

In the final lesson of the challenge we'll discuss why ultimately you should write your own definition of minimalism.

First and foremost, congratulations on making it this far. You've actually committed to a full year (52 weeks, 365 days) of minimalism and you should be proud of yourself.

As the challenge comes to a close I want to leave you with some closing thoughts to empower you after the course.

Weekly Lesson

The formal (in the Oxford dictionary) definition of minimalism reveals an aesthetic principle but over time the word and concept have evolved to mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people!

Here are a few highlights from the past 200 years:

1800-1850

A transcendentalist philosophy takes hold in America and is popularized by the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

They held the idealistic view that insight and enlightenment can be gained through solitude and simplicity, such as illustrated in the book [Walden](#).

1920-1930

The modern style that the word minimalism is most associated with was heavily influenced by the Bauhaus School's ideal of balancing beauty with utility in product design.

As I reported in a [recent review](#) of the Bauhaus Era, teachers and students of the school offered an alternative to uninspiring manufactured products and reimagined the role art could play in society.

By injecting creativity and thoughtfulness into the production of otherwise cheap and ubiquitous items, the Bauhaus school inspired the concept of elevated design for everyday life.

1960-1970

The word minimalism itself gains popularity amongst certain groups of [young artists in](#)

[the 60s](#) who resisted the stifling conventions of fine art (such as my favorite abstract painter Agnes Martin). Minimalism started being used as a colloquial term in writing, painting, architecture, and other aesthetic, design, and creative fields.

Moreover, in the 70s Dieter Rams introduced his principles of good design and ever since has been praised as one of the most influential figures in the pared back, user-friendly product design trend that's so commonly called minimalist design.

1980-2000

The slow food movement was initiated after the opening of a [McDonald's was protested](#) in Rome. It then inspired similar subcultures in other categories like sustainable fashion and travel.

Supporters of "slowness" resist the modern idea that the fast acquisition and accumulation of more things or experiences is somehow better. They believe quality is preferred over quantity and adjusting our lives to a more deliberate pace will help us get the most out of it.

2000 - PRESENT

Blogging became mainstream and advocates of simple living, good design, and the various slow movements started using the medium as a way to share their ideas. Suddenly minimalism became the de facto term used across all of these communities.

Asceticism is ages old but within our generation blogging sparked a heightened interest in applying "less is more" as a lifestyle philosophy. Over the past decade a flood of minimalist gurus turned a philosophy into a fad with 100-item or less challenges, 30-day no shopping contests, 10-things to throw away guides, and so on.

People started writing scripts for applying minimalism to different areas of life. Though well-meaning, these rigid rules have had adverse outcomes.

Weekly Challenge

At this point if someone tells you they are a minimalist you can't assume you know what they mean. And even if their definition happens to be similar to yours, their interpretation may still be miles away from your thinking.

A now ubiquitous term has led to confusion and conflict that overshadows its positive connotation. A quick search on "minimalism" in Reddit will land you into some pretty heated forums where the root of the debate is nothing more than semantic misunderstanding.

So how do you navigate all the external noise, tension, and hype around this word to establish a perspective that's true to you?

FORGET THEIR RULES

It's easy to pitch minimalism as a one-size-fits-all philosophy but it's not.

Don't be so quick to adopt the rules you've picked up from here and there. First understand that your less vs. more equilibrium can only be found with a personal assessment of what makes you happy.

One way to do this is to go through a simple [soul-searching exercise](#). In the absence of having a purpose for life it's easy to get distracted and to run after a bunch of stuff that we think will make us happy, only to be disappointed when it doesn't.

I've found that happiness starts with a clear vision for life and the alignment of our actions against that vision.

WRITE YOUR OWN

The reason we so easily apply other people's rules to our own lives is because we're seeking a shortcut, instead of putting effort into thinking about who we are and defining the life we want to live.

Ultimately those shortcuts will lead to more clutter and confusion because you are conforming instead of creating a life you truly desire. Once you can articulate what makes you happy, you can write your own set of rules to better align your life with those things.

CREATE YOUR MOTTO

For me it's all about differentiating real happiness with suffering in disguise.

I have a vision for life and know what makes me happy but I get in trouble when I'm too extreme and start to blur the line between helpful and harmful — for instance this can be extreme consumption just as much as it can be extreme abstinence.

So I have a motto that's useful in making judgment calls on balance: *Do what you want to do so long as you do no harm*. If an idea, thing, activity, or relationship causes me (or someone else) more bad than good then it's probably not worth having or engaging in.

You too can create a motto to simplify decision-making by considering the areas that tend to threaten your life vision and sense of happiness.

DON'T REBUKE OTHERS

Once you do establish a clear definition for yourself don't berate other people for having a different perspective. It is an utter waste of your own time and it probably won't change their mind.

When you troll the internet leaving negative comments on other people's thought pieces because they differ from your own you are expending energy on behavior that's likely to have zero impact on their way of thinking.

If you try and discredit someone else's work because it contradicts your own at most you'll harm your own reputation while instilling curiosity in the very person you are hating on.

Healthy debate is great but don't demean the spirit of the concept with futile criticism and pessimism.

Conclusion

There are so many different schools of thought that claim minimalism as their mission that it can be mind boggling to keep track of them all.

Ultimately we need to be realistic and empathetic to our own unique set of needs and desires. Write your own definition of minimalist living and remember it is only a tool (not a doctrine) that can help guide your lifestyle choices.