BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:
COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS EXPLAINED

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MENTAL FILTERING

- Picking out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that your vision of reality becomes clouded/darkened. The focus is primarily on the negative and filtering out all of the positive ones.

“I bombed my DC presentation. The instructor told me I needed to slow down because I was difficult to understand when presenting my case.”
ALL OR NOTHING THINKING

• Commonly called “black and white” thinking. If a situation falls short of perfect, you see it as a total failure. This person sees themselves and the world in extremes that leave little room for middle ground. “Always” and “never” are indicators of this type of thinking.

“I messed up the suture. I was so embarrassed. I always mess things up. I’ll never be a good vet.”
OVERGENERALIZATION

• When we draw general conclusion without sufficient evidence or experience. Often people make a very broad conclusion based on a single incident or a single piece of evidence. If something bad happens only once, it is expected to happen over and over again.

“I answered that question correctly on my anatomy exam. I must be really good at anatomy.”
You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be. “Musts,” “oughts” and “have tos” are similar offenders. Such statements can be personal standards of behavior, standards for other people, or expectations about the way the world functions.

“I should know how to talk to clients about euthanasia. I shouldn’t have assumed the client would know what to expect.”
EMOTIONAL REASONING

- A cognitive process by which a person concludes that their emotional reaction proves something is true, regardless of the observed evidence. Can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

“I feel anxious. I know I’m going to fail this exam.” or “I feel incompetent. Maybe I shouldn’t become a vet.”
PERSONALIZATION AND BLAME

- Personalization occurs when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn’t entirely under your control.

Some people do the opposite.
- They blame other people or their circumstances for their problems, and they overlook ways that they might be contributing to the problem usually doesn’t work very well because other people will resent being scapegoated and they will just toss the blame right back in your lap. It’s like the game of hot potato – no one wants to get stuck with it.

Personalization: “I had the notes and was late for my study group. I caused everyone to feel irritated. If I had been on time, everyone would have felt more prepared.”
Blame: “It’s the professor’s fault I feel so anxious.”
MAGNIFICATION / MINIMIZATION

- Consists of perceiving a case or situation in a greater or lesser light than it truly deserves. An example of magnification is when you make a small mistake and you think that you’ve made a really big one. You exaggerate the importance of your problems and shortcomings, or you minimize the importance of your desirable qualities.

“What if I believed that I was deserving and capable? 0

MAGNIFICATION AND MINIMIZATION

The tendency to magnify the positive attributes of another, while minimizing your own.

“Magnification: _______”
“Minimization: _______”
CATASTROPHIZING

• Making something into a catastrophe when it's not. When we catastrophize, we tell our selves that something is so awful, so terrible, that we won't be able to handle it. That we would fall apart, or die.

“What if I fail this exam and have to go in front of the progress committee and then I flunk out of vet school!?”
DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVE

• You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count." If you do a good job, you may tell yourself that it wasn’t good enough or that anyone could have done as well. Discounting the positive takes the joy out of life and makes you feel inadequate and unrewarded.

“I did that project well, but that doesn’t mean I’m competent. I just got lucky.”
LABELING

• Involves making a judgment about yourself or someone else as a person, rather than seeing the behavior as something the person did that doesn't define him or her as an individual. Labels are abstractions that lead to anger, anxiety, frustration, and low self-esteem.

Instead of saying “I made a mistake”, you attach a negative label to yourself, “I’m stupid.”
JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

• Involves making decisions without having enough information. People often reach conclusions from little or no evidence. The conclusions are usually negative interpretation or prediction that arrive from fictitious (a) Mind reading or (b) Fortune-telling.

• Mind Reading: Without checking it out, you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you.

• Fortune-telling: You predict that things will turn out badly.

Before a test you may tell yourself, “I’m really going to blow it. What if I flunk?” If you’re depressed you may tell yourself, “I’ll never get better.”
Scenario: Bethany raises her hand in class to answer a question. She gets called on and answers incorrectly. The class is silent and the professor says, “that’s not quite right. Does anyone else want to try?”

Later, at home, while studying Bethany starts crying and is surprised and confused by her emotional reaction. She had a good day and can’t figure out why she’s reacting this way.
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<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Thought</th>
<th>Cognitive Distortion</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Replacement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Studying</td>
<td>&quot;I can’t believe I got that answer wrong. I’m such an idiot.”</td>
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<td>- Thinking about my wrong</td>
<td>&quot;Everyone thinks I’m stupid.”</td>
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<td>answer in class</td>
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Scenario: Bethany is in anatomy lab working with a classmate and is frustrated that it isn’t going as quickly as she’d like. She starts to get short with her classmate and complains about it taking so long to complete the dissection.

During next lab Bethany is unfriendly and doesn’t seem interested in working with her partner. Over the next few weeks, this behavior continues and leads to conflict in the team. The partner ends up confronting Bethany to ask why she isn’t helping with the labs as much. Bethany yells at her lab partner and calls the classmate lazy and incompetent.
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<td>Making dinner</td>
<td>“I can’t trust anyone to do good work.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking about lab partner</td>
<td>“The instructor should let other people do the work because clearly my partner can’t.”</td>
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ACTIVITY: LAW & ORDER WORKSHEET
What is a Thought Diary?

Do you often feel stressed, anxious, sad, frustrated, or unmotivated? When feeling down, you may tend to think and interpret things in negative or pessimistic ways. When feeling anxious, you may overestimate the likelihood of bad things that can happen, and you might tend to notice and remember negative things over positive things. These thinking styles are unhelpful and counterproductive.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (or CBT) is a scientifically-supported and commonly-used therapy approach for a variety of mental health concerns, such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. The centerpiece of CBT is changing your emotions by identifying and changing your thoughts. A thought diary (also called thought record) is one such tool taught in CBT. This app, Thought Diary, can help you take a step back from your thoughts to identify negative and distorted thinking patterns.
Anxious

Emotions
- Anxious
- Empty
- Overwhelmed

Details
I can’t juggle everything. It’s too much. I feel like I don’t get the help I need.

Negative Thoughts
I want to quit. I’m sick of feeling this way.

Cognitive Distortions
- Overgeneralization
- Catastrophizing
- Emotional reasoning

Challenge
It’s not always this way. I do like many aspects of my job.

Alternative Thoughts
There are times I feel overwhelmed & times I feel happy and at peace with my job. It ebbs and flows.
REFRAMING

- Explore what’s stressing you: Evaluate your situation with a different viewpoint.

- Find what you can change: If you could, what parts of your situation would you most like to change? With positive reframing, you may see possibilities you weren’t aware of before.

- Identify benefits: Find the benefits in the situation you face.

- Discover the humor: Find the aspects of your situation that are so absurd that you can’t help but laugh.
WHAT I CAN CONTROL:

1. MY ACTIONS & REACTIONS
2. MY BOUNDARIES
3. MY EXPECTATIONS
4. HOW I INVEST MY TIME
5. HOW I TREAT MYSELF
6. HOW I TREAT OTHERS
7. HOW I INTERPRET WHAT HAPPENS

xo @heyamberrae
The Law of Attraction states that whatever you focus on, think about, read about, and talk about intensely, you're going to attract more of into your life.

Jack Canfield