



Navigating Perfectionism and Coaching Your Inner Talk

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



THE NATIONAL FLUTE ASSOCIATION
Inspiring Flutists, Enriching Lives

Healthy
Conservatoires

Lecturer and Tertiary Tutor: Flute Performance, Music Psychology, Aural Musicianship, Movement Analysis

Recently submitted PhD researcher (flute performance and music psychology – embodied cognition).

NFA Performance Healthcare Committee member

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Perfectionism



Perfectionism

A **multidimensional personality trait** characterised by:

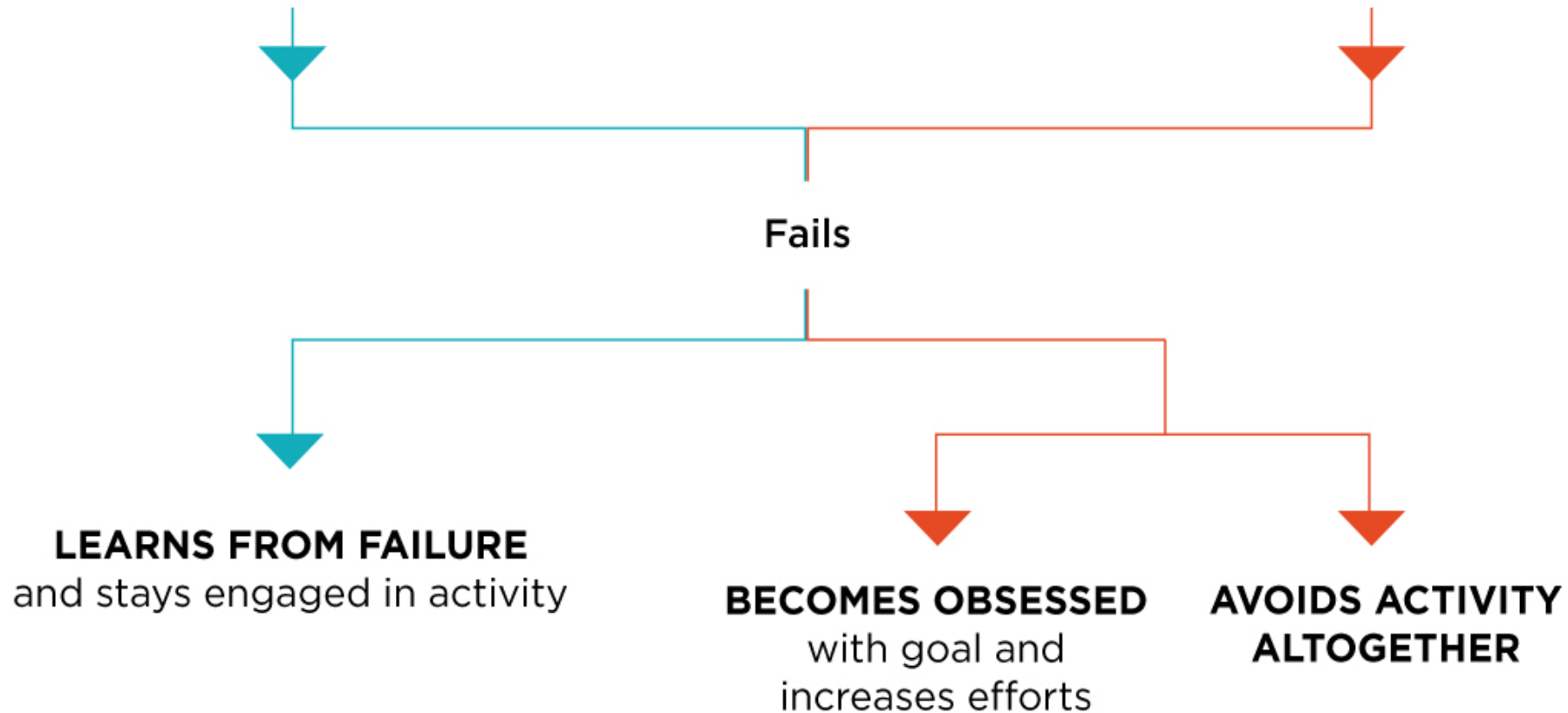
- Striving for flawlessness
 - Setting high performance standards
 - Critically self-evaluating
 - Concerned with evaluation
-
- Consists of both intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects
-
- Shaped by sociocultural factors

