Cognitive Restructuring is a process of changing irrational thinking into rational thinking. You can start this process by doing the following:

- Identify distressing or negative thoughts and situations
- Identify the emotional response or behavior that follows the thought
- Identify the cognitive distortion behind the thought
- Challenge and evaluate the thoughts and replace the distorted thinking with more accurate or logical thoughts

**Process:**

1. *Where is the evidence?*

2. *Are there any alternative explanations?*

3. *What are the implications? What does it mean?*

4. *Replace original thoughts with more accurate statements*

Reference: Dr. Albert Ellis, Rational Emotive Therapy
Negative self-talk assessment

Check all statements which you have heard from a student or thought or said to yourself in the last year:

1. ___ Life is unfair.
2. ___ You can't really trust anyone in this world today.
3. ___ I think they are talking about me.
4. ___ Just my luck, if something bad happens- it happens to me.
5. ___ Nobody loves me.
6. ___ I'm not smart enough.
7. ___ I can't remember anything.
8. ___ I'm so overweight (or skinny), I might as well give up.
9. ___ What's the use?
10. ___ That was a dumb thing for me to do (or say).
11. ___ I am not as good as ________________________.
12. ___ No matter how hard I try, people aren't satisfied.
13. ___ Life has no meaning.
14. ___ I'm ugly.
15. ___ I'm stupid.
16. ___ I'll never find what I really want.
17. ___ I can never do anything right.
18. ___ It's all my fault.
19. ___ Why do bad things always happen to me?
20. ___ I hate my life.
21. ___ I don't have what it takes to be successful.
22. ___ I am wasting my life.
23. ___ Things are so messed up that doing anything about them is useless.
24. ___ I'm sure I will fail.
25. ___ Why should I even bother getting up in the morning?
Positive self-talk assessment

Check all that you have heard from a student or thought or said to yourself in the last year:

1. _____ Life is interesting.
2. _____ I feel great.
3. _____ I like who I am.
4. _____ I have great hopes for the future.
5. _____ I think I can do a good job at this.
6. _____ I have good self-control.
7. _____ I can accomplish the things I want to do in life.
8. _____ I like people.
9. _____ I have a good sense of humor.
10. _____ There are things that I'm very good at.
11. _____ I have a good life.
12. _____ I deserve to have good things happen to me.
13. _____ I feel good about myself.
14. _____ I can learn new skills to gain control of my mood.
15. _____ I can find a solution to most of the problems that come up.
16. _____ Other people think that I'm fun to be with.
17. _____ I'm a good listener.
18. _____ I'm OK the way I am.
19. _____ Even if things don't always go my way, I'll live through it.
20. _____ I have some good skills.
21. _____ I'm doing all right.
22. _____ I often receive compliments for doing something well.
23. _____ I have confidence in myself.
24. _____ I can achieve what I put my mind to.
25. _____ I'm good.
### Identifying Facts, Thoughts, and Feelings

For each of the following statements indicate if it is a fact, a thought, or a feeling with a check mark in the appropriate column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Fact</th>
<th>Thought</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1. You are an insensitive jerk</td>
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<td>10. You are rude</td>
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<td>14. You don’t like me</td>
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The Most Common Types of Cognitive Distortions:

All or Nothing Thinking: You see everything in terms of black or white with no shades of gray. If something is not perfect, it is not acceptable. “Unless I put together the best report the professor has ever seen, I'm a failure.” If I don't receive all “A's” I'm a terrible student.”

Overgeneralization: You take a single negative event as evidence that something is all bad or is always going to be bad. After a bad review from the professor you conclude, “Class discussions are a waste of time, they can’t really capture the value of a student.”

Disqualifying the Positive: In a situation or event, there are usually some positive and negative aspects. You discount or ignore the positive aspects and instead focus on the negative aspect of the event, even when the situation or event was largely positive. After stumbling briefly during an otherwise good class presentation you conclude, “That was an awful presentation.”

Jumping to Conclusion: You arbitrarily jump to negative conclusions that are not supported by the facts. This may involve mind reading, making assumptions about what other people are thinking, or predicting negative future events without evidence. For example: “That student is intentionally trying to undermine my project in order to look good to the professor.”

Magnification and Minimization: You blow negative events out of proportion or minimize the importance of positive events. “If I appear the least bit nervous while talking to my professor I will never have credibility.”

Labeling and Mislabeling: You put negative labels on events or on yourself, which influences how you view yourself or events in the world. For example: “I’m such a terrible public speaker, I can’t possibly participate in this presentation.”

Personalization: You assume responsibility for the occurrence of negative events, even when there is no evidence that you are responsible. After saying good morning to your professor who doesn’t greet you also, you conclude, “I must have done something to offend him.”

Emotional reasoning: This is mood-state dependent thinking based on the assumption that feeling something strongly necessarily makes it true. e.g., “If I am feeling anxious, I must be doing a poor job.”

Should statements: Are statements that suggest a desire to change some reality when the only real choice is between accepting or not accepting it. e.g., “My professor should show greater appreciation for the hard work I do.”

Note: Not all should statements contain the word “should”. e.g., “Why does Dr. Mack always have to arrive late for appointments?”

