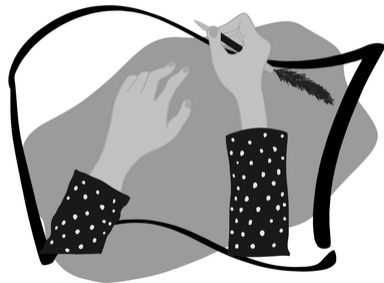


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*An  
introduction  
to CBT  
Journaling*

## An introduction to efficient CBT Journaling



This handout guides you with simple models that introduce how to identify and journal *thoughts that cause feelings*.

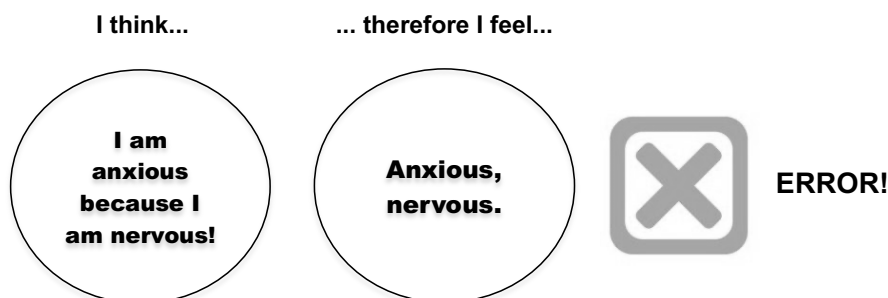
**WRITE THINGS DOWN** – your brain likes learning-by-discovery with key ideas, it sticks.

**What is your ‘attributional style’?** How are you explaining the world to yourself? Is it distorted by stress? Do you have bad thinking habits? Catch them and edit them – literally!

Thoughts and beliefs don’t come to us in helpful paragraphs and chapters that are rational and clear – they are mixed up with feelings and physicality and biases and misinformation, and if you have ‘crooked thinking’ it will cause crooked feeling and crooked behavior – CBT journaling helps you to have clarity and to examine your version of what is going on, and to clean it up with cool evidence based assessments, which will literally change how you feel and behave, and your whole life experience. Be cool. Be rational. Deliberately. Especially in challenging times.

**Firstly: watch out for emotional reasoning / explaining *feelings with feelings*.**

**Emotions are not thoughts** – learn the habit of separating thoughts from feelings and behaviours – learn how to *identify what you are thinking* when you are feeling emotional upset like anxiety, anger, or depression..



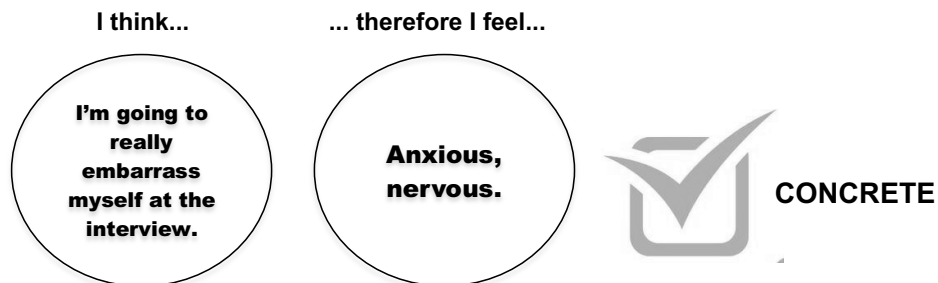
**Trying to make sense of things through how you ‘feel’ gives you the wrong information.** The following styles of emotional reasoning are *not helpful* in building awareness of our thoughts and beliefs about a given event or situation, they are very general and only identify feelings, which tells you nothing concrete. And if you have the very human habit of trying to figure out the meaning of things through how you are feeling emotionally, well, you have the wrong data! Feelings are not facts.

I am <b>stressed</b> because I am <b>anxious.</b>	I am <b>afraid</b> because I am <b>nervous.</b>	I am <b>angry</b> because I am <b>insecure.</b>	I am <b>upset</b> because I am <b>embarrassed.</b>
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The above emotion and emotion statements pair two feelings and don't give you enough information to evaluate what's going on.

