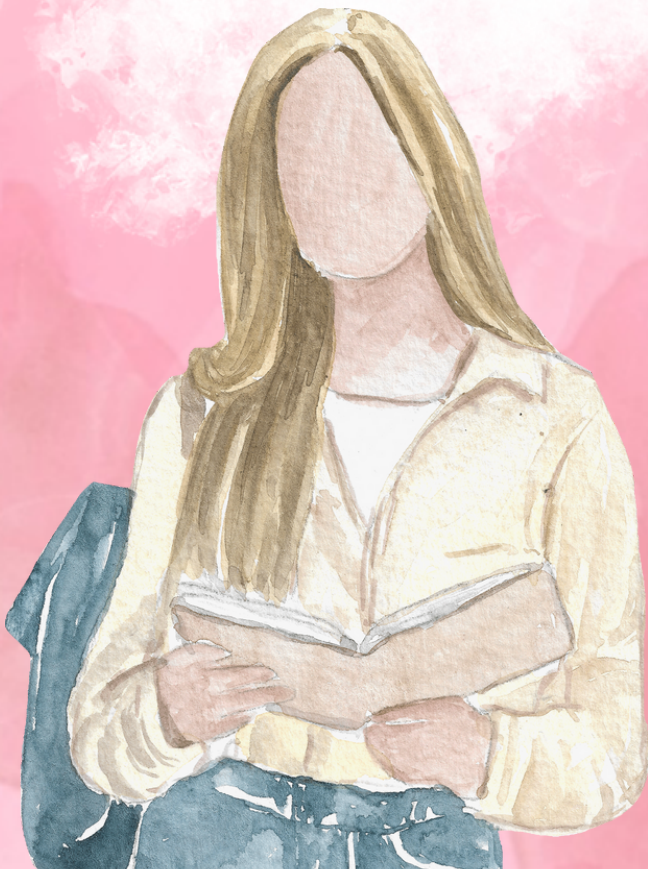




# Dealing with performance pressure for students

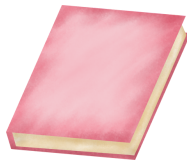


## Intro

More and more students suffer from performance pressure: the feeling that you have to perform.

You can become (too) perfectionist and suffer from mental complaints. Such as: fear of failure, sadness, sleeping problems, stress and fatigue.

## Useful e-book



You get:

- Explanations of healthy and unhealthy stress.
- 10 tips to reduce performance pressure.
- Exercises you can try yourself.

You can also do the self-test. This tells you right away if you experience performance pressure.

*You're not the only one...*

**54%** of students suffer from **performance pressure**.

**97%** of students experience **stress**.

## What is stress?

If your situation or environment changes, your natural survival mechanism may activate. This is a stress response and it feels like tension or pressure.

## Healthy stress

Normal stress is healthy. Like tension before an exam or a difficult conversation. Your body allows you to react and concentrate extra alertly.

This goes away after the stressful event.

## Unhealthy stress

If you stress for too long, intense or often, you can't recover well in between. This is unhealthy.



## Symptoms

- Feeling agitated
- Shallow breathing
- Headache
- Upset stomach
- Neck pain
- Mulling
- Not sleeping well
- Being easily irritated
- Fast heart rate
- Catching more colds
- Changed appetite
- Fatigue

# Self-test

Do you recognise the following? YES or NO

1. I always do more than is asked of me
2. I feel pressure from my environment to perform
3. When there are many choices, I get stressed
4. I often check how many likes and comments I get
5. I feel I should post more often
6. I feel I have to prove myself to others
7. Getting a 6 gives me anxiety
8. I can hardly relax
9. I am busy achieving goals without knowing what I am doing it for
10. I often feel I have to be useful/productive

**How often did you answer YES?**

**0 - 2 times**    There is little performance pressure.

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**3 - 5 times**    You experience pressure. Check this e-book.

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**6+ times**    Oy, time to raise the alarm!  
Talk to your academic advisor or a caregiver.

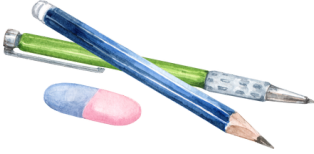


**Get started on your own? Check out the tips and exercises in the Mirro modules.**



## Exercise 1 - Gratitude journal

Feeling gratitude brings you into the here and now. You learn to be content with what is and who you are. This helps reduce performance pressure.



Write down 3 nice things every day. Something (small) that makes you happy.

Examples:

- I came across a nice acquaintance
- I felt inspired by...
- I saw a cute bird in the garden
- My hair looks nice today
- I heard my favorite song
- I received a compliment



### Tip 1: Focus on the positive

What you give attention to that grows. Why? Your brain walks the paths it knows. Because, really, it's just lazy. By focusing on nice things, your brain sends energy to everything you find positive. That's how it plays a bigger role in your life.

