

Perfectionism Interview Questions

[*Note: the entire interview, including this explanation will be read orally by interviewers*]

Thank you for participating in our study. The interview has two sections. The first section will ask 4 questions about your thoughts and opinions about perfectionism and perfectionistic people. The next section will ask you more in-depth questions about your life story. Overall, this interview will take about an hour, though some people get through the interview faster or slower than that.

The interview should not be seen as a "therapy session." This interview is for research purposes only, and its sole purpose is the collection of data concerning people's life stories. We are not trying to figure out what is wrong with you. Nor are we trying to help you figure out what is wrong with you. At the end of the interview we will give your resources on mental health services that you can access at your own discretion. Your responses are fully confidential: However, please keep in mind that we may have to share your information with the proper authorities if you talk about abuse or neglect of a child, an adult in need of protection, plans to commit suicide or planning to harm another person. This interview will be recorded. At the end of the interview you will have the chance to decide whether you want your audio recordings to be used for our research purposes or to be deleted.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Perfectionism Question #1

How would you define perfectionism or perfectionistic people?

Perfectionism Question #2

Do you think you are a perfectionistic person? Why or why not?

Perfectionism Question #3

Do you know anyone other than yourself that is a perfectionistic person? Why do you think they are perfectionistic?

Perfectionism Question #4

What are the best things about someone being a perfectionist?

Perfectionism Question #5

What are the worst things about someone being a perfectionist?

Life Narrative Interview

[note: the entire interview, including this explanation will be read orally by interviewers]

This next section of the interview is the largest section. This part is an interview primarily about the story of your life. We are asking you to play the role of storyteller about your own life. People's lives vary tremendously, and people make sense of their own lives in a wide variety of ways. As social scientists, our goal is to collect as many different life stories as we can in order to begin the process of understanding of how people make sense of their own lives. Therefore, we are collecting and analyzing life stories of people and we are looking for significant commonalities and significant differences in those life stories that various people tell us.

In telling us a story about your life so far, you do not need to tell us everything that has ever happened to you. A story is selective. It may focus on a few key events, a few key relationships, a few key themes which stand out in your story. In telling your own story, you should concentrate on material in your own life that you believe to be important in some fundamental way -- information about yourself and your life which says something significant about you and how you have come to be who you are. Your story should tell how you are similar to other people as well as how you are unique.

In order to complete the interview within, say, 60 minutes or so, we would like you to concentrate on a few key events that may stand out in important ways in the story. A key event should be a specific happening, a critical incident, a significant episode in your past set in a particular time and place. It is helpful to think of such an event as being a specific moment in your life story which stands out for some reason. For example, an important conversation you had with your mother in the kitchen in five years ago might qualify as a key event in your life story. These are particular moments set in a particular time and place, complete with particular characters, actions, thoughts, and feelings. A week-long vacation -- be it very happy or very sad or very important in some way -- on the other hand, would not qualify as a key event because it takes place over an extended period of time (Unless, of course, you chose a single, specific scene or event from that week).

I am going to ask you about ten specific life events. For each event, describe in detail what happened, where you were, who was involved, what you did, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. Also, try to convey what impact this key event has had in your life story and what this event says about who you are or were as a person. Please be very specific here.

[participant will be provided with a handout which lists these things for reference during the interview]

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

#1 High Point / Peak Experience

First, we would like you to tell us about a peak experience. A peak experience would be a high point -- perhaps the high point -- of your life story. It would be a moment or episode in which you experienced positive emotions, like joy, excitement, great happiness, inspiration, or even deep inner peace. Today, the episode would stand out in your memory as one of the best, highest, most wonderful scenes or moments that occurred during your life. Please describe in some detail a peak experience, or something like it. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and **what this experience says about who you were or who you are.**