**FEELINGS ARE NOT FACTS**, an emotion doesn't come out of the blue and cause another emotion.

**What is causing the feelings?** Be concrete – what is the event or situation – and how are you explaining it to yourself? Is physical anxiety, rather than just emotions, a main issue? Events are often quite benign and neutral, or at least manageable - it is how we view them, plus what our nervous system is doing, that largely causes our dramatic negative emotional responses. Explore *context* in your journaling. If you do not map context that objectively describes the *activating event or situation*, and then *how you think* about it, you will be left at the mercy of 'emotional reasoning' (trying to make sense of things through *how you feel*, rather than rational evaluation of evidence and facts), and you will not cope well..



If feelings are largely caused by the view we take of events or situations, more concrete and helpful ‘thought catching notes’ might be like this:

<i>I am nervous <b>because I think I</b> will fail this exam because I always fail at things these days and it's all too much.</i>	<i>I am afraid <b>because I</b> <b>think</b> this meeting is going to go badly, I'm not good enough for this job, and am not able to cope.</i>	<i>I am furious <b>because I think</b> that your behaviour is absolutely disgraceful and I will not tolerate it.</i>	<i>I am upset <b>because</b> <b>I think</b> that everybody is looking at my horrible big butt in these ugly jeans. I look awful!</i>
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**Re-cap: feelings are not facts, and thoughts are not the same as feelings**

– identify and examine thoughts and beliefs that cause the feelings.

So – **if feelings are ‘internal emotions’ caused by perception**, it would not be useful to conclude “I feel anxious because I am nervous!”, as anxiety and nervousness are both feelings. It would be more useful and accurate to identify the event or situation, and the thoughts and beliefs you have about the situation, that are causing the feelings (eg ‘I predict I am going to embarrass myself at the interview, so I feel very upset and anxious). Be precise. Catch how you are explaining the world to yourself. Are you ‘negative predicting’ in a dramatic way?

**Task:** unpack your self-talk and bad feelings about a situation or event:

<b>Thoughts and beliefs about a situation/event</b>	<b>Feelings</b>

**The thought-catching form:** this is a simple format that shows examples of how simplistic negative framing influences negative feelings, while positive framing influences positive feelings:

<b>Thought:</b> <i>I think...</i>		<b>Feeling:</b> <i>Therefore, I feel...</i>
I'll never really be happy.	➤	Depressed, hopeless
I am ugly.	➤	Anxious, hopeless
He's evil and is deliberately embarrassing me.	➤	Aggressive, vengeful, defensive
Nobody really cares about me.	➤	Hurt, lonely, afraid.
Covid19 has destroyed our lives.	➤	Fearful, helpless, hopeless.
I have evidence I can cope with bad situations, I can do this.	➤	Hopeful, motivated, energised.
I am good enough – 'perfect' doesn't exist.	➤	Calm, present..
I am doing the best that I can, and working on doing better.	➤	Proud, motivated.

**Task:** try it yourself, map some of your thoughts and worries that cause feelings:

<b>Thought:</b> <i>I think...</i>		<b>Feeling:</b> <i>Therefore, I feel...</i>

Thoughts cause feelings which cause behaviours – template examples.



