

## How to Stop Being Your Own Worst Critic

By Andrew Leigh

**7 brilliant techniques to stop beating yourself up, embrace your Healthy Self Critic and produce your best creative work again & again.**



Hi – I'm Andrew Leigh, author of *The Creative Instinct*. I hope this free download will make a huge and positive difference to you. You can learn even more about conquering your inner negativity in my new e-book *Beating Your Bad Inner Critic* – a comprehensive guide to blast away the negativity that blocks you from being at your creative best – it's not quite ready for publication, but watch this space.

I'm also a personal development professional and experienced life coach. I'd be happy to talk with you about one-to-one coaching (either for creativity or otherwise), creativity workshops and public speaking. For more information email me [Andrew@thecreativeinstinct.com](mailto:Andrew@thecreativeinstinct.com) with your details and what it is you are interested in. You can also check out my coaching website at [www.pathwayscoaching.co.uk](http://www.pathwayscoaching.co.uk) .

Now read on to stop being your own worst critic and to open the door to satisfying new achievement.

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## How to Stop Being Your Own Worst Critic

Focusing on your own mistakes and weaknesses is a real confidence killer. It has probably stopped more creative people from enjoying their creative potential than any other single factor.

It's a personal creative tragedy that's repeated all over the world – and it has to stop!

In this free Creative Instinct download you will learn:

- The painful costs of Your Own Worst Critic Syndrome
- The joy and power of your Healthy Self Critic
- 7 easy techniques to kick out your Worst Critic and usher in your new healthy attitude to creativity

### Counting the Cost of 'Own Worst Critic' Syndrome

Ever heard yourself say that you are your own worst critic? Sometimes I hear people saying it almost with pride. But being your own worst critic is not a common indicator of a successful and fulfilled creative artist.

Yes – there are successful artists of all kinds who are also their own worst critic – but they tend to be filled with anxiety, self doubt and often, self loathing. They find it impossible to enjoy the quality of their own work, and will

focus on their 'flaws' as proof that they are undeserving of the success they've achieved. Some success!

You could argue that these artists achieved their success because they are so critical of their own work. But when you are your own worst critic, *if* you achieve success (and that's a very big 'if'), you achieve it in spite of your own worst critic tendency – not because of it. It's like having spikes in your shoes – each step forward is accompanied by discomfort and pain.

No surprise then that one effect of Own Worst Critic Syndrome is to fear the very creativity that we love. Some people can give up their creative life altogether.

And almost as sad is the person who feels driven to be creative, has no choice but to be creative, but finds little joy, satisfaction or fulfilment in either the creative process or the outcome.

### **Healthy Self Criticism – The Benefits**

One fear that stops 'worst critics' being kinder to themselves is the idea that they'd be fooling themselves if they believed everything they do is perfect. That's very true. But one regular tactic of your bad inner critic is to use 'polar opposite' arguments to justify their own (also polar) position.

So your worse critic justifies offering a constant stream of negativity by arguing that offering no criticism at all is self deluding and the enemy of

worthwhile achievement. It conveniently ignores the existence of any midway position between the two poles. Yet that mid position is the place of Healthy Self Criticism – the home to your good inner critic.

Healthy self criticism is... well... healthy. But it's also much more than that.

- It encourages a recognition and celebration of your achievements and abilities – but without the dangers of complacency
- It helps you understand your own areas for development in a more non-threatening, matter-of-fact way that encourages growth
- It helps you see flaws in your work from a perspective of overall positivity
- It's about enjoyment, focus and development rather than fear and stasis

### **Moving From 'Worst Critic' to 'Healthy Self Critic'**

Worst critic mode is founded on false assumptions and perceptions that over the years become accepted as fact. Resetting these ways of thinking can be wonderfully freeing. Personally, this kind of resetting is my most effective strategy whenever I feel myself getting stuck. I check my unconscious assumptions, reset them to more powerful and truthful ways of thinking, and find myself able to work with freedom and enjoyment when previously I was grinding to a painful halt.

## Anti-Worst Critic Exercises

You'll find below a number of short exercises (with explanations) aimed at resetting your thinking to more healthy and productive assumptions. The explanations alone will move you some way along the road – but taking a little time to actually think about and complete the exercises will take you further still. Don't just read this – complete each exercise.

### Worst Critic Exercise 1 – Cost/Benefit Analysis

A great way to begin resetting your thinking is by doing a cost/benefit analysis. In fact much of what I've written so far is doing just that. So re-reading specifically to pick out the costs and benefits is step one of this exercise. What makes it really powerful is completing your own personal cost/benefit. It works best if you use as much personal detail as you can.

