

CBT Thought Record

Use this when a situation triggers a strong emotion or automatic thought. Aim for a response that is more accurate and useful - not simply more positive.

1 Notice -> 2 Examine -> 3 Respond

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Situation

What happened? Stick to observable details where possible.

My manager asked me to rewrite the opening slides 30 minutes before a client review.

Emotion(s)

Name the emotion and rate intensity from 0-100.

Anxiety 78/100; embarrassment 60/100.

Automatic thought

What went through your mind? Which thought felt most emotionally charged?

She thinks I am incompetent and cannot trust my work.

Evidence that supports the thought

Facts only. What genuinely points in this direction?

She said the opening was unclear and asked me to change it before the meeting.

Evidence that does not support it

What facts, context, or alternative explanations are easy to overlook?

She said the analysis was strong, asked two other people for edits, and has not raised performance concerns with me.

Balanced response

Write a response that fits the evidence. It can still acknowledge risk, uncertainty, or difficulty.

She wants this section clearer before the client sees it. That does not tell me what she thinks of my overall competence. I can make the requested change and judge the feedback on its actual content.

Next useful step

Reframe, plan, accept, test, ask, wait - or do nothing for now.

Rewrite the first two slides, then ask whether the revised opening works.

Re-rate the emotion

What is the intensity now (0-100)? What changed, if anything?

Anxiety 46/100. Still pressured, but less ashamed.

Automatic Thoughts: Catch the Thought

Automatic thoughts are quick words, images, meanings, or predictions that appear in response to a situation. This sheet helps you slow them down enough to see what your mind added.

Catch it -> Name it -> Separate fact from interpretation

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Trigger / situation

What was happening just before the emotion shifted?

I texted a close friend about weekend plans. They read it at lunch and had not replied by evening.

First thought, image, or meaning

Write the first thing that flashed through your mind - even if it seems irrational, embarrassing, or incomplete.

They are avoiding me. I must have done something wrong.

Emotion + intensity

What did you feel? Rate each emotion 0-100.

Anxiety 70/100; sadness 45/100.

Body sensations

What did you notice physically?

Tight stomach, hot face, urge to keep checking my phone.

The hot thought

Which thought best explains why the emotion became strong? Rewrite it as one clear sentence.

They are pulling away from me because I upset them.

Camera test: what is observable?

What could a camera, audio recording, or neutral witness confirm?

The message was read. There was no reply for several hours. I saw them active online once.

What did my mind add?

Predictions, interpretations, assumptions, labels, or mind reading.

Their motive, that I caused it, and that the friendship is changing.

What deserves attention next?

Do I need to reframe the thought, solve a real problem, get information, tolerate uncertainty, or simply let the thought pass?

No action is needed tonight. If the distance continues, I can ask directly instead of guessing.

Cognitive Distortions Finder

Cognitive distortions are recurring thinking patterns that can make an interpretation less accurate or less useful. A distortion is a clue to examine the thought - not proof that the thought is false.

Start with one thought. Check any patterns that might be influencing it.

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Thought to examine

Write the thought exactly as it showed up.

I stumbled over one answer in the interview. They definitely thought I was unqualified, and I have blown my chance.

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|--|---|
| ☐ All-or-nothing thinking
Seeing only extremes: success/failure, good/bad, always/never. | ☐ Overgeneralization
Turning one event into a broad rule about the future or yourself. |
| ☒ Catastrophizing
Treating a feared possibility as if it is likely or unmanageable. | ☒ Mental filter
Focusing narrowly on negative information while missing relevant context. |
| ☒ Mind reading
Assuming you know what another person thinks without enough evidence. | ☐ Discounting positives
Explaining away evidence that does not fit the negative conclusion. |
| ☒ Fortune telling
Predicting a future outcome as though it is already known. | ☐ Labelling
Turning a mistake or behaviour into a fixed identity label. |
| ☐ Emotional reasoning
Treating a feeling as proof: "I feel it, therefore it must be true." | ☐ Should statements
Using rigid rules about how you, others, or life must be. |

Which pattern(s) fit - and which do not?

