

A FREE GUIDE FOR MUSICIANS WITH DAY JOBS

Overcoming *Perfectionism*

Why your best music is stuck at “almost done,” and one small move toward finishing it.

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The folder of “almost done” and dreams on hold

It's 10pm – I just finished loading the dishwasher after finally winning the battle of putting my kids to bed. I'm exhausted, staring at a folder of unfinished songs and feeling like a failure. I use my kids as an excuse for why I haven't released any music in the last seven years, but I know that's just a lie I'm telling myself to avoid the reality. I'm scared. What if no one likes my music? What if I'm not actually good enough? Why can't I just finish one f*cking song already?

I tell myself it isn't the right time, that the songs need more time to be done, that I don't know enough yet to make it sound perfect. More lies.

Something deep in my soul knows things need to change. I make a commitment, and let go of perfection.

You're reading this because, like me, you have an unshakeable need to make music. It may have been buried underneath years of toiling away at an investment firm just to make ends meet, but the dozens of unfinished songs are evidence it's still there.

But, like the master baker that refuses to sell a cake because they don't think it's good enough, your “nearly done” songs are a gift you're selfishly withholding from the world.

Imagine: what if “Bohemian Rhapsody” was never released because Freddie Mercury didn't think it was perfect enough...

This guide will help you finally finish the music you've been holding on to. You'll see where you get stuck, what to do about it, and how to keep the momentum going.

What perfectionism actually is

Perfectionism is a mix of **rigid standards** and **low self-esteem**: the belief that *“I must be perfect, and nothing but perfect.”*

Notice the word is *rigid*, not *high*. Wanting excellent music is healthy. Perfectionism is when the standard can't bend and your self-worth rides on meeting it.

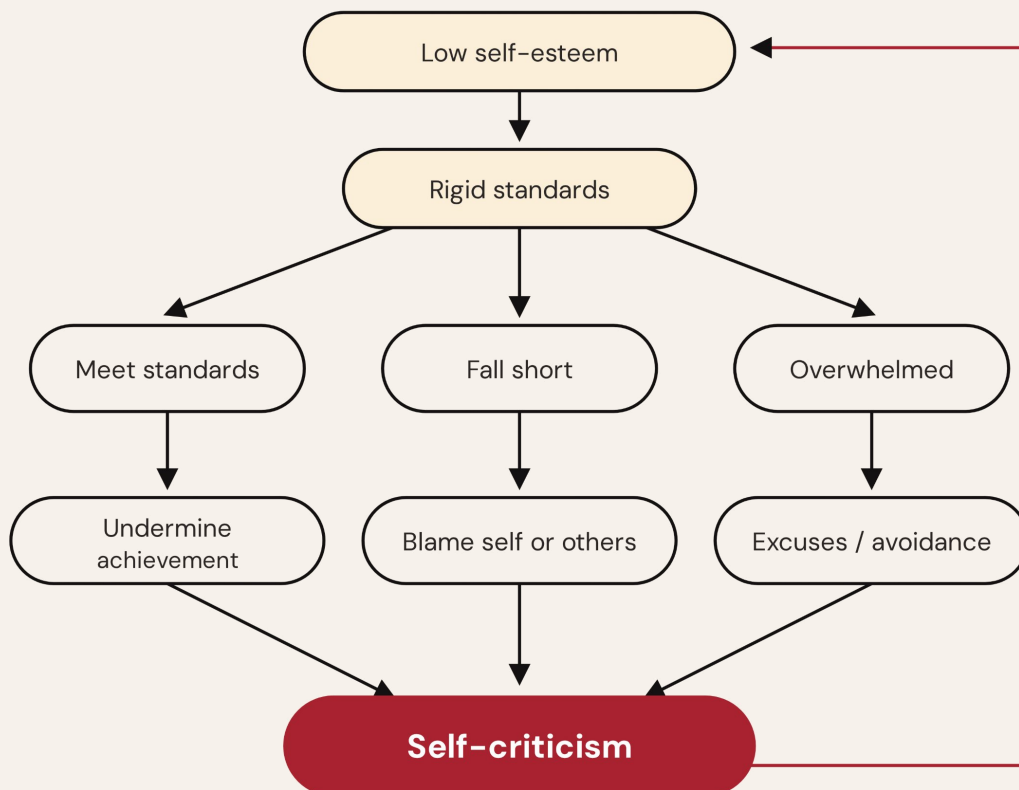
For most musicians, it sounds like: **“I’ll play the show when I’m ready.”** Or **“I’ll finish the song when I have time.”** But “I’m not ready” or “I don’t have the time” is often just an excuse that lets us avoid taking a risk on making our dreams or performing for a sold out crowd or releasing a critically acclaimed album a reality.

