

# Are You an Impostor? Take the Quiz

*By Valerie Young*



Have you ever felt like, "I'm in over my head and they're going to find out"?

Are you crushed by even the slightest constructive criticism of your writing, seeing it as proof that you'll never be good enough?

When you succeed at something, do you think, "Fooled 'em that time ... but the next time I may not be so lucky"?

If you answered yes to any of these questions on that short quiz, chances are you might just suffer from impostor syndrome.

Psychologists first coined the term in the 1970s and say it centers around family messages and expectations around achievement.

Of course, situational factors can also be at play. For instance, working alone makes you more susceptible because there's no one to bounce your work off of. If you belong to a group for whom there are stereotypes based on competence, you're also more vulnerable.

But let me back up just a minute. People who feel like impostors are nothing of the sort. In fact, there's plenty of evidence of their abilities. Things like good grades, positive performance reviews, promotions, awards. It's just that they chalk them up to external factors like luck, timing, personality, connections, even computer error.

The kind of work you do matters too. Actors, artists, musicians, writers, and other creative types are especially prone to impostor feelings. It makes sense when you consider others are constantly judging your work.

Regardless of where imposter syndrome comes from, whether family or work-related, all those who suffer from it share one thing in common: Our response to failure. No one likes to fail ... or make a mistake ... or ask for help ... or not know the answer ... or struggle to master a new skill or subject. But when any of these things happen to "impostors," they experience shame.

That's hard for the imposter to shake off. Left unchecked, impostor syndrome shapes our behaviors. We create coping mechanisms, such as:

- Flying under the radar. If you never put your work or ideas out there, if you never ask questions or try to grow your business, then no one will find out you're a fraud.
- Workaholism. You stay longer and study harder than everyone else — not out of the requirements of the endeavor, but out of the belief that you have to work harder because you're not as "smart" as others.
- Self-sabotage. Maybe you show up to an important meeting late or unprepared. Or you jump from one job or business idea to another. Or just as you're about to score a big win, you engage in some form of alcohol or substance abuse.
- Procrastination. If you wait until the last minute to write and submit your work and it gets rejected, you have a built-in excuse because you know it didn't reflect your best effort. But here's the rub — if you land the gig, you feel undeserving.
- Never starting or finishing — the book, the painting, the business plan, the degree, the course ... After all, if something is in perpetual process, no one can judge you.

All of these strategies work but the bad news is — there's a cost to your protection. The price could come in the form of stress, or losing out on valuable learning experiences or connections. And in almost all cases, there is a financial cost.

So how do you deal with imposter syndrome so it doesn't overtake your life? Talking about your feelings is an important step. But be careful because you can spend years sharing your insecurities with others and never feel any different. That's because you can't share your way out of impostor feelings.

In addition to talking about your feelings, there are three actionable steps you can take:

1.

*Normalize impostor feelings.*

This is where I have to break it to you: You're not special. Researchers estimate up to 70 percent of people have experienced these nagging feelings of fraudulence — nurses, engineers, social workers, executives, even Academy-Award-winning actors and mega-best-selling authors.

What you want is to feel confident 24/7. But that's not how confidence works. You're going to have moments of supreme confidence and times when you're scared silly. When you realize that fear and self-doubt are normal, you can stop trying to eliminate impostor feelings, and instead focus on talking yourself down faster.

2.

*Reframe.*

People who don't feel like impostors are no more intelligent or capable than the rest of us.

The only difference between them and us is they think different thoughts. That's it. Which is actually really good news — because it means all we have to do is learn to think like non-impostors.

Start by becoming consciously aware of your own impostor self-talk. Then pause and "reframe" that internal conversation the way a non-impostor would. It's the difference between responding to a huge new assignment with, "Oh my God, I have no idea what I'm doing" and instead thinking, "Wow, I'm really going to learn a lot."

As part of that learning, you may receive some constructive criticism. When you feel like an impostor, even a single negative comment among five positive ones can cause you to quit. But non-impostors actively seek out more skilled teachers or coaches because they know honest feedback is the only way to constantly get better. So, the next time someone compliments your writing, practice saying, "Thank you. What's one thing I could have done even better?"