Healthy Perfectionist

Maladaptive Perfectionist

CHALLENGES THEMSELVES
by setting high goals and standards

Sets extremely high and
UNREALISTIC GOALS



Understanding perfectionism



Unknown how it fully develops across lifespan



Children can also experience perfectionism



Indication that perfectionism declines with age

Relationship to Music Performance Anxiety



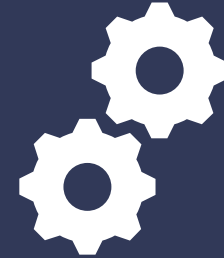
Mental:

- Negative thoughts
- Critical self-talk
- Worrying
- Ruminating
- Fuzzy thinking
- Memory slips



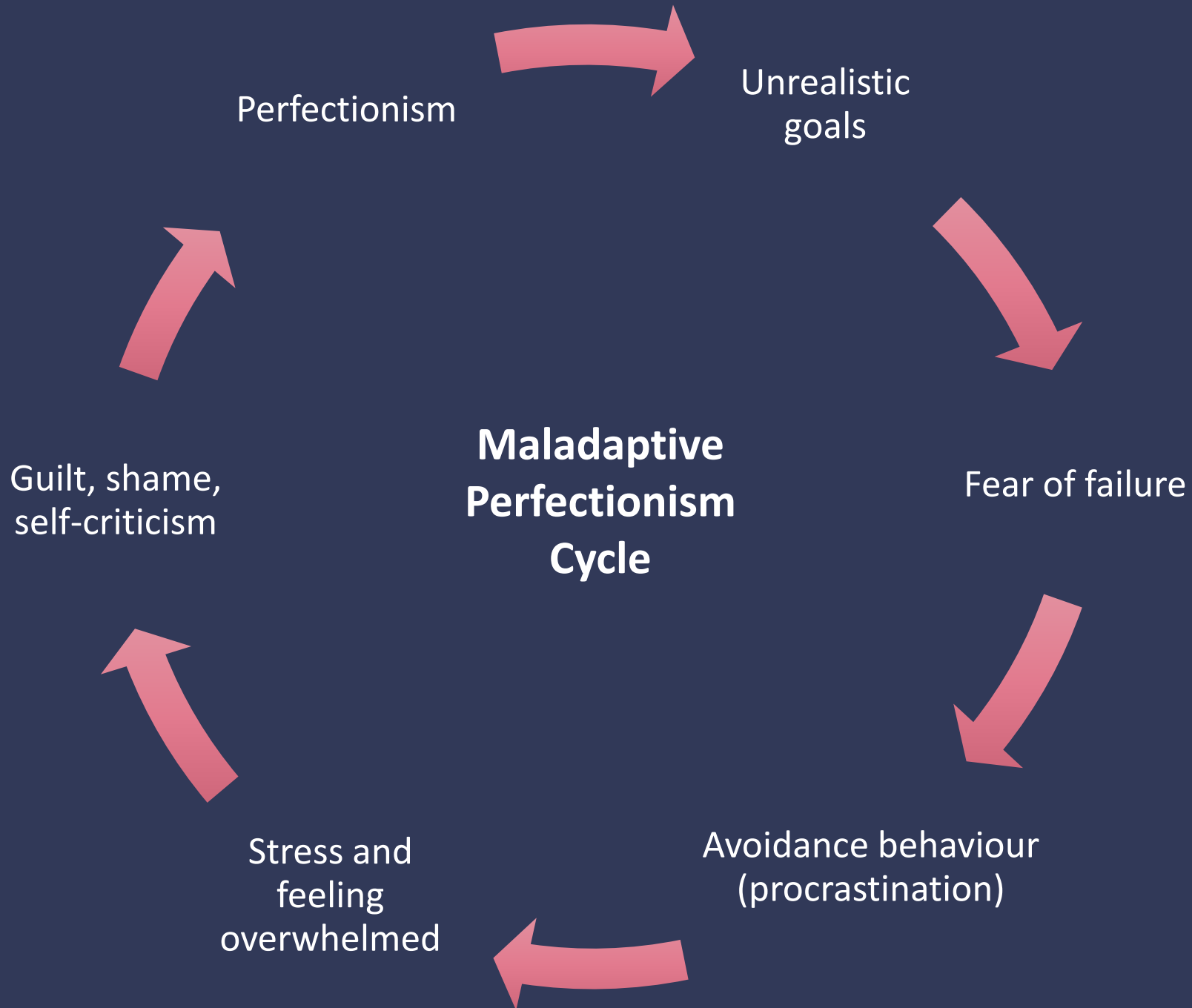
Physiological:

