if the goal is not met) and accepting perceived blemished and appreciating mistakes as stepping stones to growth]

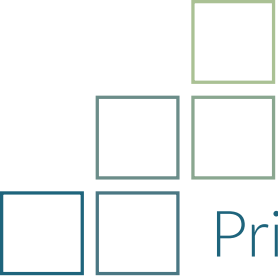
***We are going to make an agreement; this is a mistake-free group: meaning we will not call them mistakes, only steps to growth. What can you tell yourself when you make a mistake or think you are failing?*** [the facilitator records the responses on the white board]

3. Students then list 1-2 expectations that would like to target for change in the next 3-6 months and complete the remaining part of the sheet. It is important that students pay attention to identifying what new behaviors that they will need to perform to reach their new expectation. Facilitators should have students think about potentially extensive behavior changes (study patterns, getting on an exercise plan) and more mundane "daily rituals" that must be addressed before their expectations are met. One example of a daily ritual would be "getting up 10 minutes early to review my homework assignments", or "take 5 minutes each morning and night to practice deep breathing skills." Students are given the option of sharing these with the class, and the facilitator will keep a copy of the list to be revisited periodically over the course of the year.
4. Facilitators then have students list up to three individuals who inspire them. The individuals must identify those who typify the standards that they would like to improve (as identified in their Evaluating my Standards sheet). Students are instructed to select one of these individuals for an in-person interview (outside of class), using the Personal Standards Interview form. The interview is designed have the student learn from a mentor about the value of high standards, how to use mistakes to their advantage, and lessons on how to maintain standards even when situations do not go well. Students submit a paper based on their interview (due within 4 weeks of assigning this activity).

Facilitators can use the following script:

***I want you to think of three adult role models in your life. These role models are someone that you can meet with regularly and who know you well. As some example, they could be a member of your family, someone who works at this school (such as a teacher, a coach, a lunchroom worker) or someone in the community. You can choose all three from the same group, such as three family members. But if possible, I would like you to choose adults from different groups.***





## Primary Lesson

06

***Think about why they are role models for you. Chances are, they have high standards. The best way to learn the benefit of having high standards is to get feedback from a role model. I want you to pick one of your role models and schedule an in-person interview, using the Personal Standards Interview worksheet. As you go through these questions, think about how their responses apply to you. The more you can add to each question, the better this is for you. I will not accept one-word or single sentence responses. This is an occasion for you to think deeply about an important topic from someone you trust and admire.***

Although the following step can be covered during the same period, it may be better to discuss the remainder of the Evaluating My Standards sheet once their interview with at least one role model has been conducted. The reason is that some information in the bottom of the Changing My Standards worksheet (see below) cannot be completed until after the interview.

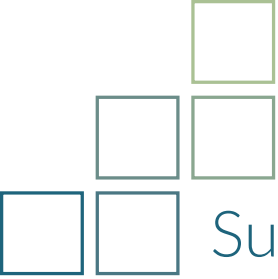
Whatever the option, the facilitator presents the Changing My Standards worksheet to students, who are instructed to transfer any domain with a 1, 2, or 5 option to the Changing My Standards sheet. This sheet allows them to focus on domains with low standards, or domains with high standards but high self-criticism. On regular occasions (no more than 2 weeks apart) they complete portions of sheet to monitor their progress to goals

Facilitators can use the following script:

***Let's turn to your domains on the Evaluating My Standards worksheet. If you rated any domain as a 1, a 2, or a 5, place them on boxes at the bottom. After you have done so, complete the remaining boxes. What will be your new expectation and what will be different for you? What behaviors will you need to change to meet your new expectation, and how will you know that you succeeded?***

[facilitator hands out the Changing My Standards worksheet]. This sheet will allow you to monitor your progress. ***This is where information you got from your interview is so important. If you don't feel that you are making progress, think about the behaviors you felt you needed to change and what your role model said. What can you do differently to overcome any barriers? I will help you monitor your progress as you strive to reach your goal. What you will not do is give up. If you are frustrated, come to me. Although I will not do the work for you, I will help you come up with strategies to keep you going.***

5. From this point forward, and no later than every two weeks, facilitators have students update the Changing My Standards worksheet, which compels them to keep track of their progress towards their goals. These discussions should be both 1:1 with the facilitator, but they can also be group-level discussions to help those who are finding it difficult to maintain their focus or are frustrated with their progress.