Do not force a label. Note only the patterns that genuinely help you understand the thought.

Mind reading fits because I am assuming what the panel thought. Catastrophizing and mental filtering also fit. I am focusing on one answer and treating it as decisive.

A more accurate version

Keep what is true. Remove exaggeration, certainty you do not have, or conclusions that go beyond the evidence.

I had one answer I wish I had handled better. I also answered the rest of the interview, and I do not know how the panel evaluated me. One awkward answer does not tell me the final outcome.

Reframe the Thought

Reframing is not positive thinking. The goal is to build a response that better fits the evidence, context, uncertainty, and what you can actually do.

Accuracy over positivity

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Situation

What happened?

During a project presentation, a senior colleague challenged one of my assumptions and I paused before answering.

Automatic thought

Write the thought in one sentence. If there are several, choose the one with the strongest emotional charge.

Everyone could tell I did not know what I was talking about.

What supports it?

Facts, context, or real risks.

I paused for several seconds and needed to look back at one figure before answering.

What complicates it?

Missing information, alternative explanations, exceptions, or evidence pointing elsewhere.

I answered the question, the discussion continued normally, my manager thanked me afterward, and another colleague asked for the deck.

What kind of response fits?

Is this mainly an interpretation to reframe, a real problem to plan for, something to accept, or a prediction you can test?

Reframe the interpretation. There is no practical problem to solve beyond noting the question for next time.

Balanced reframe

Write a response you can actually believe. It can include uncertainty, difficulty, and limits.

I hesitated on one question because I wanted to check the number. That was visible, but it does not show that everyone judged me as incompetent. The rest of the presentation continued normally.

Next step

What would you do differently if you held the balanced view for the next hour?

Add a note on that assumption to my presentation file and then stop replaying the moment.

What Do I Know? What Am I Predicting? What Can I Do?

Use this when your mind is filling in missing information. Separate facts from predictions, then decide whether any useful action is actually available.

Facts -> Predictions -> Actions -> Uncertainty

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

The question or worry

What is your mind trying to figure out?

My partner has not replied for five hours, which is unusual. Is something wrong between us?

1. What I know

Observable facts. What could a camera, record, or reliable source confirm?

We spoke normally this morning. My last message was not an argument. They have had a busy workday. I have not received any message saying something is wrong.

2. What I am predicting

Guesses, assumptions, interpretations, feared outcomes, or mind reading.

They are upset with me, losing interest, or deliberately ignoring me.

3. What I can do

A useful action, question, plan, boundary, or information source - if one exists.

Wait until later this evening. If I still need to check in, send one normal message rather than several reassurance-seeking texts.

What remains uncertain?

Write the part you cannot reliably know yet, even after reasonable action or information gathering.

Why they have not replied and what they are doing right now. I cannot know that until they respond.

Enough information rule

What would count as enough information to move forward?

No relationship decision is needed based on a few hours of silence. One check-in is enough if the delay continues.

What can stay unanswered for now?

Name the question you are willing to carry without solving immediately.

Why the reply is delayed. I can let that question remain open until there is actual information.

Behavioral Experiment Planner

Use a small, safe real-world test to gather evidence about a prediction. The goal is not to prove yourself right or wrong - it is to learn.

Predict -> Test -> Observe -> Update

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Belief or prediction

Make it specific enough to test. Example: "If I ask one question in the meeting, people will think I am incompetent."
If I speak in the team meeting without rehearsing every sentence, I will ramble and people will think I am unprepared.

How strongly do I believe it?

0-100% before the experiment.
80/100 before the experiment.

What would count as evidence?

What observable result would support or weaken the prediction?
Whether I can make the point clearly enough, whether people understand it, and whether anyone reacts as if I am unprepared.

Small, safe experiment

What will you actually do? Keep the test proportionate and avoid unnecessary risk.
Prepare three bullet points, not a script. Speak once during Thursday's team meeting and allow myself to pause if I need to think.

