

## Change the way you think using the five column technique – the ABC model – part 2

Turning around long-term negative patterns of thought requires you to recognize your own automatic thoughts and change them step by step. That's easier said than done. Your unhelpful thought patterns have often existed for many years.

So here's how to change them in three steps.

### Step one:

Become aware of your thoughts. You can keep a written record of your thoughts for this purpose. This will help you to analyze your thoughts more precisely and identify those that are inappropriate and unhelpful. In the first column of the record, describe the specific circumstances. In the second, write down all the thoughts crossing your mind at that moment. And in the third column write down how these thoughts impact on your emotions and behavior.

An example of a student's thought record.

<p>①</p> <p>Situation-related events that trigger unpleasant emotions</p>	<p>②</p> <p>Automatic thoughts that are triggered by the given situation</p>	<p>③</p> <p>Consequences: emotions and behavior</p>
<p>Two days before your exam you're sitting at home at your desk and studying.</p>	<p>"I'm bound to fail. I probably won't be able to remember anything I've learned, and I'll fail across the board."</p>	<p>Fear</p> <p>You decide to stay at your desk and study deep into the night, even though you can't concentrate anymore.</p>
<p>You're throwing a party, and two of your friends head home at 10 pm.</p>	<p>"They didn't like the party. They were bored. I mess up everything – I'm a total loser. Everyone else is probably just staying out of pity."</p>	<p>Sadness, guilt, shame</p> <p>So you make a special effort to please all the other guests and keep on asking whether they like the party.</p>

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### 2. Step two:

Question your own thoughts. Subject your thoughts to a reality check. The following questions can help you identify inappropriate thoughts and develop alternatives.

- Do my thoughts actually correspond to reality? Has this been confirmed?  
Is there any way I can know this? What's the evidence for this? What's the evidence against this?
- How does that thought make me feel? Is the thought appropriate and realistic?
- Does the thought help me to achieve what I want?  
Does it help me to behave the way I want to?
- Is this really the case? What evidence/facts support my point of view?
- Is there an opposite point of view?
- What would I advise a friend to do?
- What would my best friend advise me to do?
- How important is it really for me? What's more important?
- What could happen in the worst case? How bad would it really be?  
How likely is this to happen?
- Which difficult situations in my life have I already mastered or gone through?  
How did I manage that?
- What will I think about this tomorrow, in one year, in ten years?
- What would someone think who was less emotionally involved in the situation than I am?
- Just how much does this really impact on me personally? How do other (neutral, independent, experienced) people see the situation?

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### Step three:

Reformulate your thoughts. In a fourth column note down some more helpful and realistic thoughts that are relevant to the situation. The purpose of the fifth column is to verify whether the alternative thoughts are effective. In the column, enter any changes to your emotions and behavior.

Examples from the perspective of a student.

<p style="text-align: center;">④</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Alternative, more appropriate thoughts: Is there a different way to look at the situation? Which thoughts are more helpful and realistic for me?</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">⑤</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Result: emotions and behavior</b></p>
<p>“Right now, I have no way of knowing if I will fail. I’ll study as well as I can and try to go into the exam relaxed. If I can’t remember something during the exam, it’s not so bad, I’ll continue on to another task and try again later. I can do it, I’ve succeeded in other exams.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Nervousness</p> <p>I’ll study for no more than three hours and then read a chapter of my favorite book to relax and as a reward for studying.</p>
<p>“Too bad they’re leaving already; it would have been great to have partied with them for a while longer. They’re probably tired or they have something to do tomorrow. There’s bound to be other opportunities to party.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">(Moderate) sadness, disappointment</p> <p>“I’ll say goodbye to them and go back to my other friends and carry on partying.”</p>

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Space for your own examples.

<p>①</p> <p><b>Situation:</b> Events you experience in the present that generate unpleasant emotions</p>	<p>②</p> <p><b>Automatic thoughts</b> that occur in the situation</p>	<p>③</p> <p><b>Consequences:</b> emotions and behavior</p>	<p>④</p> <p><b>Alternative, more appropriate thoughts:</b> "Can I also look at the situation differently? Which thoughts are more helpful and realistic for me?"</p>	<p>⑤</p> <p><b>Result:</b> emotions and behavior</p>