

## Quality of Thinking - Spotting Thinking Errors Exercise

Summary extracted from 'Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Dummies' by Rob Willson and Rhena Branch.

We know that the thoughts, attitudes and beliefs you hold have a big effect on the way you interpret the world and how you feel. So, if you're feeling excessively bad – the chances are that you're thinking badly – or, at least, in an unhelpful way.

Thinking errors are slips in thinking that get in the way of you making accurate assessments of your experiences. Thinking errors lead you to get the wrong end of the stick, jump to conclusions, and assume the worst. Have a look at a list of *thinking errors* below – see which ones you identify with most and then review to the potential remedies you can practice to help you to step back and take another look at the way you're thinking to get back on track.

	Description	How frequently do you find yourself slipping into this thinking mode? 0 = never 5 = frequently	Thinking Error Remedies
Catastrophising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking a relatively minor negative event and imagining all sorts of disasters</li> <li>• For instance – you stumble over your words at the beginning of a presentation and conclude that everyone finds it amusing and thinks you have lost your edge. You imagine that everyone was talking about it at the break.</li> <li>• Leads to you misinterpreting a social faux pas as a social disaster, a late arrival as a car accident or a minor disagreement as total rejection.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Seeking alternative explanations:</i> What would your best friend say about the situation? What other reasons can you find?</li> <li>• <i>Weigh up the evidence:</i> What are the actual facts of the situation. Remember <i>feelings</i> aren't <i>facts</i>. Look for the evidence that contradicts your assumption(s).</li> </ul>

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">All-or-Nothing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extreme thinking that can lead to extreme emotions and behaviours. People either love you or hate you. Somethings either perfect or a disaster.</li> <li>• For instance – you are enrolled on a Professional Qualification programme and you fail one module. All-or-nothing thinking makes you decide that the whole endeavour is pointless.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Be realistic:</i> see the bigger picture around the situation. Will this event mean anything in 3 months, 6 months, 12 months' time? You can't go through life without mistakes – remind yourself of your goal, forgive yourself the 'slip' and get back on trap.</li> <li>• <i>Develop 'both-and' reasoning skills:</i> Mentally allow two seeming opposites to exist together. You can <i>both</i> succeed at X and be challenged/fail at Z and Y.</li> </ul>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Fortune Telling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often our worry about a future event is far greater than the reality of the experience.</li> <li>• We try to predict future events – and our predictions are often negative</li> <li>• For instance – you have an idea that you want to pitch to your boss. You predict that if you pitch it, you will be anxious and won't be able to convince her about your idea. Anyway she is bound to turn it down as she is a hard person to persuade.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Test out your predictions:</i> Think back to times when you have worried before the 'event' ... how many of your predictions have turned out to be right?</li> <li>• <i>Be prepared to take risks:</i> 'a ship is safe in the harbour, but that's not what ships are built for'. Learning to live experimentally and taking calculated risks will help you achieve your goals.</li> <li>• <i>Your past experiences don't determine your future experiences:</i> Fortune-telling can stop you from taking action. It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy – step outside your comfort zone.</li> </ul>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Mind-Reading</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You think you know what other people are thinking?</li> <li>• With mind-reading the tendency is often to assume that others are thinking negative things/have negative motives/intentions</li> <li>• For instance – Your boss advises that you book time off to use up your annual leave. You decide that he's saying this because he doesn't rate you and wants to replace you.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Generate some alternative reasons for what you see:</i> what would be a more logical explanation?</li> <li>• <i>Consider that your guesses may be wrong:</i> Are your fears really about your bosses motives – or do they concern your own insecurity about your abilities at work? Do you have enough information/hard evidence?</li> <li>• <i>Get more information if appropriate</i></li> </ul>