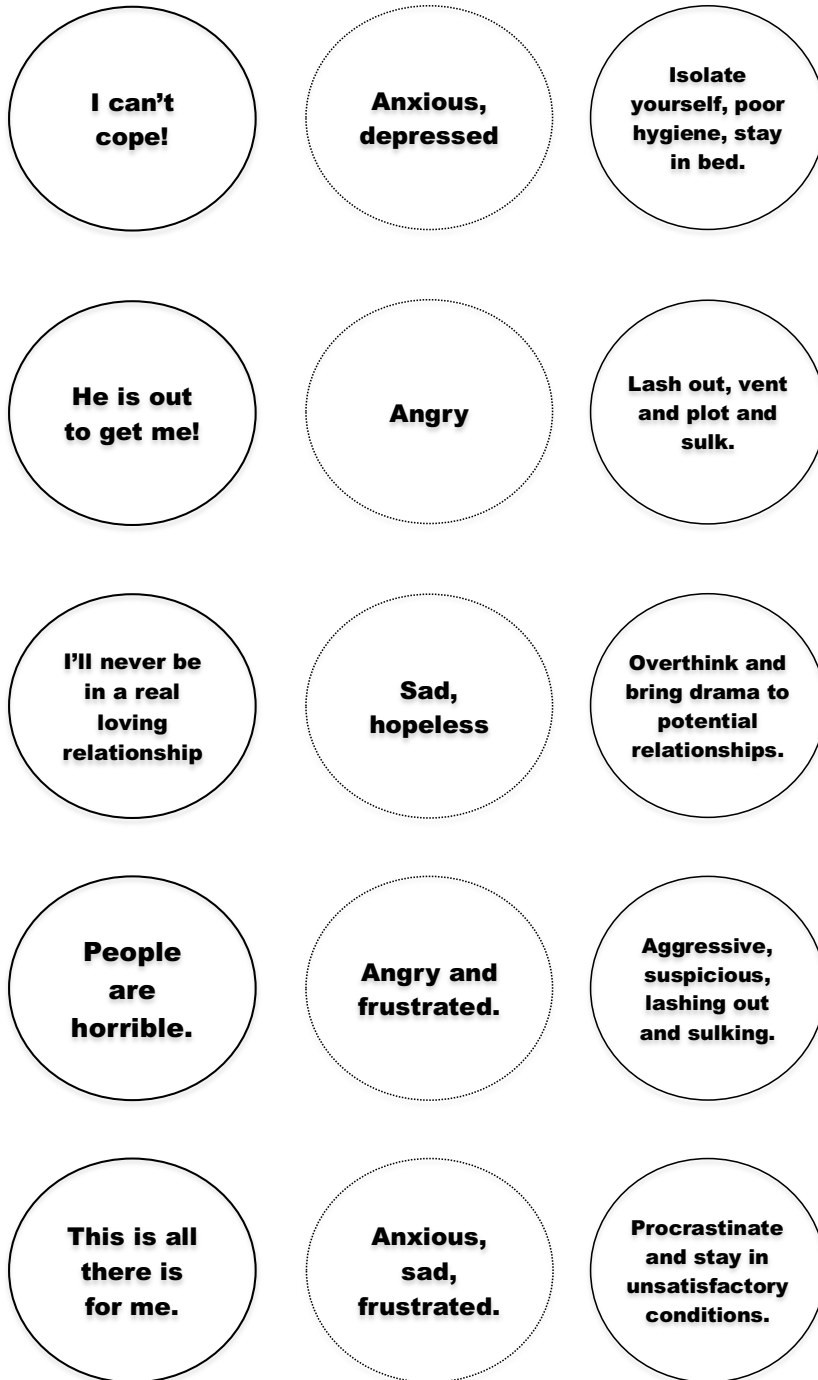
**Try it this way:** make simple maps of your thoughts and feelings and behaviours.

What are you thinking? Consider the following random examples of **unhealthy self-talk patterns**. Different people have different patterns, can you spot yours? Can you see how language matters, and how accepting automatic dramatic thoughts and beliefs 100% will cause yourself and others unnecessary upset? You don't have to accept them! Catch how you are talking to yourself, and thought-stop and consider whether it is rational and healthy, or a bit extreme and over the top. Edit edit edit.

*Change how you think, change how you feel, change how you behave.*

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THINKING THAT...	MAY MAKE YOU FEEL...	AND YOU MAY...
<b>I'm no good at talking to people</b>	<b>Anxious, worried, afraid.</b>	<b>Go quiet – can't focus, can't listen properly, don't interact.</b>
<b>My boss hates me</b>	<b>Anxious, worried, angry.</b>	<b>Not communicative or productive in work. Take a lot of sick days.</b>
<b>She is an evil bitch.</b>	<b>Rage.</b>	<b>Text her a rant about how awful she is.</b>



Is your inner narrative sometimes negative and exaggerated? Thought-stop and edit.

**Task:** a blank form to track *thoughts that cause distorted feeling and behaviours:*

Thoughts and beliefs	Feelings	Behaviour
Thinking that...	May make you feel...	You may...