Safety behaviours to reduce

What do you usually do to prevent the feared outcome or feel certain?
Reduce only what is safe and appropriate.
Do not rehearse the exact wording repeatedly, apologize before speaking, or scan everyone's face for signs of judgment.

What I will observe

What facts will you collect instead of relying only on how anxious you feel?
Whether my point is understood, what people actually say or do, and how long the discomfort lasts.

What happened?

Describe the result without grading yourself.
I spoke for about 35 seconds, paused once, and finished my point. My manager nodded and a colleague built on the idea. Nobody commented on the pause.

What did I learn?

What was expected, unexpected, or still uncertain?
I do not need a perfect script to contribute. A pause felt noticeable to me but did not stop the conversation.

Belief now

Re-rate 0-100%. What would be a fair updated belief?
45/100. I still prefer preparing, but the original prediction feels less convincing.

Worry, Problem or Uncertainty?

Not every anxious thought needs the same response. Use this sheet to decide whether there is a problem to solve, information to obtain, or uncertainty that cannot be removed yet.

Choose the response that fits the problem

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

The worry

Write the question, prediction, or situation that is taking up your attention.

My work contract ends in two months. What if it is not renewed?

A. A real problem ☐

Something is happening and a useful action is available.

Response: Plan / act

B. Missing information ☒

A reliable answer can reasonably be obtained.

Response: Ask / check once

C. Uncertainty ☒

No reliable answer is available yet, or reasonable action is already complete.

Response: Allow / wait / continue

Which category fits best - and why?

If more than one fits, separate the solvable part from the uncertain part.

Mostly missing information plus uncertainty. I can ask when renewal decisions are made, but I cannot know the final decision today.

If action or information is available

What is the next proportionate step? When will you stop once the useful step is complete?

Ask my manager at our next 1:1 when renewal decisions will be communicated. Update my CV this week so I have a practical backup plan.

If no reliable answer is available

What question will remain unanswered? What can you return your attention to instead?

The final renewal decision is not available yet. I can return my attention to current work after I have taken the proportionate steps.

My enough-information rule

Complete: "For this situation, enough information means..."

I will ask once about the timeline and act on any new information. I do not need to mentally rehearse every possible outcome each evening.

Next reasonable step

What will you do after this worksheet - including choosing to wait or do nothing?

Add one hour on Saturday to update my CV and note the renewal question for Tuesday's 1:1.

Rumination Exit Worksheet

Rumination can feel productive while repeatedly circling the same question. This sheet helps you check whether thinking is still producing information - and choose an exit when it is not.

Ask: "What do I know now that I did not know 10 minutes ago?"

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

The loop

What question, conversation, mistake, or future scenario keeps replaying?

At dinner I interrupted a friend and made a joke that landed awkwardly. Since getting home I keep replaying it and asking whether I sounded rude.

What has this thinking produced?

New facts? A decision? A useful action? A clearer question?

No new facts. I have replayed the same few seconds and feel more embarrassed than I did earlier.

What is it trying to give me?

Certainty, reassurance, an explanation, control, self-punishment, prevention?

Certainty that my friend is not offended and reassurance that I did not make a bad impression.

10-minute test

What do I know now that I did not know 10 minutes ago? If the answer is "nothing," the loop may no longer be solving the problem.

I know the same things I knew ten minutes ago. The loop is not producing an answer because I cannot know exactly what my friend thought.

Choose an exit:

- ☒ Take one concrete action
- ☐ Get one piece of needed information
- ☐ Schedule a specific time to revisit it
- ☐ Let the question remain unanswered for now
- ☒ Shift attention to a chosen activity

My exit plan

What will I do for the next 10-20 minutes instead of continuing the loop?

Write down one useful option: if I am still concerned tomorrow, I can send a simple check-in. For tonight, put my phone down and finish the book I was reading.

If the thought returns

Write one sentence you can use without reopening the whole debate. Example: "I have already thought about this; I will return to it at 6 pm if needed."

Remind myself: ?I already reviewed this. There is no new information right now. I can revisit it tomorrow if there is a real reason to.?