Catastrophizing: Is a building up of consequences to an event so that they seem insufferable or particularly horrible. e.g., “This is the second time I've been turned down for a job. At this rate I'm going to end up unemployed forever!” “I failed the exam, I'm going to be kicked out of school.”
Ruth comes to see you, her counselor, because she is feeling depressed and confused about her job as a researcher for Professor Goodman, who is on her doctoral committee (she was recently hired as a SRA I in his large campus lab). She frequently worries about her performance in the lab, although she had never been told that she is not doing a good job. Last week she made a mistake in recording findings in the database. Dr. Goodman told her about it and showed her how to do it correctly in the future, this was the first time he had corrected her work. After this happened, Ruth said to herself, “I’m not sure I can do this job, I’m just too stupid. I know I’m going to get fired. My professor thinks I’m incompetent.” She made these and similar statements to herself at the lab, at home, and with you. When she made these statements to herself, she felt more depressed.

Where are the cognitive distortions in Ruth’s self-statements?

What would you suggest to Ruth?
Affirmations

One way to reprogram your self-talk is by repeating positive affirmations until you begin to get a good sense of what positive thinking really sounds like. After all, much self-talk is actually negative affirmations. Our emotions, perceptions, and behaviors are shaped by our most dominant thoughts. Our frequent thoughts represent goals which the subconscious mind strives to actualize. What we most often tell ourselves can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you want to explore the power of positive affirmations, follow these guidelines.

1. Personalize your affirmations with words like "I," "me," and "my." You can't always control circumstances or other people, so make your affirmations about what you can control---yourself. Make your affirmations state your own goals, wants, and values---not someone else's.

2. Affirmations are best stated in the present tense, because, if affirmations are in future tense ("I will...") your subconscious mind feels no urgency to act NOW. If you feel hypocritical stating affirmations in the present tense (as in "I am a good student") then state your affirmations as a process (as in "Each day I become a better student.")

3. Make your affirmations believable and realistic so that you can say them with sincerity. Begin with small, easily achievable goals, and work your way up to bigger accomplishments. "My study habits are perfect." is probably more believable as "I have good study habits most of the time."

4. State affirmations in the positive, not the negative. To say "I don't fail tests," only focuses your attention on the behavior you want to avoid. Instead say "I do well on tests."

5. Make affirmations short and easy to remember.

6. Repeat your positive affirmations often and positive thinking will become routine.

To maintain positive self-talk, fill your mind with uplifting ideas. Recognize your strengths. Comfort yourself when things go wrong. Let your self-talk be like the soothing, supportive words of a counselor, friend, or mentor. As you improve your self-talk, commit to changing your actions accordingly. Lasting accomplishments come when we change our behaviors as well as our thinking.
# Answer Sheet

Distinguishing between Facts, Thoughts and Feelings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Facts/behavior</th>
<th>Thoughts/interpretation</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>John says you are chubby</td>
<td>You are an insensitive jerk</td>
<td>I feel hurt and humiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>One bank teller is open during lunch hour and there is a long line</td>
<td>This is ridiculous</td>
<td>I feel impatient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You smile whenever I mention retirement</td>
<td>You want me to retire so you can hire someone younger</td>
<td>I feel worthless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Your significant other is smiling at and putting his/her arm around another</td>
<td>You are crass and uncaring</td>
<td>I am distressed and jealous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mary is driving over the speed limit</td>
<td>You are driving like an idiot</td>
<td>I am scared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>You arrived late to work and left early every day last week</td>
<td>You obviously don’t care about your job</td>
<td>I’m frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>You said you would pick me up at 6 but you didn’t come at all</td>
<td>You make me mad</td>
<td>I am angry and hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I completed 90% of our project and you didn’t give me any credit in our meeting</td>
<td>I am your door-mat</td>
<td>I feel belittled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>When I told you about my job offer, you didn’t counter offer</td>
<td>You don’t value loyalty</td>
<td>I am sad and disappointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>When I said hello, you turned away</td>
<td>You are rude to me</td>
<td>I feel offended and angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>John turns down your offer of a meatloaf you made him</td>
<td>You don’t like my cooking</td>
<td>I feel hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>You didn’t return my call on Mon or Tues</td>
<td>You screen calls so you don’t have to talk to me</td>
<td>I am irritated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>You didn’t invite me to the shower or the wedding</td>
<td>I am always left out of things</td>
<td>I am annoyed and disappointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Every time I have invited you to lunch you had another appointment</td>
<td>You don’t like me</td>
<td>I am hurt</td>
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</table>
Cognitive Distortions

Ruth is **overgeneralizing** from a single instance (making one mistake) and telling herself that she is not good at her job.

She is **labeling** herself as "stupid."

She is **jumping to conclusions** (mind reading) when she tells herself that her professor thinks she is incompetent and that she is going to get fired.