Finally, you need to reframe failure. You can feel disappointed, but not ashamed. The only time you should feel shame is if you didn't really try. Allow yourself to be in the midst of a learning curve by reminding yourself that, "The more I write, the better I'll get."

Bottom line: If you want to stop feeling like an impostor, you have to stop thinking like an impostor.

3.

*Keep going regardless of how you feel.*

Feeling like an impostor sucks. So, naturally, what you want is to FEEL differently. But it doesn't work that way. In fact, feelings are the last to change. That's why you can't wait until you feel confident to take action.

Rather, you have to change your thoughts by 1) normalizing and 2) reframing. Then you have to do the thing that scares you. Over time, you'll start to believe the new thoughts and your feelings will slowly catch up.

# The Bottom Line

Launching a new career (or life!) is scary. It's even harder if you've spent your life putting others' needs before your own. All the more reason you need to know that *everyone loses when you play small*.

So think differently. Instead of the proverbial question "What would you do if money were no object?" try asking, "What sort of difference could I make if fear were not a factor?" There are people out there right this very minute who want and deserve to benefit from your full range of knowledge, abilities, and skills.

It's time you share it with them.

Editorial Note: [Dr. Valerie Young](#) is an internationally recognized expert on impostor syndrome. She's author of the award-winning book, *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women: Why Capable People Suffer from the Impostor Syndrome and How to Thrive in Spite of It* (Crown), now available in five languages.

She's spoken to over 80,000 people at such diverse organizations such as Boeing, P&G, Apple, Intel, Chrysler, IBM, Ernst & Young, Facebook, Society of Women Engineers, Harvard, Stanford, and Princeton.

And her career-related tips have appeared around the world on BBC radio and in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Psychology Today*, *Science*, *O magazine, Inc.*, *Woman's Day*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Glamour* (UK), *Vogue*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and dozens of other popular and business publications around the world.

Have you felt like an imposter before? Do you feel you're better equipped to handle it the next time those feelings surface? Comment below and let us know!

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## 5 Responses to "Are You an Impostor? Take the Quiz"

THANK YOU, Rebecca, for sending this to my email box today. I've been struggling with this exact problem (with the exception of the alcohol/substance abuse self-sabotage) for months. I had a 'difficult' client over the summer that knocked me on my tush in terms of confidence. I'm just now feeling confident again, but I realized the other day that my writing

business isn't growing financially even though I'm good about charging what the work + my skill are worth because - wait for it - I spend hours and hours overdelivering on every project. I'm not afraid to charge what I charge, but I'm apparently afraid to charge that AND stop the project at the end of the contract's scope. This post/email is exactly what I needed to hear! Many thanks!

*Guest (Deb Mitchell) – over a year ago*

I never knew there was a name for this or it even existed. This syndrome has plagued me since grade school. If there was any chance I ever had to succeed, I would find a way to screw it up. I am terrified of success. My creative IQ is genius, but I never feel like my stuff is good enough, so I do not submit it.

I do not feel like I know why I am really here at AWAI. I have no path, but I do have skills. I am going to have to take baby steps and recognize when I am trying to run.

*G56 – over a year ago*

I recently experienced this while doing a new thing (for me). Because I had heard of this phenomenon, it helped me to push on and not worry about being "found out." But I think I would like to read the book you gave a link for. Thanks!

*KathyG – over a year ago*

So I'm just another writer? Okay :) Thank you for reminding about reframing. It's fun isn't it when one voice in there says 'just reframe it' and the other voice says, 'you can't do that. It was your thought and you have to stick to it.' my main challenge is sticking to it. I work on my blog and then the novel and then email class and then... jeez. Is that part of the imposter stuff?

*Guest (David Wright) – over a year ago*

This is SO me! I recently got my first "paying" writing job and am shocked at how long it takes me to write just a 250-word blog post! I read and re-read the specs - apparently, I did a great job the first time 'round but with about 5 little corrections, I felt like it was awful!

This is a great article and very helpful. At least when you can recognize the fear it is easier to cope with it.

*Deirdre – over a year ago*

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