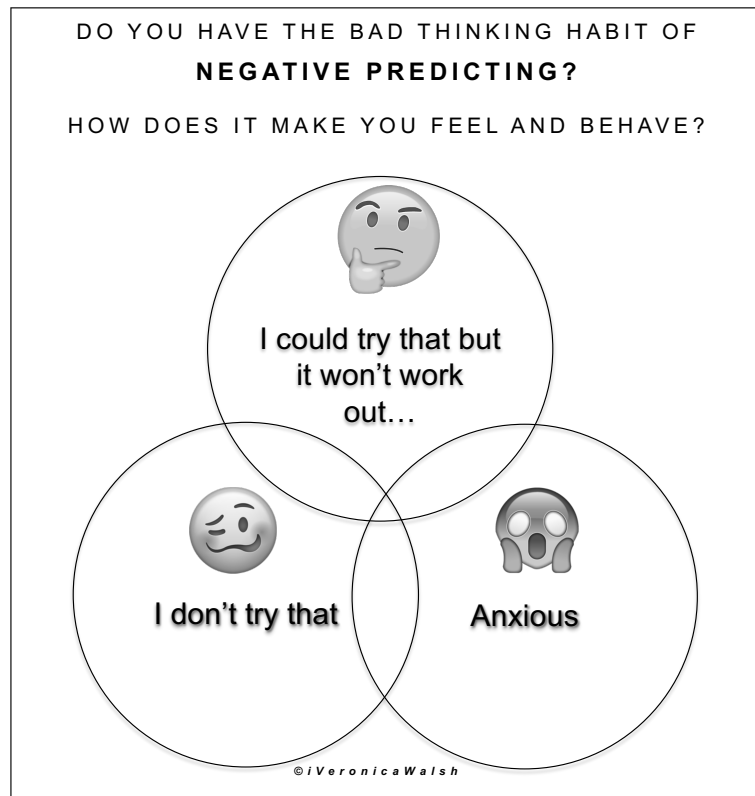
**Important note: feelings are not just emotional – they’re also physical.** Do you see how this style of negative dramatic thinking would affect your nervous system? You are perceiving *threats* to your status and wellbeing – and your body treats all threats as physical challenges (‘paper tigers’), with a surge of adrenaline and oxygen and cortisol to *pump you up* to handle them – this is ‘discomfort’, this is ‘anxiety’. Remember – your mind is your brain which is attached to your nervous system. Dial down the drama with new accurate rational self-talk – to regulate yourself,

**Task: controlled breathing** can help to regulate your nervous system: the threat response overloads us with oxygen, so controlling the intake and output yourself puts you in control and regulates you – it’s simple: take a long slow breath in through the nose, hold for a few beats, then breathe out long and slow through the mouth – and repeat in a rhythm. **REGULATE**

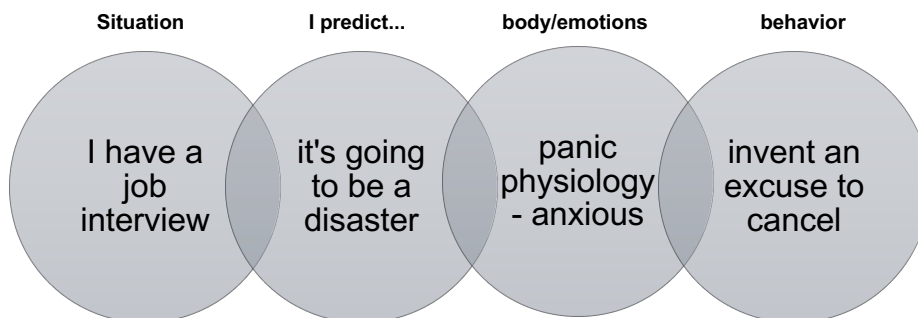




**Clear CBT journaling requires context:** without mapping *context* that includes the *activating event or situation* and *how you think* about it, you'll be left at the mercy of 'emotional reasoning' – trying to make sense of things through *how you feel emotionally*, rather than cool rational evaluating. So assessing the event or situation in a concrete objective way through your journaling is essential.