## Tip 2: Share your concerns

Plenty of students experience the same. Break it open by talking about it. This will ease your feelings.

## Tip 3: Focus on your passion

What gives your life color?  
It could be writing, drawing, painting, filming, sports, going out, traveling, photography, learning a new language....

Pay enough attention to this each week.



## Ask yourself: 'Am I still enjoying myself?'

Achievement is not the only important thing in life. Even though it may seem that way at times. Focusing too much on this comes at the expense of rest and enjoyment. Or of other things that are just as important, such as: Enjoying your life!

## Exercise 2 - Discover your values

Discover your core values with 5 questions:

1. Who do you look up to?
2. Why?
3. What do you hate?
4. How would a friend describe you?
5. What do you enjoy most?



Consider:  
Honesty, love, safety, justice,  
freedom, respect, equality  
and peace.

### Tip 4: Live from your values

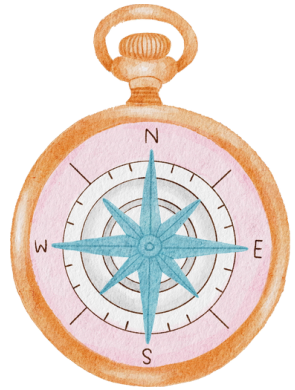
Do you often do something because "it's the right thing to do"? Or just because it suits you?

Organise your life as much as possible according to your values. You'll feel more autonomy and satisfaction. And care less about external pressure.

## Tip 5: Learn to choose

You can't do everything. Actually, you can do very little, with how many activities and skills there are.

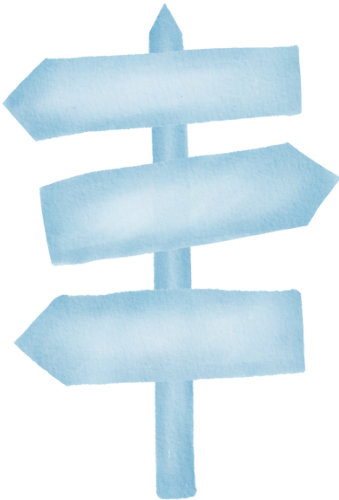
Do what suits you. Something you are good at or that makes you happy. Because that's good for you.



## Exercise 3 - Pick & Choose

Take time to feel. How does the ground under your feet feel? Hard or soft, warm or cold?

After a few minutes, return to your issue.



Think 1 by 1 about the choices you have. How does this choice feel? Heavy or light?

Feeling light means the choice suits you right now.

## Giving permission to yourself

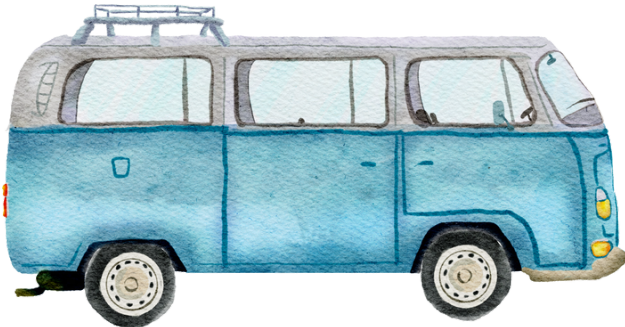
Do you ever stop to think about your habits? Suppose you often hurry, you don't allow yourself to rest.

Tell yourself, "I am allowed to walk slowly."

Or, "I'm allowed to do things at my own pace."

These permissions often work better than affirmations. After all, those can make you feel like you 'have to' enjoy yourself. And we want to relieve that very feeling to reduce performance pressure.

*"Focus on the journey rather than the destination."*



# Experience story

"My family is very proud of me for being admitted to the School of Medicine.

In my family it is important to work hard and get good results. In high school, I managed to do this well. That's why everyone was proud of me.

During my education, I have had lower grades many times. I prefer not to tell this to my parents.

I am ashamed enough of it myself."

Fatima, 20 years old



## **Tip 6: Schedule breaks for yourself**

You relax during a break, no matter how short. Walking or stretching gives you extra rest. Then you concentrate better.



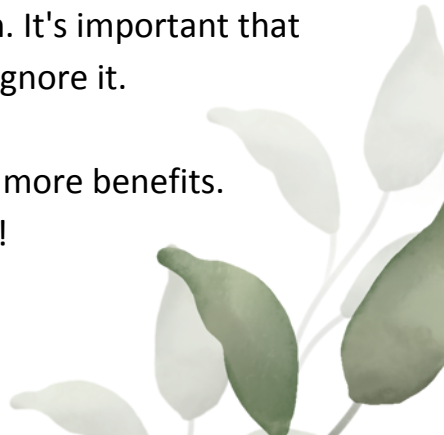
## **Tip 7: Social media only shows highlights**

Many students feel extra pressure from social media. Cool parties, beautiful trips, workouts, fashion... But you only see highlights, what someone wants to share. That person may also feel angry, sad, jealous... and maybe also feels that pressure!

