

# 12 Common Cognitive Distortions

Sometimes the thoughts that we have are unhelpful or even inaccurate. These types of thoughts – unhelpful and inaccurate – are called cognitive distortions. Cognitive distortions can happen automatically in our mind and make us interpret a situation in a “distorted” way, which usually makes us feel worse.

It’s natural to experience occasional cognitive distortions. But if we unknowingly reinforce them over time, it can be damaging to our mental health, relationships, and well-being.

**All-or-nothing thinking:** Seeing things in terms of extremes, with everything being either good or bad, and there is no in-between.

E.g., *“I never have anything interesting to say.”*



**Magnification and minimization** (magnifying the negative, minimizing the positive): exaggerating or minimizing the meaning, importance, or likelihood of things

E.g., *“My girlfriend hasn’t responded to my text in hours, she’s probably doesn’t like me anymore.”*



**Catastrophizing:** Expecting the worst-possible outcome.

E.g., *“If I don’t do well on this exam, I will fail this class and will never have the career I want.”*



**Overgeneralization:** making conclusions from insufficient evidence, seeing a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

E.g., *"I'm never going to find someone who likes me."*



**Personalization:** Taking everything personally, believing that you are responsible for events that are out of your control, or blaming yourself for circumstances that are not your fault.

E.g., *"The party started being a bore as soon as I came in."*



**Should statements:** Setting subjective rules for yourself and others, demanding particular behaviors without considering the realistic circumstances of the situation.

E.g., *"I should have known this would happen."*

**Emotional reasoning:** basing conclusions on how you feel in a given moment, accepting your emotions as facts.

E.g., *"I feel stupid, therefore I must be stupid."*



**Jumping to conclusions:** reaching conclusions and making assumptions without enough information.



**Mind-reading:** imagining you know what the other person is thinking.

E.g., *"She must be thinking I'm a loser."*

**Fortune-telling:** predicting the future and expecting that things will turn out badly.

E.g., *"I'll never get better."*



**Disqualifying the positive:**

acknowledging positive experiences, but rejecting them instead of accepting them.

E.g., *“Anyone could have done as well.”*



**Mental filtering:** dwelling only on the negative details of a situation and filtering out the positive aspect.



E.g., Receiving a good performance review at work but focusing on one constructive comment your manager made.

Here are 7 techniques that you can start practicing today to challenge cognitive distortions.