For instance – one of the costs of worst critic thinking is that you feel bad about yourself – but what does that mean. Here's an example of my own personal response.

**Example – Worst Critic mode - Cost**

<b>Headline cost</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
I feel bad about myself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I get in a bad mood</li> <li>• Lynda (my wife) gets upset to see me like this</li> <li>• I'm bad company</li> <li>• I feel ungenerous and uncharitable</li> <li>• Our cats don't get as many strokes!</li> <li>• I don't feel like talking and chatting with people</li> <li>• My negativity spills into other areas of my life – exercise, music, going out</li> </ul>
I work less effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I end up working longer to catch up</li> <li>• I don't sleep well when I've been unproductive – so I feel even worse the next day and find it harder to be creative</li> <li>• If I'm not working effectively on my creative work, I tend to put other important jobs off too – so there's a double impact</li> <li>• I'm scared to take risks or use my imagination</li> </ul>

Once I got started writing the examples above I had a job stopping. It's only when you think about it in terms of what it really means to you personally that you realise the pervasive negative impact that worst critic thinking has.

Here are some other headline costs to consider:

fitness	diet	income
quality of creative output	quantity of creative output	work
career	self-abuse (drink etc)	self esteem
confidence	likeability	appearance
family relationships	goal achievement	imagination
mental ability		

So now it's your turn. Print off the tables below, or make similar tables for your word processor – and list as much as you can. If you get stuck on the benefits table – just look at the costs – most of them can be reversed.

**Challenge: aim for a minimum of 10 items for each list – but don't stop there. See if you can get 15, then 20 – then maybe even 30 items.**

## Cost/Benefit Analysis Exercise

### Own Worst Critic Mode - Costs

Headline Cost	Meaning

## Cost/Benefit Analysis Exercise

### Healthy Self Critic - Benefits

Headline cost	Meaning

Whenever you feel Worst Critic Mode coming on, remember your list and read through it. It's also a great idea to make a summary list on a small card so that you can carry it with you and refer to it whenever you want. And what's the main benefit of this task? Well, let's talk bottom line – more creative work and better quality too. Can't be bad.

## **Rethinking Mistakes and Risks**

One way that worst critic mode freezes you up is by instilling a terror of mistakes. It does this by imposing damaging false assumptions about the meaning and outcome of mistakes.

Here are just a few common false assumptions. How many does your Worst Critic use?

**Assumption 1:** each mistake is its own little disaster.

**Assumption 2:** each mistake is evidence of your own stupidity and uselessness.

**Assumption 3:** there are successful people out there who never make mistakes.

**Assumption 4:** whilst it's disastrous and shameful for you to make a mistake, it's actually okay for other people – and that includes those successful people above who never make any!

**Assumption 5:** people will not like or respect you if they see that you are not perfect.

**Assumption 6:** hiding your mistakes is the best policy – that way no-one will know that you are not perfect, apart from yourself.

**Assumption 7:** it's often better to do nothing than to make a wrong decision or fall short of your goals – the assumption here is this: **it's not worth the risk.**

### Why Mistakes Are Good!

Okay – so nobody wants to make mistakes and I will reluctantly concede that not even the most well balanced creative person is going to rise each morning joyfully anticipating all the mistakes they're going to make. Having said that, many resourceful and able people regularly choose to do things 'wrong'. They do so in the spirit of exploration, effectively saying: *I know this is the 'wrong' way to do this – but let's see what happens anyway.*

It's all about experimentation and discovery. It's about discovering what works and discovering what doesn't. It's about giving yourself an opportunity to learn something new.

### Learning Opportunities

When you make a genuine mistake you've also gained an opportunity to learn. You may not have looked for it but it's there all the same. But while we'd think it was crazy not to bother learning from the results of experiments, we all too often spurn the opportunity to learn from the results of our mistakes, with the really crazy outcome that we'll go on to make the same mistake again.

I could be harsh and say that's stupid or just plain dumb – but really it's a kind of blindness caused by your own worst critic's horror at making a mistake in the first place. Mistakes do often have negative consequences, in which case the learning is about what led up to the mistake and what you can do differently and better next time. But the relationship between mistakes and experiments can be surprisingly close and in reshaping our thinking it's vital you take that on board. Take for instance these two scenarios:

### **Experiment and Discovery**

An artist takes time out to explore new ways of working. She decides to look around her studio for anything that might give her some new paint effects. After a few false starts that get her nowhere, she picks up a small triangular offcut of wood and finds that dragging and twisting it on wet paint gives an effect she loves.

