

# Imposter Syndrome

## Pre-Reading

### A. Warm-Up

To what extent do you agree with these statements?  
Discuss your ideas with a partner.

1. Most of my success has come from luck.
2. I am more comfortable with failure than success.
3. I seek perfection in everything I do.
4. Other people think I am good at what I do.



### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.  
Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. incompetent     | a) a person who pretends to be someone or something they are not           |
| ___ 2. expose          | b) something that happens or takes place                                   |
| ___ 3. imposter        | c) not having the necessary skills to do a job well                        |
| ___ 4. self-doubt      | d) to refuse to admit something  |
| ___ 5. occurrence      | e) a goal or task achieved successfully                                    |
| ___ 6. exaggerate      | f) to stop thinking about a past experience                                |
| ___ 7. deny            | g) a feeling of uncertainty about one's skills and abilities               |
| ___ 8. procrastination | h) to consider something to be caused by something else                    |
| ___ 9. accomplishment  | i) the act of delaying an important task                                   |
| ___ 10. attribute      | j) to reveal something that is usually hidden                              |
| ___ 11. criticism      | k) a comment that expresses something is wrong or bad                      |
| ___ 12. let go         | l) to make something seem bigger, better, worse, etc., than it actually is |

## Reading

### IMPOSTER SYNDROME

*Examining extreme self-doubt*

1. Do you ever doubt your own abilities? Do you sometimes feel **incompetent** in your job despite being skilled, experienced, and highly qualified? Do you ever fear that someone will **expose** your inadequacies?
2. It's common to have these feelings from time to time. One study suggests that up to 70% of all employees have felt like an **imposter** in their job at some point. In fact, some of the world's most successful people have admitted to having feelings of **self-doubt**. These include Starbucks executive Howard Schultz, former Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, actor Tom Hanks, and Serena Williams—one of the greatest tennis players of all time.
3. Feelings of extreme self-doubt are sometimes referred to as imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is not a medical condition although it is a real psychological **occurrence**. It may affect people professionally and academically. It may also have an impact on their personal relationships. According to psychotherapist Pauline Clance, people suffering from imposter syndrome display two or more of the following traits:
  - the need to feel special or valued
  - the need for perfectionism
  - the fear of failure
  - the tendency to **exaggerate** weaknesses and mistakes
  - the habit of **denying** personal success
  - the state of being stuck in the “imposter cycle”
4. Clance believes that being stuck in the imposter cycle is the most common trait of imposter syndrome. The cycle starts when a person is assigned a task at school or work. That person responds with anxiety to the task, which usually leads to one of two actions: **procrastination** or overpreparation. Once the task is completed, there is a brief feeling of **accomplishment**, which is often accompanied with positive feedback from colleagues. However, the person tends to reject any praise, **attributing** success either to hard work or to luck. When assigned a new task, they begin with the same level of self-doubt and repeat the cycle.
5. Imposter syndrome may arise as a result of experiences during childhood, such as pressure from parents to succeed or **criticism** from teachers. It may also be caused by societal expectations or it may be a result of immediate circumstances, such as a new job, new responsibilities, and so on.
6. How can someone cope with such extreme self-doubt and begin to break the imposter cycle? Most advice on overcoming imposter syndrome highlights the importance of changing one's mindset by celebrating successes, accepting failures and learning from them, sharing feelings, and **letting go** of past negative experiences. It is important to separate emotions from reality—a person might feel like an imposter, but other people may see things very differently.

*“I have written 11 books, but each time I think, ‘Uh-oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody, and they’re going to find me out.’”*

—Maya Angelou, Nobel Laureate

## Comprehension

Decide if these statements are True (T) or False (F)  
or if the answer is Not Given (NG) in the text.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Most successful people experience self-doubt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. "Imposter syndrome" is a catchall term for any degree of self-doubt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. People with imposter syndrome are usually diagnosed by a doctor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Imposter syndrome can cause difficulties for people in their work, studies, and home life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. You must be stuck in the imposter cycle in order to be classified as having imposter syndrome.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. People in the imposter cycle do feel a sense of achievement at times.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. It is suggested that being proud of your achievements can help break the imposter cycle.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. If you feel like an imposter, other people will tend to agree.

## Vocabulary Review

### A. Word Forms

Complete the chart with either the verb or noun form of each word.  
Use a dictionary to help you.

#	Verb	Noun
1		occurrence
2		procrastination
3	exaggerate	
4	deny	
5		criticism
6		accomplishment

### B. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from the chart in Part A.  
You may need to change the verb tense.