- Racing pulse
- Sweating
- Dry mouth
- Shaking
- Butterflies
- Digestive issues



Behavioural:

- Avoidance
- Pacing
- Over-practicing
- Shaking
- Nervous talking
- Feeling frozen



**I should
always be able
to play this
perfectly**

**I can't start
unless I do it
perfectly**

**People always
expect me to be
perfect**

**It's a disaster if
I make a
mistake**

Maladaptive perfectionism might sound like...

**I only allow
myself to do
things perfectly**

**I have to
be the best**

**All that
matters is
not making a
mistake**

**No one can
see or hear my
work unless
it's perfect**

Activity 1:

Reflect on your experience with
perfectionism.

Have you had any of those thoughts?
What are some other thoughts you have experienced?
How often do you think like this?
In which musical contexts do you have these thoughts
or tendencies?



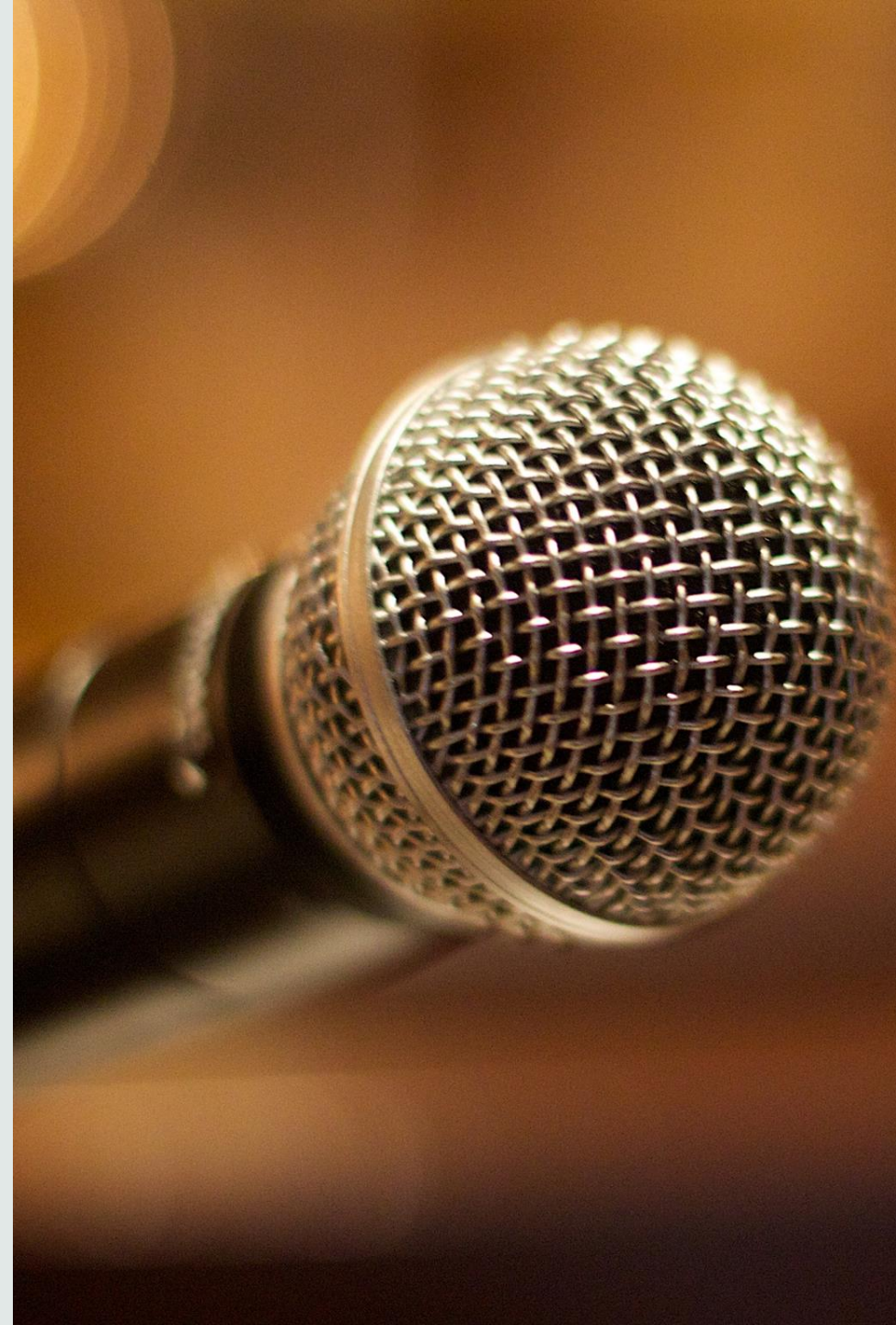
Do you talk to yourself via your inner voice?

