

BUREAU OF STUDY COUNSEL  
CENTER FOR ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

5 Linden Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138 USA



tel: 617-495-2581 fax: 617-495-7680  
web: <http://bsc.harvard.edu>

Comparing the pursuit of  
EXCELLENCE  
with the pursuit of  
PERFECTION

by M. Suzanne Renna, Ed.D.

**One who pursues perfectionism...**

- ... tries to do *everything* perfectly the first time around (no rough drafts).
- ... has the illusion that time is elastic.
- ... is afraid of making mistakes.
- ... fears that if something is missed, *all* is lost.
- ... feels anxious; feels like a failure when unattainable goals are not met; has a stressed, rigid style.
- ... sacrifices care of self; goes without food or sleep; falls into binge behaviors (all-or-nothing thinking).

**One who pursues excellence...**

- ... acknowledges limitations of time, energy, desire.
- ... makes wise choices.
- ... sees mistakes as opportunities for learning.
- ... is not afraid to take healthy risks.
- ... feels curious, playful, wise, resourceful; takes things in stride.
- ... takes care of body needs and listens to one's feelings.