### **Mistake and Discovery**

An artist uses a newly cleaned brush that she's inadvertently left soaked with turpentine. It makes a mess but, she realises, it's an interesting mess – and one she can use to her advantage in the future. Which she does.

In case you're wondering, both these stories are true and used here with the kind permission of my wife. Note that the reason she could, and did, learn

from her mistake was that she didn't waste her mental energy in own worse critic mode, beating herself up over a spoiled canvas.

### **It Gets Even Better**

There's also a second gigantic difference in outcome between the two modes of thinking – that is, the way that you think about yourself afterwards.

**Own Worse Critic** – you found yet more evidence to show why you are no good. You feel angry and disappointed with yourself – but not, unfortunately, surprised. At least you can moan about your stupidity to your friends.

**Healthy Self Critic** – you made a mistake and it turned out to be a real lucky break. You are delighted with the way things turned out – and feel good about yourself all day. Your smile is infectious.

I am not arguing here that every mistake leads to a fantastic break through – though without being open to the possibility none of them will. What I am saying is this:

- A healthy attitude to mistakes opens you to learning, discovery and an improved self image.
- An unhealthy own-worse-critic attitude closes your mind to learning and instead focuses on making you feel bad about yourself.

If you suffer from Own Worst Critic Syndrome and find yourself terrified of making mistakes then pause, now, and take this moment to begin resetting your thoughts and assumptions.

Remember that you do have a choice in this. Make that choice now.

### **Healthy Self Critic Exercise 1 – Learning from Others**

The power of observation is often underestimated.

Spend the next few days noting the reaction of those around you to mistakes and setbacks. Note the differences between the Healthy Self Critics and the Own Worst Critics.

- Give the people you observe a score between 1 and 10, with 10 being the Healthiest of attitudes and 1 being the worst.
- Write down the differences you perceive
- Ask this powerful question about each person: *what is the outcome of the attitude each person has?*

### **Making Conscious Changes**

#### **Healthy Self Critic Exercise 2: Shaping Your New Healthy Self Critic.**

Using the information and insights you've gained from Healthy Self Critic Exercise 2, choose and write down the actions you would like to incorporate

into your own way of being. Over the next days and weeks read this aspirational list regularly to help assimilate your new and empowering responses.

### **Healthy Self Critic Exercise 3: Forward Visualisation**

In a quiet place, close your eyes, take some slow, deep breaths and visualise the 'future you' reacting positively to his or her mistakes. Run through the mind set you have, and notice and hold the positive feelings you get from your positive responses. Forward visualisation is the same powerful technique used by top athletes before they compete. It works for them and it will work for you, too.

### **Healthy Self Critic Exercise 4: Practise Your New Healthy Attitude to Mistakes**

You may find it easy to start with smaller mistakes and build yourself up. One thing for sure – if you are like everyone else in the world, you'll have plenty of material to practise on.

Remember – look for the learning, look for the opportunities and never badmouth yourself or talk yourself down. So no *I'm so stupid*, or, *I always get this wrong*. Instead be willing to smile at yourself and clearly acknowledge what you've learned and what you'll do differently next time.

### **Healthy Self Critic Exercise 5: Retro-Visualisation**

If, when you make a mistake you do lapse into Own Worst Critic mode and begin to beat yourself - don't then compound it by beating yourself up about beating yourself up!

Instead, simply visualise how you might have handled your response more positively, and note your double learning opportunity – from the original mistake, and from your worst critic response.

### **Exercise 6: Keep a Success Journal**

Focusing on what you've done right is tremendously beneficial, as is reflective learning. A success journal helps you do both. I can't emphasise enough how powerful keeping a positive reflective journal is to our personal development. Just a few minutes a day will have a tremendous impact on building and maintaining your Healthy Self Critic.

## **Time to Take Action**

Okay – so now it's down to you. A few minutes a day is all it takes to encourage your Healthy Self Critic and move you towards enhanced self belief in yourself, your creative output and your ability to succeed.

You will find the mental freedom to experiment, and to learn from and laugh at your mistakes.

In short, you'll produce better creative work and more of it!

Get started now and enjoy your creativity like never before.

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Know someone who might enjoy this free download and **The Creative Instinct**? Then do your good deed for the day and tell them about: [www.thecreativeinstinct.com](http://www.thecreativeinstinct.com) .

Best wishes – Andrew Leigh