- Almost everyone does in some form or another (e.g., deaf people who use sign language have their own form of inner language)
- It's a basic feature of the mind
- Examples: repeating a phone number you've just been given, verbally coaching yourself through a performance
- Inner talk occurs at a rate equivalent to 4000 words per minute out loud (*it's a fast talker!!*)

Types of Chatter



- Rambling narration
- Dialogue with self
 - Rumination
 - Worrying
- Back and forth
 - Fixation



Activity 2:

Stressful Automatic Thought Score

Listen to the following 10 Stressful Automatic Thoughts and score one point for each thought type you've experienced.

For each SAT, give it a percentage out of 100 for how often you experience it – or how prominent it is in your thought patterns.



Stressful Automatic Thoughts

1. Filtering
2. Overgeneralisation
3. Catastrophising
4. All-or-nothing Thinking
5. Labelling
6. Mind Reading
7. Fortune Telling
8. Discounting the Positive
9. Personalisation
10. Shoulds and Oughts

Why do we have an inner voice?

- Connected to our working (short-term) memory; e.g., repeating that phone number
- Phonological loop: inner ear (retaining words) and an inner voice (repeating words)
- Verbal development aligns with emotional development (e.g., toddlers speaking to self out loud to learn to control self = neural and emotional growth)
 - As children, the words of our primary caretakers give us instructions which we mimic (at first, out loud and then we learn to internalise those words)
 - Later on, we develop and use our own words which direct our behaviour
- Evaluating our progress towards a goal

Self-talk and stress

- When we experience distress, engaging in introspection often does significantly more harm than good (undermines work performance, interferes with good decision making, negatively influences relationships, enhances risks of becoming physically or mentally unwell)
- Chatter consists of the cyclical negative thoughts and emotions that turn introspection into potentially negative outcomes

How can we steer our thoughts back on track?

