

# It's better than you think: The 80/120 rule

**“Focus on the present moment. And don't worry. Even in the bad scenario you will probably be better off than you think.”**



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### No, it isn't the 80/20 rule

It's no mistake – it's supposed to be 80/120. It's a deliberate play on the 80/20 rule, so please, don't confuse it. Today I take a different angle. I want to show how the Stoic principles translate into patterns of daily life.

The 80/20 rule, otherwise known as the Pareto rule, is quite well known. It states that in most endeavours and experiences 80% of the final output comes from 20% of input. And vice versa, 80% of the input yields merely 20% of the final tally. If you raise money for a cause it's likely that 20% of your donors provide 80% of your budget (hence another name for Pareto, “the law of the vital few”). When you toil at daily tasks it's often that nasty 20% of them take up 80% of your time and so on.

### What is the 80/120 rule?

What about the 80/120 rule then? Here is how I coined the term. As a reformed Stoic and an author, I frequently appear on TV, on the radio, and in other media. When my first book came out and I sat in front of the camera for the first time, it was quite stressful I admit. In order to learn the ropes I ran some prep sessions with friends who knew the dos and don'ts of the media world. Over time I became fairly experienced myself and I paid it forward by giving advice to others.

Somewhere on that learning curve I realized that the most important point in all this is quite simple. Here it is. Don't worry, you are the only one who sees the difference between it went great and it went bad. Sounds weird – let me explain more.

### Judgments: mine vs. others'

I've been there many times myself. Once the lights go off I feel like I did a terrible job, that I came off like an idiot, didn't say anything smart and so on. But when I ask around people still tell me that it was all okay. Flattery? No. Both sides are right and it is precisely because of the 80/120 rule. Unless one comes to the TV studio drunk, naked or after three sleepless nights, 80% of the overall quality of their performance is what they get for simply being there.

In other words, being sober, clothed and relatively slept-out is a guarantee that you perform at least at 80% of your capability. This is the baseline. This is what we get when we feel that we blew it, “had a bad day” and so on. If we feel that we did “a good job,” then we probably run at 100% capability. If we feel we did outstanding, we most likely hit 120% of what was possible for us.

### The difference is smaller than we think

We feel the difference between “outstanding performance” and “screwing

up” like it's heaven and hell. In reality the difference comes down to 80% vs. 120%. The gap is much narrower than we tend to think. Moreover, there is no need to sweat much. After all, even what we see as a disastrous performance is still an 80 % in the eyes of others! Needless to say all this relates not only to TV appearances but also to exams, job interviews, and so many other occasions. Basically, it refers to life itself.

### Where does Stoicism come in?

Where is Stoicism in all this? Everywhere! Think of it this way. The mentioned 80% of the quality of our performance, the part that we get “for free”, is not actually for free (of course). It's the reward for all our hitherto preparation, the learning and training we put in before. This is something that is deep in us and that no one can take from us, not even a trick question or a bad performance on a given day.

Making the difference between 80% and 120% is up to us, but the mentioned 80% is outside of our control already. It depends on the past, i.e., on the preparation made before. And the past is out of control already (remember the dichotomy of control?). If we did it, we did it. If we didn't, well, we didn't. The camera is going on in 3... 2... 1..., and there is nothing else that we can do about the past. Hence, focus on the present moment. And don't worry. Even in the bad scenario you will probably be better off than you think.