

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Cognitive distortions are simply ways that Impostor Syndrome convinces us to believe things that aren't really true. These are inaccurate thought patterns that reinforce our negative self-perception and keep us feeling bad about ourselves.

There are ten common types of cognitive distortions. See which you can relate to:

1. **ALL OR NOTHING THINKING:** You see things in black and white categories. If you fall even a little bit short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure. *"I always fail when I try to do something new; I fail at everything I try."*
2. **OVERGENERALIZATION:** You make broad conclusions that a single negative event represents pattern of defeat, using words such as "always" and "never". *"I am never comfortable around others" or "I am always messing things up."*
3. **MENTAL FILTER:** You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it. *You focus on the one negative comment in an otherwise-positive email from your boss and obsess about it for the rest of the day.*
4. **DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. If you perform well, you tell yourself it still wasn't good enough, that you just got lucky this time, or anyone could have done the same. *Your LinkedIn contacts congratulate you on your promotion and you comment saying it "was nothing".*
5. **JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS:** You make negative interpretations even though there are no facts to support your conclusions. There are two subsets to this
 - i. **Mind reading:** You automatically assume people are reacting negatively to you. *"I know she hates me because she didn't reply to my post."*
 - ii. **The Fortune Teller Error:** You anticipate and take it as fact that things will turn out badly. *"I spent a week drafting this report but I know my boss will think it's garbage"*



6. **MAGNIFICATION OR MINIMIZATION:** You exaggerate (magnify) the importance of your mistakes or someone else's achievements, so that by comparison you look always worse. Or you inappropriately discount (minimize) your own desirable qualities and another person's imperfections so that once again by comparison you look bad. *You wind up with a small zit when you're going out to a party. You dwell on how ugly you think it makes you, while praising your friend's stylish new outfit -- ignoring the fact that your friend has acne and you've got on sweet new clothes, too.*
7. **EMOTIONAL REASONING:** You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are. *"I feel guilty, therefore I must be a bad person", "I feel sad, so I must be a bore to be around."*
8. **SHOULD STATEMENTS:** You are attached to a certain outcome or expectation about how things should be. *"I should be doing something better with my time right now."*
9. **LABELING:** You attach a negative label to yourself like *"I'm a loser"* or *"I'm a failure"*.
10. **PERSONALIZATION:** You hold yourself accountable for things that are beyond your control. *You blame yourself for not spending enough time at the office when a large project fails (despite the fact that there were 20 other people involved).*

By learning to correctly identify cognitive distortions for the myths that they are, you can begin to respond to errors in thinking by challenging them. By refuting Impostor Syndrome's irrational, fear-based evaluations, you can begin to course-correct your self-perceptions so that they more accurately reflect reality and can be replaced by more rational, balanced thinking.



UNTWISTING YOUR THINKING

EXERCISE

We know how you talk to yourself can impact your success, so it's essential to identify and fix the faulty negative self-talk produced by Impostor Syndrome. In moments of severe self-criticism, many of us can recognize that we aren't being helpful or logical, but that realization doesn't automatically shift our point of view.

We can, however, fix cognitive distortions through a simple 3-step process of:

- (1) catching ourselves engaging in errors of thinking
- (2) generating counter-evidence to refute the erroneous self-evaluation and
- (3) putting distance between ourselves and the faulty negative thought to see the situation more objectively.

By doing so, we can get a clearer picture of reality that's not clouded by Impostor Syndrome.

The goal of this exercise is to identify cognitive distortions and refute them using the system above. In this activity, you'll start paying more attention to your negative self-talk to become more aware of which cognitive distortions you most commonly fall victim to. You'll then go through a process of reality testing, or finding specific evidence and examples that invalidate the cognitive distortion and show why it's a myth and not true.

Finally, you'll practice self-distancing, or assuming the role of a "Wiser You" who would speak in a compassionate and caring way that you would use with a friend in a similar situation. Putting space between you and Impostor Syndrome can help you step into a growth mindset where you feel like change, control, and success are possible.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. For the next few days, record examples of negative self-talk or troublesome thoughts that come up. Write the specific phrases that occupy your inner monologue in the first column.
2. Label each negative thought with the type of cognitive distortion it maps to in the second column.
3. Refute the cognitive distortion by generating 1-3 examples of situations or experiences that prove your cognitive distortion is incorrect. Write down any specific facts or truths that logically demonstrate why the cognitive distortion is a myth. Identify external factors that show how others may have contributed to the situation. For example, if you accuse yourself of "*always procrastinating*", generate examples



RESOURCES

[Impostor Syndrome Scale](#)

[Trying to Change? How Self-Doubt Can Actually Help | Melody Wilding | TEDxBergenCommunityCollege](#)

[The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women: Why Capable People Suffer from the Impostor Syndrome and How to Thrive in Spite of It by Valerie Young](#)

[The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance---What Women Should Know by Katty Kay and Claire Shipman](#)

CAREER CONFIDENCE SUPPORT GROUP

Intimate, safe small groups with expert guidance from me where you'll:

- Let go of self-critical habits so you can enjoy your success
- Create rock solid boundaries so work doesn't drive you crazy
- More tools you can use *in the moment* when your inner critic strikes

Fill out form by June 30th

melodywilding.com/techladies