Harnessing your inner voice

- Mental habits
- Language/expression
- Behaviours
- Daily routines
- People we interact with
- Our environment

It is NOT to stop talking to yourself, but to talk more effectively

Activity 3:

If comfortable, briefly write about a negative performance experience. Include any details such as:

- What you were thinking
- Your physical reaction
- Your self-perception
- Your perception of others





Strategies for stopping Thought Spirals



WRITE EXPRESSIVELY

A long, straight asphalt road with a dashed center line and solid white edge lines stretches from the bottom center towards the horizon. The road is flanked by dark, scrubby vegetation. In the background, there are several layers of hazy, blue-tinted mountains. Two prominent, pointed peaks are visible in the distance. The sky is a pale, overcast blue with a soft light source, possibly the sun, creating a slight glow in the upper center.

DISTANCED SELF-TALK

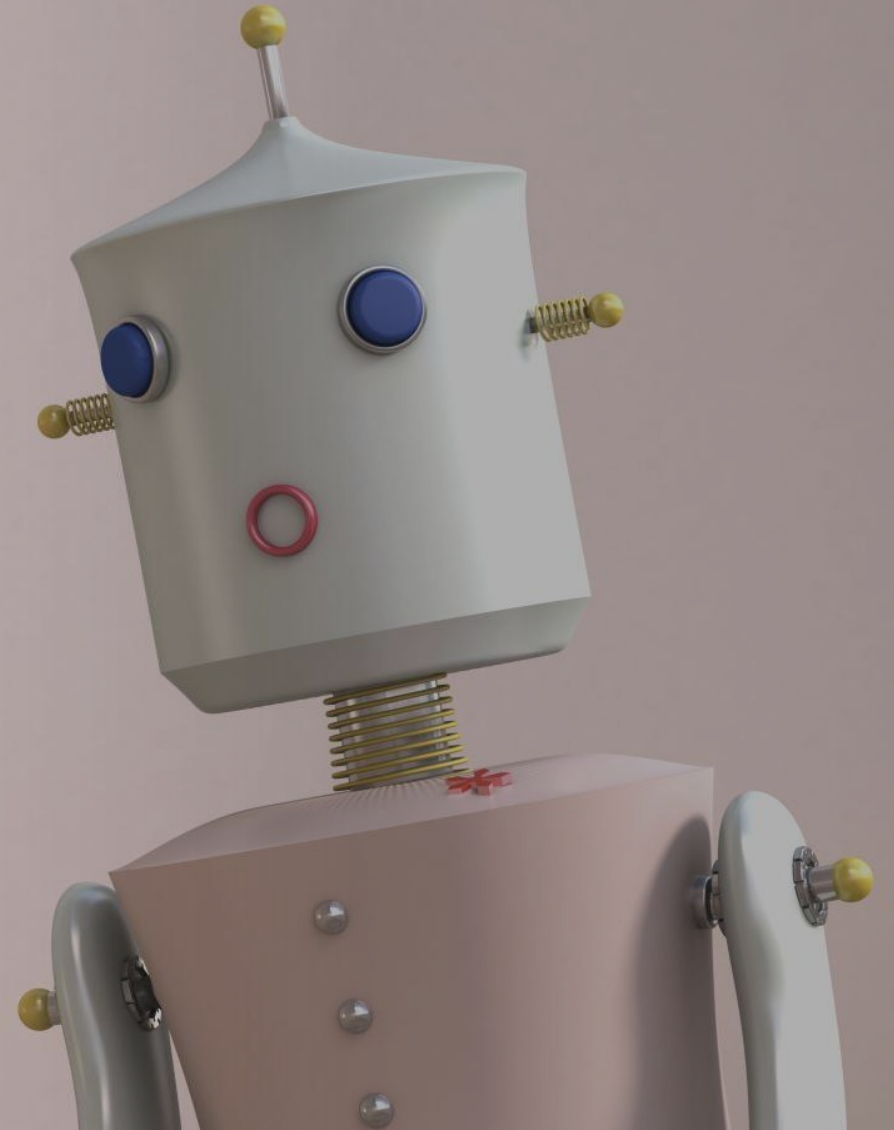
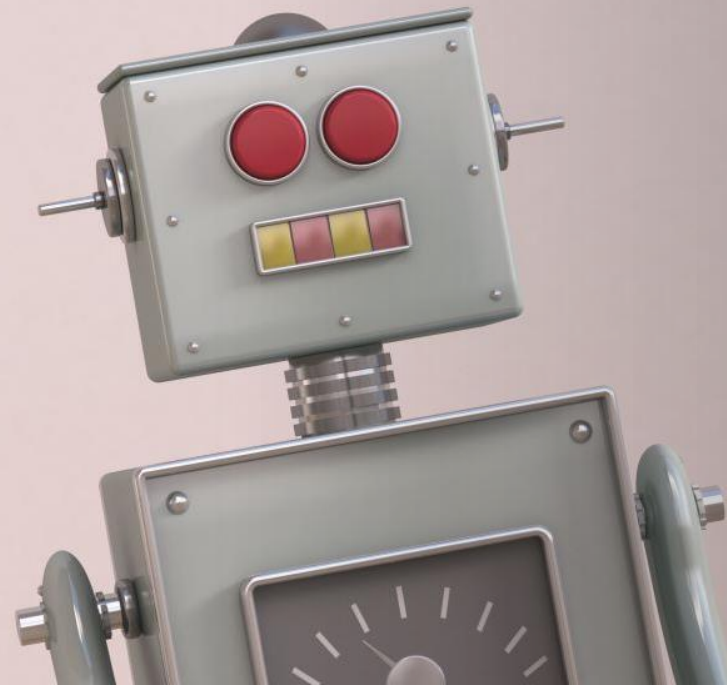
A long, straight asphalt road with a dashed center line and solid white edge lines stretches from the bottom center towards the horizon. The road is flanked by dark, scrubby vegetation. In the background, there are several layers of mountain ranges, with the most prominent peaks being sharp and pointed. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a misty or overcast day. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Third person: Simone