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Feelings are not Facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relying too heavily on your feelings as a guide can lead you off track.</li> <li>• For instance – You feel guilty out of the blue – you conclude that you must have done something wrong.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Take notice of your thoughts:</i> ‘I’m so angry and that shows how badly you have behaved’. Recognise that feelings are not always best measure of reality – especially if you aren’t in most resourceful state of mind.</li> <li>• <i>How would you view the situation if you were feeling calmer?:</i> Is there any concrete evidence to support your interpretation of feelings?</li> <li>• <i>Give yourself time for feelings to subside.</i></li> </ul>
Overgeneralising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawing global conclusions from one or more events.</li> <li>• When you find yourself thinking ‘always’, ‘never’, ‘people are’.</li> <li>• For instance – You feel fed up. Your car doesn’t start. You think to yourself ‘Things like this <i>always</i> happen to me. Nothing ever goes right.’</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Get a little perspective:</i> How true is the thought that nothing ever goes right for you?</li> <li>• <i>Suspend Judgement:</i> when you judge others as being stupid/ getting in the way etc – you make yourself angrier and less able to deal with the situation.</li> </ul>
Labelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you label other people as ‘no good’ or ‘useless’ you’re likely to become frustrated with them. Or maybe you label the world as ‘unfair’. You globally rate others/things.</li> <li>• For instance – Your receive poor feedback for a report and label yourself as a failure</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Allow for varying degrees:</i> Things are more complex than black &amp; white – success vs failure.</li> <li>• <i>Celebrate complexities:</i> To label yourself or others can be an extreme form of overgeneralising.</li> </ul>

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Making Demands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Albert Ellis, founder of rational emotive behaviour therapy, places demands at the very heart of emotional problems.</li> <li>• Thoughts and beliefs that contain words like 'must', 'should', 'need', 'ought', 'got to' and 'have to' can create rigidity.</li> <li>• For instance – You think that because you try hard to be kind and considerate to others, they <i>ought</i> to be the same to you. Your demand is not realistic because others are governed by their own priorities and beliefs. As a result you often feel hurt others are not acting the way you do.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pay attention to language:</i> Replace words like 'must', 'need' and 'should' with 'prefer', 'wish' and 'want'</li> <li>• <i>Limit approval seeking:</i> Can you find a way to be OK without getting the approval of others?</li> <li>• <i>Understand the world doesn't play to your rules:</i> Other people have their own rulebooks. If you can give others the right to not live up to your standards – you will be less disappointed</li> <li>• <i>Retain your own standards – ditch the demands on others</i></li> </ul>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Mental Filtering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a bias in the way you process information – you acknowledge ONLY information that fits the belief you hold.</li> <li>• Information that doesn't fit tends to be ignored.</li> <li>• For instance – You believe you are a failure so you tend to focus on your mistakes and overlook successes.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Examine your filters closely:</i> You are what you focus on.</li> <li>• <i>Gather evidence:</i> Challenge yourself to seek evidence that proves the opposite of your 'belief'</li> </ul>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Disqualifying the positive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a mental action that transforms a positive event into a neutral or negative in your mind.</li> <li>• You believe that you are useless. You respond to a work promotion by thinking 'This doesn't count, because anyone could get this sort of thing'. The result – instead of feeling pleased, you feel quite disappointed.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Become aware of your responses to positive 'data':</i> Practice acknowledging and accepting positive feedback. Focus on acknowledging the good points.</li> <li>• <i>Accept a compliment by saying thank you:</i> Do not reject or dismiss it.</li> </ul>

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Low Frustration Tolerance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Error in assuming that when something is difficult to tolerate – it's 'intolerable'</li> <li>• Magnifying the discomfort and not tolerating temporary discomfort when it will benefit you in the long run.</li> <li>• For instance – You often procrastinate on writing reports – 'I'll do it later when I'm in the mood.' Unfortunately, waiting until the last moment means you can't put the time and effort in to get the result you want.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pushing Yourself to do things that are uncomfortable/unpleasant:</i> Break the activity down into bite size chunks that you can focus on using short bursts of energy.</li> <li>• <i>Giving yourself messages that emphasise your ability to tolerate pain:</i> If you tell yourself you can't stand something – it leads you to focus on your discomfort AND underestimate your ability to cope.</li> </ul>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Personalising</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting events as being related to you personally and overlooking other factors. This can lead to feeling easily hurt or unnecessarily guilty.</li> <li>• For instance – You feel hurt when a colleague leaves quickly after only saying a hurried hello. You think 'He was obviously trying to avoid me. I must have done something wrong or offended him somehow.'</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Imagine what else may have contributed to the outcome you're assuming responsibility for.</i></li> <li>• <i>Consider why people may be responding to you in a certain way:</i> Don't jump to the conclusion that someone's response relates directly to you.</li> </ul>

Which *Thinking Error Remedies* do you need to focus on to help you keep the quality of your thinking on track?