WHY IT MATTERS

Chasing the “perfect” song is how songs stay unfinished. The fear of getting it wrong feeds procrastination, avoidance, and burnout – and years can pass with the song never seeing the light of day. Research agrees: the fear-driven side of perfectionism is linked to burnout and extra hours worked, not better performance. (Hill & Curran, 2016; Bellam & Curran, 2025)

See your pathway

It starts with insecurity and rigid standards. From there, you meet the standard, fall short of it, or get overwhelmed by it. Each path ends in self-criticism, which feeds the insecurity.



Three branches, three moves

BRANCH 1 · YOU MEET THE STANDARD

“I did it, but anyone could have done that...”

- You release a song, but downplay what you were able to accomplish.
- You play your first show, but think it's not that big of a deal.
- You share a demo with a friend, but make excuses before pressing play.

TRY THIS

Celebrate the smallest accomplishment like you just won a Grammy or got invited to play at Coachella. Then, start again. This builds your confidence and momentum.

BRANCH 2 · YOU FALL SHORT

“Of course I couldn't do it...”

- You release a song, it gets ignored, and you tell yourself you're no good at writing songs.
- You perform a show, but only your mom and elderly neighbor show up. You wish you didn't even try.
- You finish a demo, but know it doesn't sound as good as Prince, so you trash it.

TRY THIS

Remember that creativity is a process, one that improves with trial and error. Ask what went well, what you learned, and what you'll do differently next time.

BRANCH 3 · YOU'RE OVERWHELMED

“It's too much right now - I'll get to it when I have the time...”

- You want to create a full concept album, but have no idea where to start, so you put it off.
- You dream of performing with a full band, but you don't know any musicians and auditioning seems too daunting.
- You write the lyrics, but you can't play guitar well enough to actually perform the song, so it joins the folder of the unfinished.