## Supplemental Lesson

### PERSONAL GROWTH PROJECT: LEARNING HOW TO FAIL

**Time: 15 minutes for discussion; ongoing**

*Materials: a personal journal (either in print form or through a social medial platform)*

Students are instructed to selected one activity that they have always wanted to explore but have not had a chance to do so. The activity may involve a new skill (such as learning to play a musical instrument, a new language, or a sport) or experience (traveling to a region an immersing themselves in a new culture) but must comply with the following requirements. First, the activity must be something that they have not attempted before—it must be something completely new for them. Second, the activity must be ongoing (at least for 6 weeks). Finally, it must be under the guidance of an adult figure such as a coach, tutor, or mentor. Students will continue to add entries into their personal journal as they continue in their journey, specifically detailing their goals, frustrations or roadblocks that hindered goal attainment, that pathways that were formulated to work around or through the roadblocks, and motivational strategies to pursue the pathways. Students will also describe what they learned about themselves over the course of their journey and if they plan to continue beyond the grade term.



# Evaluating My Standards

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

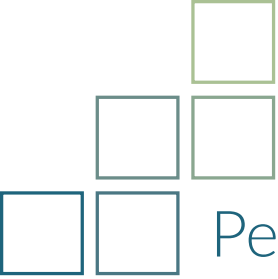
Below, consider your expectations in various areas. You can ignore areas that don't apply to you. Rate each area according to the following:

Don't have any	Very low and I am not fine with this	Very low but I am fine with this	Neither high nor low	Very high and I am not fine with this	Very high and I am fine with this
1	2	3	4	5	6

The expectations I have for myself in...	Are...					
My health	1	2	3	4	5	6
My schoolwork	1	2	3	4	5	6
My friendships	1	2	3	4	5	6
My boyfriend/girlfriend	1	2	3	4	5	6
My relationships with my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
My relationships with my siblings	1	2	3	4	5	6
My attitude to others	1	2	3	4	5	6
My self-discipline	1	2	3	4	5	6
My mindset	1	2	3	4	5	6
My future	1	2	3	4	5	6
Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

Area to Increase My Expectation	What is My New Expectation?	What will I no Longer Accept from Myself or Others?	What New Behaviors Will I need to Adopt?	When I Succeed, Will Change for Me?





## Personal Standards Interview

As a class project, we were asked to think of an individual who we respect and who set high standards for themselves and expect the best from those around them. I chose you. Can I ask you some questions to help me with this project? This interview is not meant to last longer than 15 minutes.

☐ YES ☐ NO

1. What kind of qualities do you expect of yourself at your work or at home?

---

2. When you were my age, what were some goals that you set for yourself?

---

3. What were some things you learned about yourself and others as you were trying to reach your goals?

---

4. How do you handle mistakes? What do they mean to you?

---

5. If you see someone my age not living to their potential and had the power to change them, what would you change first, and why?

---

6. If there was one thing that you can tell me that is not acceptable as a student, what would that be?

---

**Thanks so much for your time.**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Changing My Standards

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Area That I am Trying to Change: \_\_\_\_\_

How I Know I Achieved My Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Progress to Goal (circle one) <i>No Progress at All</i> <i>Very Slow Progress</i> <i>Steady Progress</i> <i>Goal Attained</i>	If no Steady Progress, What is the Barrier?	A) Am I Being Consistent with Adopting New Behaviors?	B) What Was the one Thing that My Person Said Was Unacceptable?	Considering a) and b), What Can I do to Overcome the Barrier?