#2 Low Point

Next, we would like you to tell us about a low point. This story is the opposite of a peak experience. Thinking back over your life, try to remember a specific experience in which you felt negative emotions, such as despair, disillusionment, fear, guilt, etc. You should consider this experience to represent one of the "low points" of your life. Even though this memory is unpleasant, we would still appreciate an attempt on your part to be as honest and detailed as you can be. Please remember to be specific. What happened? When? Who was involved? What did you do? What were you thinking and feeling? What impact has the event had on you? **What does the event say about who you are or who you were?**

#3 Turning Point

In looking back on one's life, it is often possible to identify certain key "turning points" -- episodes through which a person undergoes a large or important change. Turning points can occur in many different areas of a person's life -- in relationships with other people, in work and school, in outside interests, etc. I am especially interested in a turning point in your understanding of yourself. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point. If you feel that your life story contains no turning points, then describe a particular episode in your life that comes closer than any other to qualifying as a turning point. *[Note: If subject repeats an earlier event (e.g., peak experience, low point) ask him or her to choose another one. Each of the ten critical events in this section should be independent. We want ten separate events. This kind of redundancy is inevitable.]*

#4 Mistake Story

Next, we would like you to consider a particular episode in your life in which you feel that you made a mistake. That is, a time in your life when you feel you made the wrong choice. The mistake could be large or small, but should be something you consider to be an important event in your life story. The mistake could turn out to be good, bad, or neutral, but you should explain in your story why you think it was a mistake. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and **what this experience says about who you were or who you are.**

#5 Positive Childhood Memory

The next scene is an early memory **from your childhood** that stands out as especially *positive* in some way. This would be a very positive, happy memory from your early years. Please describe this good memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or about your life?

#6 Negative Childhood Memory

The next scene is another early memory from your childhood, this time one that stands out as especially *negative* in some way. This would be a very negative, unhappy memory from your early years, perhaps entailing sadness, fear, or some other very negative emotional experience. Please describe this bad memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

#7 Drinking Story

Please tell me about a memorable time in your life that involved alcohol. That is, an event in your life when drinking alcohol played a major role. It can be an event when you were drinking, when someone else was drinking, or a time when you chose to avoid alcohol altogether. Please give as much detail as possible. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and what this experience says about who you were or who you are.

8 Relationship defining moment: Parents

I will now ask you to tell me three additional stories about particular individuals in your life. This time, we are looking for "relationship-defining scenes." That is, we are looking for a scene, event or memory you had with particular individuals that illustrates what your relationship is all about. Please tell us about the first scene that comes to mind for each individual. Also, the story can be positive or negative, so long as you feel it adequately describes the nature of the relationship.

Okay, so giving as much detail as possible, please tell me about a relationship-defining memory or event that you have regarding your **one or both of your parents**. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, approximately how long ago it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and what this experience says about who you were or who you are. *[If participants are estranged from their parents (e.g., they died early in their life), they can choose someone that serves as a parent figure in their life]*

9 Relationship defining moment: Same-Sex Friend

Giving as much detail as possible, please tell me about a relationship-defining memory or event that you have regarding a **same-sex friend**. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, approximately how long ago it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were

thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and what this experience says about who you were or who you are.

10 Relationship defining moment: Other Important Person

Giving as much detail as possible, please tell me about a relationship-defining memory or event that you have regarding **any other important person that you haven't discussed so far**. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, approximately how long ago it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and what this experience says about who you were or who you are.

[Interviewer should make sure that the subject addresses all of these questions, especially ones about impact and what the experience says about the person. Do not interrupt the description of the event. Rather ask for extra detail, if necessary, after the subject has finished initial description of the event.]

#11 Overall Life Theme

Looking back over your entire life story with all its events, scenes, and challenges, do you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? If so, what is the major theme in your life story? Please explain.

Conclusion of Interview

“Okay, we’re almost at the end of the interview now. Is there anything else you would like to add?” *[Wait for a response, in case they have something to say. In practice, most do not.]*

“Okay, that’s great. The interview is done.”