Second person: You

First person: Me

IMAGINE ADVISING YOUR FRIEND



**BE A
NEUTRAL
OBSERVER**



Activity 4:

If comfortable, re-write your negative performance experience using one of the four strategies:

1. Narrator
2. Third-person language
3. Advising a friend
4. Neutral observer






**BROADEN
YOUR
PERSPECTIVE**

MENTAL TIME TRAVEL





**Reframe your experience
as a challenge
(not a threat)**

**REINTERPRET
YOUR BODILY
RESPONSE**





REMEMBER WE ARE NOT ALONE

A close-up photograph of several people's hands stacked together in a circle, symbolizing teamwork and support. The hands are of various skin tones and are wearing different clothing items, including a white and orange striped sweater, a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, a white ribbed sweater, and a dark blue and green striped sweater. One hand is wearing a gold ring, and another is wearing a watch with a white face and a dark blue and green striped strap. The background is blurred, showing an indoor setting with large windows and greenery outside.

BUILD A 'BOARD OF ADVISERS'



**CONTROL OR ORDER
YOUR ENVIRONMENT**



**SEEK AWE-INSPIRING
IMAGES OR
EXPERIENCES**

Activity 5:

Write a 'script' to replace some negative thoughts you (might) have before/during performing.

How can you encourage feeling excited?

Remember that excitement and anxiety have similar physiological responses!

How would you like to feel after the performance?

Recall a time when you did have a positive experience.



INNER TALK:



HOW TO HELP OTHERS



**ADDRESS
EMOTIONAL &
COGNITIVE
NEEDS**



PROVIDE 'INVISIBLE' SUPPORT



**PRETEND TO
BE A
SUPERHERO**

**FINAL WORD ON
CHANGING CHATTER**



**DON'T
BELIEVE
EVERY
THING
YOU THINK**

**TRAIN
YOUR
BRAIN**



Connect with me!

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SCAN ME



SMM | SIMONE MAURER MUSIC

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Headspace: <https://headspace.org.au/> or call 1800 650 890

Kids Helpline: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/> or call 1800 551 800

Lifeline: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/> or call 13 11 14

MensLine Australia: <https://mensline.org.au/> or call 1300 789 978

QLife: <https://qlife.org.au/> or call 1800 184 527