

# Self Awareness

An African proverb says, “When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside can do you no harm.”

Self-awareness is one of the most important skills for success. How you behave and respond to external situations is governed by internal mental processes. Self-awareness uncovers any destructive thought patterns and unhealthy habits. This leads to better decision making and behavioural responses.

## Here Are 12 Exercises For Greater Self-Awareness

### 1. The Three Why's

Before acting on a decision, ask yourself “Why?” Follow up your response with another “Why?” And then a third. If you can find three good reasons to pursue something, you'll have clarity and be more confident in your actions.

Being self-aware means knowing your motives and determining whether they're reasonable.

### 2. Expand Your Emotional Vocabulary

The philosopher Wittgenstein said, “The limits of my language means the limits of my world.”

Emotions create powerful physical and behavioural responses that are more complex than “happy” or “sad.” Putting your feelings into words has a therapeutic effect on your brain; if you're unable to articulate how you feel, that can create stress. Create a list of “feeling words” to help with labelling your emotions. Increase your emotional vocabulary with one new word each day.

### 3. Practice Saying ‘No’ To Yourself

The ability to say “no” to yourself to put off short-term gratification for the long-term gain is an important life-skill. Like a muscle, it is strengthened with exercise. The more you practice saying “no” to small daily challenges, the better you can withstand major temptations.

There are plenty of daily temptations – social media, junk food and gossiping. Make a goal of saying “no” to five different temptations each day.

### 4. Break Visceral Reactions

A person without self-awareness runs on auto-pilot and responds with knee-jerk reactions. Self-awareness allows you to assess situations objectively and rationally, without acting on biases and stereotypes.

Take a deep breath before you act, especially when a situation triggers anger or frustration. This gives you time to re-assess whether your response will be the best one.



## 5. Be Accountable To Your Flaws

Nobody is perfect. Being aware of your flaws, but failing to accept accountability, is leaving the job half-done. We're often critical of others, while ignorant of our own flaws. Self-awareness helps turn the mirror on ourselves and prevents hypocritical behaviour.

Iteration and self-improvement only happen once you recognize a flaw. Create a habit of acknowledging your mistakes, rather than making excuses.

## 6. Monitor Your Self-Talk

There is non-stop commentary in our heads that is not always helpful. A little bit of negative self-talk can spiral into stress and depression.

Pay attention to the way you respond to your successes and failures — do you pass off your achievements as luck and crucify yourself after failures? Positive and negative feedback-loops will form in your mind based off how you respond to successes and failures. Being tough on yourself needs to be balanced with self-compassion. Celebrate your wins, forgive your losses.



## 7. Improve Your Body Language Awareness

Watching yourself on video can be a cringeworthy experience, but awareness of your body language, posture, and mannerisms improves your confidence. Slouching, or taking a “low-power-pose” increases cortisol and feeds low self-esteem, while standing tall or taking a “high-power-pose” stimulates testosterone and improves your performance. Using hand gestures helps with articulating your thoughts and affects how people respond to you.

Record a speech or presentation and evaluate your posture and hand gestures. Watch videos of skilled speakers and adopt their mannerisms to improve your own.

## 8. Play “Devil’s Advocate”

Taking an opposing view forces you to question your assumptions. Your “default” beliefs and world views are not always reasonable; it's healthy to “argue against yourself” and see how your views hold up and this will give your brain a good workout. Processing challenging information stimulates new neural connections.

## 9. Know Your Personality Type

Knowing your personality type allows you to maximize your strengths and manage your weaknesses. Understanding your “strengths” and “talents” can be the difference between a good choice, and a great choice. (Strengths are skills and knowledge that can be acquired, while talents are innate).

Start with understanding where you fall on the introvert/extrovert spectrum; know your Myers-Briggs type; and then conduct a personal SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats).

## 10. Practice Self-Evaluation And Reflection

Keep a journal and track your progress. How would you rate your current level of self-awareness out of ten? Think about how often you say regretful things; repeat bad habits; make absent-minded decisions; and have erratic thoughts.

Set regular goals, break big goals down into smaller milestones. Ask yourself at the end of each day, “What did I do well today?” and, “How can I improve on this tomorrow?”

## 11. Ask For Constructive Feedback, Regularly

We all have blind spots in our thinking patterns and behaviours. Asking for regular constructive feedback cuts through any self-deceit or one-dimensional views you might hold. But only ask people you would consider as a mentor — those who understand you; whom you respect; and will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear.

## 12. Meditation

Meditation is a foundational practice for improving self-awareness. To focus solely on your breathing is to focus on a key internal process. You'll become aware of how your mind wanders and get better at snapping out of distractions.

For beginners, start with ten-minute sessions. Find a quiet place to sit, breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Count your breaths silently, pulling your mind back when it wanders.