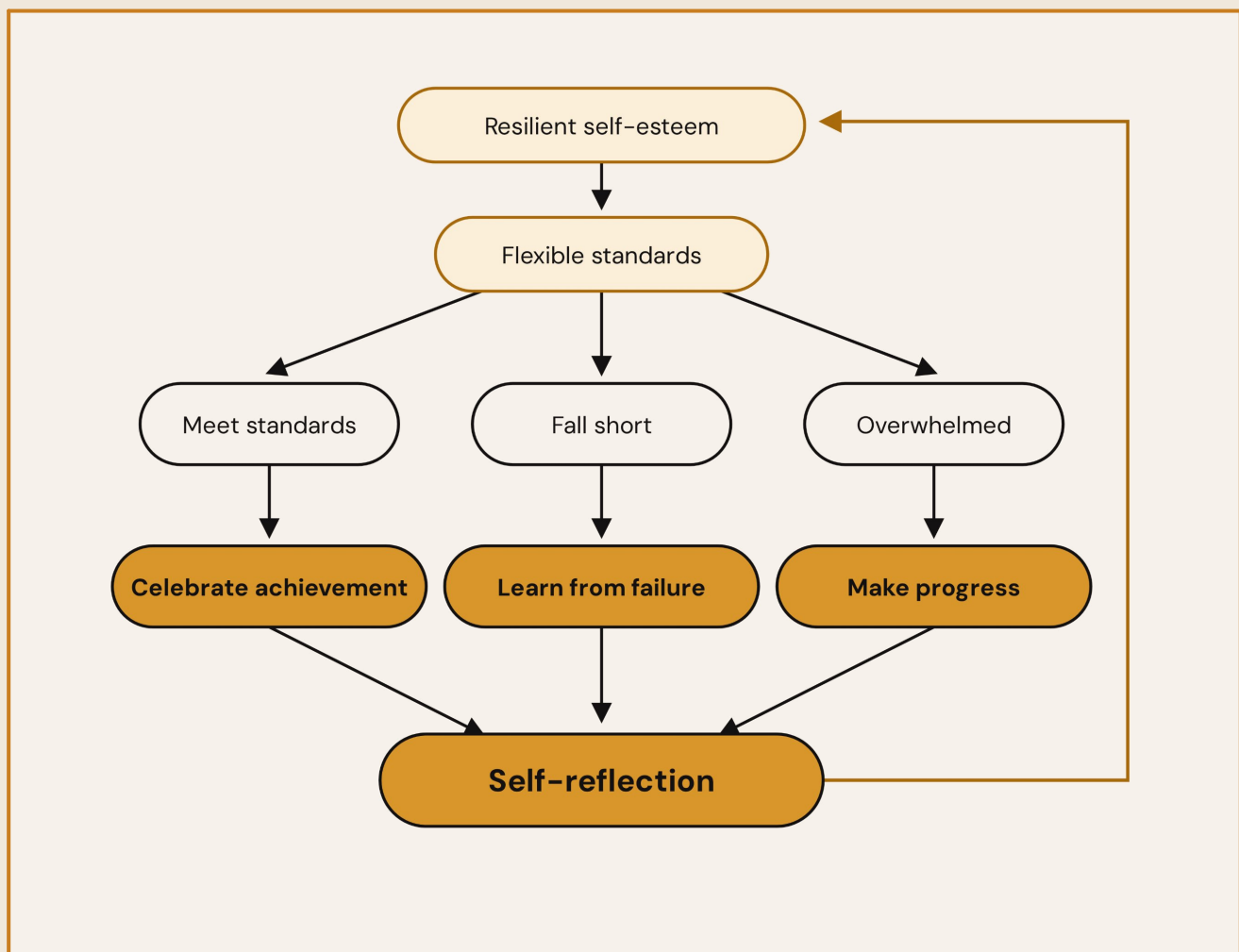
TRY THIS

Goals are often ignored when they are too ambiguous or unwieldy. Refine your goal into chunks or milestones – i.e. small actionable tasks. Identify the next smallest step you can take and do it as soon as possible.

The alternate route

The same three situations can lead somewhere better. Flexible standards – ones that still aim high but can bend to your current situation – protect your self-esteem. Whether you hit the standard, miss it, or get overwhelmed, one small mindset shift turns deflation and stagnation into progress.

Reflecting on what went well, what needs work, and what you'll do differently builds up your self-esteem, giving you the confidence to strive for bigger and better goals. The momentum builds and the virtuous cycle continues.



Strive for excellence within the constraints of reality.

What to remember

THE PATTERN

Rigid standards plus low self-esteem keep songs stuck at “almost done” and dreams left for “someday.”

YOUR BRANCH

Meet the standard? **Celebrate it.**
Fall short? **Learn from it.**
Overwhelmed? **Make one small move.**

THE LOOP TO STRIVE FOR

Flexible standards, small moves and reflection build resilient self-esteem that continues to grow with every success AND failure.

YOUR NEXT STEP

My branch:

My move this week:

I'll do it by:

My self-reflection:

Knowledge alone doesn't finish the song.
Practice, patience and consistent progress does.

KEEP GOING

Finishing is a practice.

Practice it with me.

Join the list and each week you'll get:

- **3 songwriting prompts** for a short challenge you can finish
- **A quick, actionable tip** for working through perfectionism and creative blocks

Join the MuseLetter

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