## **Tip 8: Be gentle with yourself**

The critical voice. The one always whining that something is not (good) enough. It's important that you learn to recognise it... and ignore it.

A gentle voice brings you many more benefits. The following exercise can help!





## Exercise 4 - Become your own best friend.

How do you talk to your best friend when they are struggling? Probably comforting and understanding.

But when you yourself make a mistake or are in a mood, you are very hard on yourself.

- Write down 3 things you say to yourself when you make a mistake.
- Write down what you would say to your best friend in that situation.
- Now say these things out loud to yourself.

Practice (in your head) for a while every day. On the train or in the shower.



## Tip 9: Become positively selfish

Are you always there for others?  
Even when you are (too) busy yourself?

Wanting to help others is a great quality,  
but not at the expense of yourself.  
Time for some positive selfishness!

- Guard your limits
- Dare to say no when something doesn't suit you
- Think about whether you really want something

Think about: 'What do I have to give? How much can I give? Do I want to give that to this person?'

## Tip 10: Celebrate your successes!

To strengthen your self-esteem, it helps to recognise and celebrate your successes. How?

- Treat yourself
- Thank yourself (out loud)
- Do something fun
- Write it down as a reminder





## **Breathe in, breathe out**

Stressful moment? Try Box Breathing:

Get comfortable and close your eyes.  
Blow out all the air through your nose.

Hold your breath for 4 seconds.  
Then inhale through your nose for 4 seconds.  
Hold your breath again for 4 seconds.  
Exhale for 4 seconds.

## **Precepts and how they affect you**

Everyone has precepts. You form these through your life, with influence from your environment. They tell you something about what is deemed 'normal'.

Such as: You should always be there for others.

Precepts give you guidance and protection. But they can also get in your way.

### **Consider what your precepts are**

*I must do everything perfectly. I must not give up.*

*I must not take up space / make mistakes.*

*I must enjoy myself. I must adapt.*

### **Examine a precept**

Choose a precept that you would most like to change. How strict is this one?

What are the advantages and disadvantages?

Take stock of this.

### **Rewrite the precept**

To whom is the precept important?

Family, friends, partner, culture, religion....

Now that you know this, you can rewrite it!



## Exercise 5 - Replace a strict precept

You are now going to rewrite a precept in 3 steps:

### Step 1

Replace 'I must' or 'I must not' with '... finds it important to'. Fill in on the dots who it is about.

### Step 2

Add a helping message that feels right for you. This way you can make the rule less strict on yourself.

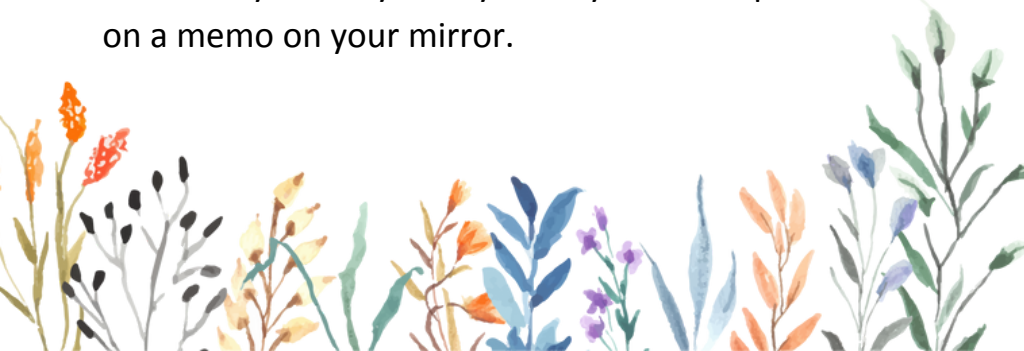
Such as: 'but this doesn't always have to happen' or 'but sometimes this happens and that's okay'.

For example, you'll get:

*I think it's important not to disappoint others, but sometimes that happens and that's okay.*

### Step 3

Make your new precept visible. For example, write it on a card you carry with you. In your smartphone. Or on a memo on your mirror.



## Strengthen your self-image with self-love

Self-love is about what you:

- Do for yourself
- Think about yourself
- Feel about yourself

This helps strengthen your self-esteem:

- Talk kindly to yourself
- Compliment yourself
- Pamper yourself
- Laugh at yourself
- Listen to your body
- Embrace your judgments



You can gain important insights from your judgments.  
Hidden in such a judgment is a need of yourself:

### **Judgment**

She is selfish

He is so stubborn

He's so offensive

### **Need**

Reciprocity, care

Willingness, flexibility

Commitment, respect

If you know your needs, you can live accordingly.



## **Get started on your own?**

Strengthen yourself with online modules  
focused on specific themes



- Anonymous
- Free
- Developed by psychologists
- Based on effective methods

Check your student portal  
or ask your academic advisor

**[www.mirro.nl](http://www.mirro.nl)**