

BALANCE YOUR THOUGHTS

Overthinking can feel like an impossible problem. Keeping a thought journal changes that by making cognitive distortions visible to you. Five minutes a day is all you need to start. Soon it will become more natural to approach situations and yourself with greater equanimity and self-compassion.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. *Describe the situation.* What led to the overthinking: Where were you? When was it? Who was involved?
2. *Write down the negative thought.* Don't worry about phrasing things perfectly. It's enough to say *I don't know for sure what I'm thinking, but I wonder if it has something to do with _____.*
3. *Choose the cognitive distortion it represents.* The most common tend to be all-or-nothing thinking, filtering, and jumping to conclusions.
4. *List supporting evidence as to why the thought might be true.* Stick with verifiable data, not opinions and interpretations. An opinion sounds like, *I'm horrible at my job.* A fact sounds like, *I made a typo in the email.*
5. *List nonsupporting evidence.* Are there experiences (no matter how minor) that contradict this thought or indicate it's not completely true all of the time?
6. *Highlight the consequences.* Consider the physical, psychological, and professional downsides.
7. *Create a more balanced thought.* Aim for statements that are rooted in reality. The more uplifting and encouraging, the better. Use these questions to help you:
 - How might someone who is confident respond?
 - How would I advise my best friend to approach this?
 - What thought helps me feel energized and powerful?
 - What would I believe if I knew everything was going to work out?
8. *Note down other observations.* How does your more balanced thought make you feel? You may not go from fearful to elated in one sitting, but going from frustrated to at ease can be a breakthrough.

BALANCE YOUR THOUGHTS

Cassie

DATE	August 21st
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SITUATION

Worrying about bombing the keynote, recounting every time I had ever rambled in a meeting.

NEGATIVE THOUGHT

I'm clearly a weak communicator.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

About a month ago Greg gave me feedback saying I needed to work on concise communication.

CONSEQUENCES

- ☐ Waste time overthinking
- ☐ Avoid a task
- ☐ Overfunction by "saving" others
- ☒ Beat myself up
- ☒ Drain my motivation
- ☐ Decline an opportunity
- ☐ Work too much
- ☐ Other

EXAMPLE OF

- ☐ All-or-nothing thinking
- ☐ Overgeneralization
- ☐ Filtering
- ☐ Catastrophizing
- ☒ Disqualifying the positive
- ☐ Jumping to conclusions
- ☐ Emotional reasoning
- ☐ Should statements
- ☐ Personalization
- ☐ Double standard

NONSUPPORTING EVIDENCE

My positive performance reviews, the fact that I'm in line for a promotion and was invited to give this keynote—all of that is evidence I can speak and present well.

MORE BALANCED THOUGHT

- ☐ I can focus on the bigger picture.
- ☐ I'm only human, and I can give myself slack.
- ☐ I choose to take this situation at face value.
- ☐ There's a lesson to take away from this.
- ☐ I could interpret this differently.
- ☒ I know I can handle this.
- ☐ This outcome actually serves me.

My balanced thought:

I'm a solid communicator and I'm
motivated to keep improving.

COMMENTS AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS

It's awkward at first to take in and acknowledge the praise I've been given. I notice this is a pattern I have at home, too, with my wife, which affects our marriage.

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Cassie

DATE	August 21st
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SITUATION

Sick to my stomach that I'll be unable to answer audience questions, exposed as incompetent, fired.

NEGATIVE THOUGHT

I'm going to screw this up, just like I do with every job.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

I was laid off from teaching.

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UNSUPPORTING EVIDENCE

I've been promoted several times in the last four years.

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My balanced thought:

Being laid off as a teacher was the catalyst
that launched my HR career.

COMMENTS AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS

I didn't realize—and it's eye-opening to see—how much this negative script was operating in the background and affecting how I approached my work and myself.

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Cassie

DATE	August 22nd
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SITUATION

In my coaching session with Melody, talking about whether or not I should go forward with the keynote.

NEGATIVE THOUGHT

I have to perform flawlessly or else the event is a failure. And I'm a failure.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

There's a lot riding on the keynote in terms of the company's reputation in the industry.

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NONSUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Even if there are a few hiccups in my presentation, it won't be the end of the world.

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My balanced thought:

The middle ground is preparing to the best
of my ability and showing up 100 percent.

COMMENTS AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS

I feel relief having worked through the thought, although I am still nervous (in a good way!).

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DATE

SITUATION

NEGATIVE THOUGHT

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

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