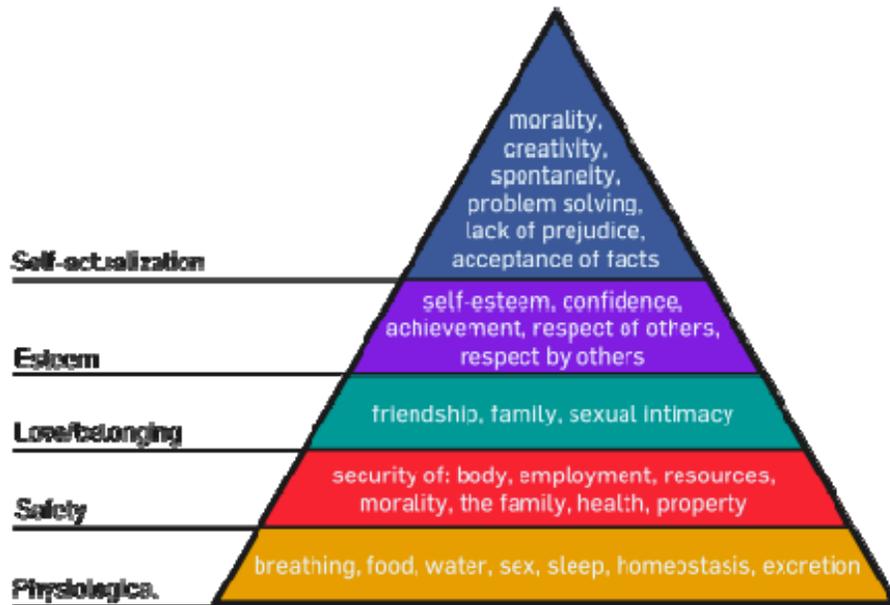


The Five Levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

By [Kendra Van Wagner](#), About.com



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

J. Finkelstein

Psychologist Abraham Maslow first introduced his concept of a hierarchy of needs in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation"¹ and his subsequent book, *Motivation and Personality*.² This hierarchy suggests that people are motivated to fulfill basic needs before moving on to other needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is most often displayed as a pyramid, with lowest levels of the pyramid made up of the most basic needs and more complex needs are at the top of the pyramid. Needs at the bottom of the pyramid are basic physical requirements including the need for food, water, sleep and warmth. Once these lower-level needs have been met, people can move on to the next level of needs, which are for safety and security.

As people progress up the pyramid, needs become increasingly psychological and social. Soon, the need for love, friendship and intimacy become important. Further up the pyramid, the need for personal esteem and feelings of accomplishment become important. Like [Carl Rogers](#), Maslow emphasized the importance of self-actualization, which is a process of growing and developing as a person to achieve individual potential.

Types of Needs

Maslow believed that these needs are similar to instincts and play a major role in motivating behavior. Physiological, security, social, and esteem needs are **deficiency needs** (also known as *D-needs*), meaning that these needs arise due to deprivation. Satisfying these lower-level needs is important in order to avoid unpleasant feelings or consequences.

Maslow terms the highest-level of the pyramid a **growth need** (also known as *being needs* or *B-needs*). Growth needs do not stem from a lack of something, but rather from a desire to grow as a person.

Five Levels of the Hierarchy of Needs

There are five different levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

- 1. Physiological Needs**
These include the most basic needs that are vital to survival, including the need for water, air, food, and sleep. Maslow believed that these needs are the most basic and instinctive needs in the hierarchy because all needs become secondary until these physiological needs are met.
- 2. Security Needs**
These include needs for safety and security. Security needs are important for survival, but they are not as demanding as the physiological needs. Examples of security needs include a desire for steady employment, health insurance, safe neighborhoods, and shelter from the environment.
- 3. Social Needs**
These include needs for belonging, love, and affection. Maslow considered these needs to be less basic than physiological and security needs. Relationships such as friendships, romantic attachments and families help fulfill this need for companionship and acceptance, as does involvement in social, community or religious groups.
- 4. Esteem Needs**
After the first three needs have been satisfied, esteem needs become increasingly important. These include the need for things that reflect on self-esteem, personal worth, social recognition, and accomplishment.
- 5. Self-actualizing Needs**
This is the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Self-actualizing people are self-aware, concerned with personal growth, less concerned with the opinions of others, and interested in fulfilling their potential.

What Is Self-Actualization?

What exactly is self-actualization? Located at the peak of Maslow's hierarchy, he described this high-level need in the following way:

"What a man *can* be, he *must* be. This need we may call self-actualization...It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming."¹

While Maslow's theory is generally portrayed as a fairly rigid hierarchy, Maslow noted that the order in which these needs are fulfilled does not always follow this order.¹ For example, he notes that for some individuals, the need for self-esteem is more important than the need for love. For others, the need for creative fulfillment may supersede even the most basic needs.

Characteristics of Self-Actualized People

In addition to describing what is meant by self-actualization in his theory, Maslow also identified some of the key characteristics of self-actualized people:

- **Acceptance and Realism:** Self-actualized people have realistic perceptions of themselves, others and the world around them.
- **Problem-centering:** Self-actualized individuals are concerned with solving problems outside of themselves, including helping others and finding solutions to problems in the external world. These people are often motivated by a sense of personal responsibility and ethics.
- **Spontaneity:** Self-actualized people are spontaneous in their internal thoughts and outward behavior. While they can conform to rules and social expectations, they also tend to be open and unconventional.
- **Autonomy and Solitude:** Another characteristics of self-actualized people is the need for independence and privacy. While they enjoy the company of others, these individuals need time to focus on developing their own individual potential.
- **Continued Freshness of Appreciation:** Self-actualized people tend to view the world with a continual sense of appreciation, wonder and awe. Even simple experiences continue to be a source of inspiration and pleasure.
- **Peak Experiences:** Individuals who are self-actualized often have what Maslow termed *peak experiences*, or moments of intense joy, wonder, awe and ecstasy. After these experiences, people feel inspired, strengthened, renewed or transformed.³

Criticisms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

While some research showed some support for Maslow's theories, most research has not been able to substantiate the idea of a needs hierarchy. Wahba and Bridwell reported that there was little evidence for Maslow's ranking of these needs and even less evidence that these needs are in a hierarchical order.⁴

Other criticisms of Maslow's theory note that his definition of self-actualization is difficult to test scientifically. His research on self-actualization was also based on a very limited sample of individuals, including people he knew as well as biographies of famous individuals that Maslow believed to be self-actualized, such as Albert Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt. Regardless of these criticisms, Maslow's hierarchy of needs represents part of an important shift in psychology. Rather than focusing on abnormal behavior and development, Maslow's humanistic psychology was focused on the development of healthy individuals.

References:

¹ Maslow, A. H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation, *Psychological Review* 50, 370-96.

² Maslow, A.H. (1943). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper.

³ Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and personality (2nd ed.)*. New York: Harper & Row.

⁴ Wahba, M.A. & Bridwell, L.G. (1976). Maslow reconsidered: A review of research on the need hierarchy theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 15, 212-240