- It takes me ages to get started on my class assignments. I \_\_\_\_\_ so much.  
I play computer games or watch Netflix. Sometimes I even dust and vacuum—anything to avoid hard work!
- Come on, don't \_\_\_\_\_! Yes, he's a good player, but he is not the next Cristiano Ronaldo!
- It's easy to \_\_\_\_\_ other people's work, but could you do better yourself?
- I'd say my biggest \_\_\_\_\_ to date is completing my master's degree. It was challenging, but I'm proud of my achievement.
- The politician \_\_\_\_\_ breaking the rules during lockdown, but the newspapers still published the story.
- Having extreme feelings of self-doubt is a common \_\_\_\_\_ for Alex. He doesn't believe he's smart enough to do his job well.

## Vocabulary Review cont.

### C. Complete the Dialogue

Complete the dialogue with words on page 1.

You may need to change the word form.

A: What are you reading?

B: Nothing really. I'm just scrolling through the news headlines.

A: Anything interesting?

B: The usual.

A: Like what?

B: Police have \_\_\_\_\_ the crimes of a local politician.  
1.

Apparently, he has been taking bribes from criminal gangs for the last decade.

A: Oh really? What else?

B: A news reporter has lost her job because she said the wrong thing on social media.

A: What did she say?

B: She called the prime minister \_\_\_\_\_, saying there were at least 20 members of the  
2.  
government who could do a better job. Her boss got really angry because he supports the prime minister.

A: She should have been more careful.



## Vocabulary Review cont.

### C. Complete the Dialogue cont.

B: Then there's some entertainment news. Johnny Willis won the Academy Award for Best Actor last night.

A: Oh, I love Johnny Willis!

B: He \_\_\_\_\_ his success to his mother, who worked 14 hours a day when he was a child so she  
3. could afford to send him to acting school.

A: Ah, that's a great story. He seems like such a nice guy.

B Here's an interesting one. Claudia Verdant opens up about her struggles with \_\_\_\_\_ .  
4. She admits that she has been living with \_\_\_\_\_ syndrome for years.  
5.

A: Wow! You wouldn't think something like that happens to celebrities.

B: It happens to us all.

A: Anyway, what else does it say about Johnny Willis?

### D. Ask & Answer

With a partner, take turns asking and answering the following questions.

1. Do you **procrastinate**? If so, what are your go-to activities to avoid starting a challenging task?
2. Have you ever **exaggerated** your ability to do something? Why? What happened?
3. What's the most amazing natural **occurrence** you've ever seen?
4. How do you deal with **criticism**?
5. What's your biggest **accomplishment** to date?

## Discussion

1. Have you ever shown signs of imposter syndrome?  
Have you noticed these signs in others?
2. What would you say to someone who showed traits of imposter syndrome?
3. Do you notice characteristics of self-doubt in certain groups of people in society? If so, which groups?
4. How might forms of modern communication contribute to our feelings of self-doubt and anxiety?
5. What could companies do to support their employees to celebrate success and embrace failure?

## Optional Activity

Do you have imposter syndrome? Go online and find out. Conduct a search with the keywords “imposter syndrome test” and take one of the many psychological evaluations that will help you determine if you suffer from this phenomenon.

## Listening

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the recording.

### IMPOSTER SYNDROME

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- It's common to have these feelings from time to time. One study suggests that up to 70% of all employees have felt like an \_\_\_\_\_ in their job at some point. In fact, some of the world's most successful people have admitted to having feelings of \_\_\_\_\_. These include Starbucks executive Howard Schultz, former Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, actor Tom Hanks, and Serena Williams—one of the greatest tennis players of all time.
- Feelings of extreme self-doubt are sometimes referred to as imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is not a medical condition although it is a real psychological \_\_\_\_\_. It may affect people professionally and academically. It may also have an impact on their personal relationships. According to psychotherapist Pauline Clance, people suffering from imposter syndrome display two or more of the following traits:
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  - the state of being stuck in the "imposter cycle"
- Clance believes that being stuck in the imposter cycle is the most common trait of imposter syndrome. The cycle starts when a person is assigned a task at school or work. That person responds with anxiety to the task, which usually leads to one of two actions: \_\_\_\_\_ or overpreparation. Once the task is completed, there is a brief feeling of \_\_\_\_\_, which is often accompanied with positive feedback from colleagues. However, the person tends to reject any praise, attributing success either to hard work or to luck. When assigned a new task, they begin with the same level of self-doubt and repeat the cycle.
- Imposter syndrome may arise as a result of experiences during childhood, such as pressure from parents to succeed or \_\_\_\_\_ from teachers. It may also be caused by societal expectations or it may be a result of immediate circumstances, such as a new job, new responsibilities, and so on.
- How can someone cope with such extreme self-doubt and begin to break the imposter cycle? Most advice on overcoming imposter syndrome highlights the importance of changing one's mindset by celebrating successes, accepting failures and learning from them, sharing feelings, and \_\_\_\_\_ of past negative experiences. It is important to separate emotions from reality—a person might feel like an imposter, but other people may see things very differently.