Others:

**Restructuring process:**

**COUNSELOR:** Ruth, where is the evidence that you’re not good at your job? (probing for evidence)
Ruth: Well, my professor never tells me I’m doing a good job.
**COUNSELOR:** Okay, your professor doesn’t tell you that you are doing well.
Does this mean you are not doing a good job? (implication)
Ruth: It must. If I was doing a good job, he would tell me.
**COUNSELOR:** Is there any other explanation for why your professor doesn’t tell you that you are doing a good job? (alternative explanation)
Ruth: I don’t know.
**COUNSELOR:** Does he tell anybody else that they’re doing a good job?
Ruth: No.
**COUNSELOR:** Do you think your co-workers do a good job?
Ruth: Yes.
**COUNSELOR:** But your professor doesn’t tell them that they do. Is it possible that you are doing a good job even if your professor doesn’t tell you that you are?
Ruth: I suppose.
**COUNSELOR:** Is there any other explanation for why your professor doesn’t tell you or you’re co-workers that you are doing a good job?
Ruth: Well, I suppose because he’s too busy.
**COUNSELOR:** That’s reasonable. Is there any other explanation?
Ruth: Well, maybe it’s just not his supervisory style to tell people when they do a good job.
**COUNSELOR:** So there may be a couple of other explanations for why your professor doesn’t tell you that you do a good job at work. Now tell me, where is the evidence that you are going to get fired?

**Replace thoughts with more accurate explanations:**

“I made a mistake this time but it doesn’t mean I’m incompetent. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. I generally perform well so if my professor makes a correction it’s not the end of the world.”

“I like this job and I will continue to do the best I can and learn from each experience.”
Questions for Challenging Irrational Thinking

An anxiety provoking situation will likely result in some inaccurate thinking. Review the list of questions below with a specific situation in mind. This exercise will help you to challenge the inaccurate assumptions and refocus your thinking in a more realistic and self-enhancing way.

1. What is actually true about this situation?
2. What facts might I be forgetting or ignoring?
3. What is not true? Especially, look for “must,” “should” “need to.”
4. How might I be exaggerating my thoughts and feelings, catastrophizing, and thinking in absolute terms?
5. What’s the worst thing that could happen?
6. How likely is that to happen?
7. How awful is that worst thing?
8. What is probable or likely to happen?
9. How could I handle the worst possible response the other person might make?
10. What specific thoughts do I need to think to myself to reduce and cope with excessive feelings I have in that situation? Are those thoughts direct rational counters to the irrational, upsetting thoughts or are they just rationalized cover-ups or avoidance of the original upsetting thoughts?
11. How do I want to act and feel in this situation, and what do I need to keep thinking in order to be that way?
12. What can I think to myself that will help reduce the excessive feelings (anxiety, anger, depression)?
13. What can I think to myself to keep from deprecating myself if I’m not handling the situation as well as I’d like?
14. How might I be overly focusing on self-deprecating or negative thoughts?
Write a more rational thought for each of the irrational thoughts below.

“I must have the approval of my friends and family in order to be successful.”

“I can’t afford to make a mistake, too much is at risk.”

“It’s a waste of time trying to deal with a difficult person, people just don’t change.”

“My unhappiness is not my fault. Life is so unfair, I can’t help feeling the way I do.”

“It’s terrible when things aren’t the way I’d like them to be.”

“Why should I care about graduating, I won’t be able to do anything with this major.”

“A job is a job, it pays the bills and that’s it.”

“There must be a perfect solution to problems (including mine). I can’t settle for less.”
Rational vs. Irrational Thinking and Rationalization

The thinking you do about a situation can be either rational or irrational.

**Rational** means reasonable, self-enhancing, logical, accurate, and realistic.

**Irrational** means catastrophic, absolute, illogical, inaccurate, self-defeating, and realistic.

The common components of **irrational** thinking are the tendency to:

- Turn wants or preferences (including strong ones) into absolute, vital needs.
- Convince oneself that if the need isn’t met, the consequence will be awful, terrible, catastrophic, unbearable, and the end of the world.
- Draw incorrect conclusions.
- Not consider the evidence.
- Automatically attribute negative motives to other people.
- Focus exclusively on self-deprecat ing thoughts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Irrational Thinking</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rational Thinking</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rationalization</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the excessive concern and inaccurate perception of reality.</td>
<td>Is the honest, appropriate concern and accurate perception of reality.</td>
<td>Is denial of concern and inaccurate perception of reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I must do well in all endeavors…</td>
<td>I would like very much to do well, I will do the best I can…</td>
<td>It'll all work out by itself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can't live without…</td>
<td>If I am liked/competent, that's great. If I am not, that's unfortunate, but I can live with it.</td>
<td>It doesn't bother me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I've got to have….</td>
<td>I will do everything I can to….</td>
<td>No Sweat – I'll just play it by ear.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What if….that would be awful, terrible, unbearable, horrible.</td>
<td>I will do the best I can in this situation…</td>
<td>Everything's fine. It's fine..</td>
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<tr>
<td>I couldn’t stand it if….</td>
<td>If I am treated unfairly, I have a right to my anger, but I do not have to act it out.</td>
<td>I didn't really care about it anyway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll just die if……..</td>
<td>If things do not go the way I want, I might be disappointed, but I can deal with that.</td>
<td>It wouldn't have done any good anyway.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I will never live this down.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel lucky….</td>
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