

# Reframing Cognitive Distortions

created by Lauren Pilman, MSW

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## Acknowledge the Cognitive Distortion

The first step is to become aware of the distorted thought as it arises. Pay attention to when it pops up, how it makes you feel, and what specific distortion it might be (e.g., black-and-white thinking, catastrophizing, or mind-reading). Remind yourself, “This might not be accurate—it’s a cognitive distortion.”

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## Challenge the Thought

Take a closer look at the thought and question its validity. Ask yourself:

- “Is this really true?”
- “Is this 100% accurate, or is it just how I feel in the moment?”
- “What evidence do I have for and against this thought?”

By poking holes in the thought, you can start to see where it might not hold up.

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## Reframe the Thought

Replace the distorted thought with a more balanced, neutral one. This new thought should still acknowledge your feelings but avoid exaggeration or distortion. Think of it as rewriting the thought to reflect a more realistic perspective.

## Example

**Original Thought:** “I completely failed that presentation. Everyone thinks I’m terrible at my job.”

**Step 1:** Acknowledge the distortion. Recognize this as catastrophizing and mind-reading. Say to yourself, “This is a cognitive distortion. Just because I feel like I failed doesn’t mean it’s true.”

**Step 2:** Challenge the thought. Ask:

- “Is it true that I completely failed, or were there parts of the presentation that went well?”
- “Do I know for sure what everyone thinks, or am I assuming the worst?”

**Step 3:** Reframe the thought. Write a more neutral version, such as:

- “The presentation didn’t go as smoothly as I hoped, but I did my best, and there were moments that went well. I can ask for feedback to improve for next time.”

# Reframing Cognitive Distortions: Guided Worksheet

created by Lauren Pilman, MSW

## Instructions:

Use this worksheet to help identify, challenge, and reframe your cognitive distortions. Fill in each section with your own thoughts and responses.

### Step 1: Identify the Cognitive Distortion

Think about a distressing thought you've had recently. Write it down exactly as it comes to mind.

**What is the thought?**

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**Now, identify which cognitive distortion(s) might be influencing this thought. (Check any that apply)**

- All-or-Nothing Thinking (Seeing things as either all good or all bad)
- Catastrophizing (Expecting the worst-case scenario)
- Overgeneralization (Using one negative event to predict the future)
- Mind-Reading (Assuming you know what others think)
- Emotional Reasoning (Believing something is true because you feel it)
- Personalization (Blaming yourself for things beyond your control)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 2: Challenge the Thought

Now, let's examine whether this thought is accurate and fair.

**What evidence supports this thought?** (What facts make you believe this thought is true?)

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**What evidence contradicts this thought?** (What facts suggest this thought is not entirely true?)

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**Would I say this to a friend in the same situation?**

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### Step 3: Reframe the Thought

Rewrite your original thought in a way that still acknowledges your feelings but removes distortion.

**New, Balanced Thought:**

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Cognitive distortions can be automatic, but you can learn to reframe them with practice. Keep using this worksheet whenever you catch yourself in a negative thinking pattern. Over time, it will become easier to see situations more realistically and with self-compassion.