Map your situational anxieties and predictions and consequences: **Example:**

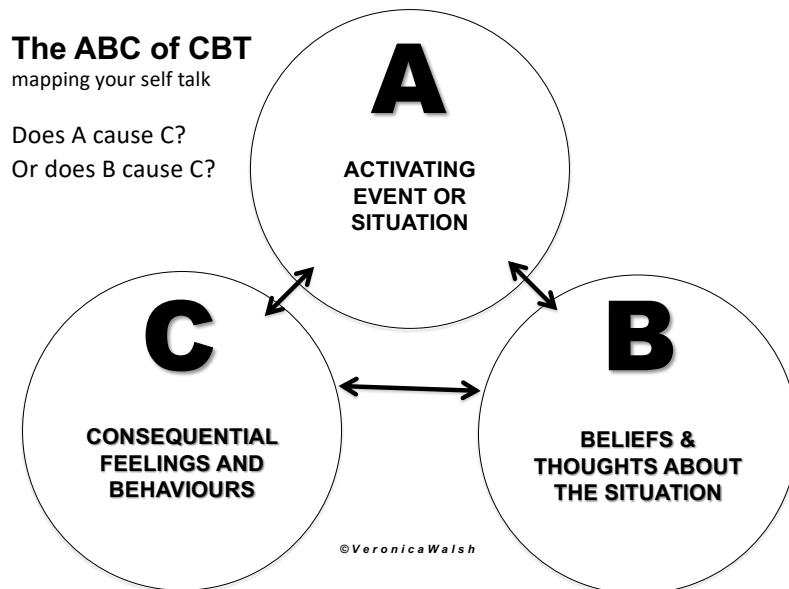


**Humans are PREDICTING MACHINES:** catch and edit your predictions.

**Task: use this blank thought form to track your patterns:**

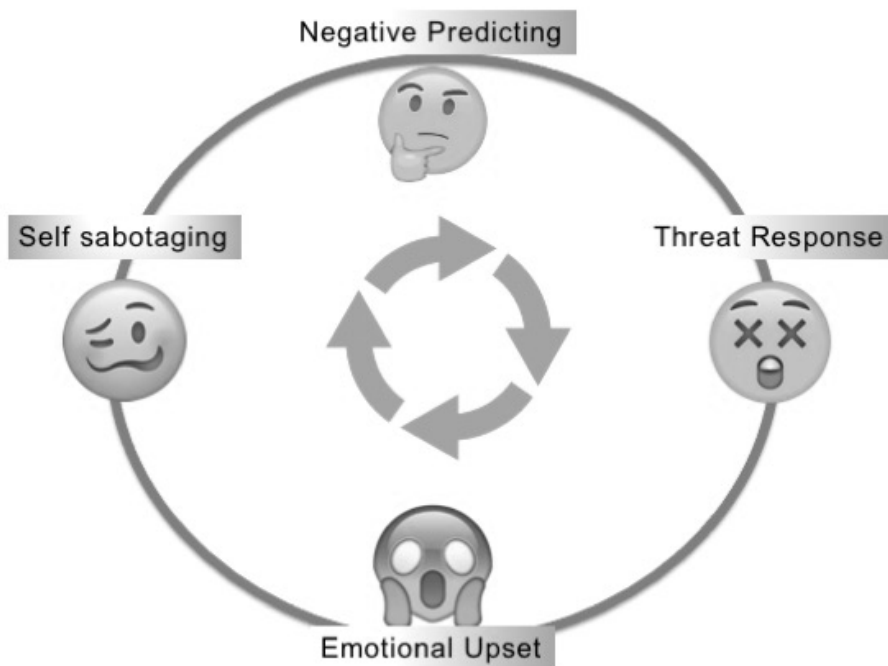
Situation	Think	Feel	Behave

Or use this **simple ABC template** to journal, or to unpack with a mental thought task:



**Beware the vicious circle of negative predicting:**

There are lots of helpful models in CBT, consider this template: **negative predicting** turns on the **threat response**, which causes **emotional upset**, which causes **self-sabotaging behavior**, which gives **bad outcomes**, which appears to confirm the negative predicting bias... trapping you in a 'vicious circle' of unnecessary upset.



Be careful what you say to yourself – your body is listening...

What did you learn? Write down your key takeaway ideas:

**TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT TAKING BETA BLOCKERS (ADRENALINE BLOCKERS) IF YOU HAVE HIGH PHYSICAL ANXIETY. THEY WILL REGULATE YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM AS PART OF A CBT CARE PLAN.**