

# Mental Filters



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# What are Mental Filters/ Cognitive Distortions

- Cognitive distortions are skewed or unreasonable Patterns of thought that may result in negative emotions and behaviors are known as cognitive distortions. These patterns involve consistent departures from logical thinking, leading individuals to perceive reality inaccurately. Rooted mainly in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) principles, these distortions are recognized as significant factors in mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and similar disorders.



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# The CBT Triangle



- The Cognitive Triangle is a foundational concept in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) demonstrating the interconnectedness of our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors through a triangle model consisting of three points:
  - 1. Thoughts (Cognitions):** These are our beliefs, perceptions, and automatic thoughts about situations.
  - 2. Emotions (Feelings):** These are our feelings in response to our thoughts about a situation.
  - 3. Behaviors (Actions):** These are the actions we take based on our emotions and thoughts.
- The concept revolves around the interdependence of three key elements: thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. To illustrate, a pessimistic thought can trigger an adverse emotional response, potentially resulting in detrimental behavior. Conversely, partaking in certain actions can shape our mental and emotional state.
- Cognitive distortions emerge at the “Thoughts” vertex of the triangle. These are illogical or prejudiced thought patterns that can adversely affect how we perceive an event or circumstance. When our thinking is tainted by these distortions, it can lead to the emergence of negative or intense emotions, which may subsequently drive us towards unhelpful behaviors

# Example

**SITUATION:** Kim shares her wish to spend the weekend with friends, while Colt has been anticipating a tranquil weekend at home. He finds himself in a quandary, wanting to support Kim's plans yet reluctant to abandon his own for a restful retreat.

1. **Thought (Cognition with a Cognitive Distortions):** "If I express my preference to stay home, Kim might interpret it as a lack of appreciation for her friends or our shared moments."

2. **Cognitive Distortion at Play: Catastrophizing** – Colt is magnifying the potential negative impact of expressing his own needs.

3. **Emotions:** his skewed perception may lead Colt to experience feelings of anxiety and resentment, stemming from the belief that he is trapped without choices

4. **Behavior:** Driven by his inclination to people-pleasing and influenced by his emotions, Colt consents to the trip despite it conflicting with his true desires. This suppression of his own preferences may give rise to passive-aggressive behavior or a sense of bitterness throughout the journey.



# Types of Filters/ Distortions

## **Overgeneralization:**

**Example:** After forgetting his Anniversary, once, he thinks, "I always mess things up in our marriage."

## **Magnification and Minimization:**

**Example:** He received an award at work for a project he over saw but blew it off as not big deal. That week he forgot to pick his wife up at the train station and condemned himself as the worst husband ever.

## **Catastrophizing:**

**Example:** His wife is a little distant one evening because she had a tiring day at work. He immediately thinks, "She's going to leave me. Our marriage is doomed."



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# Types of Filters/ Distortions

## **Emotional Reasoning:**

**Example:** He feels intimidated at work by his colleagues. He determines he is not a good employee and should quit.

## **Magical Thinking:**

**Example:** He believes that if he's just selfless all the time, it will guarantee that his wife will never be unhappy with him.

## **Mind Reading:**

**Example:** His wife did not comment on his new haircut. she must think it's horrible



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# Types of Filters/ Distortions

## **Jumping to Conclusions:**

**Example:** He got laid off due to cut backs at work. When his told his wife she sighed. He immediately felt "She thinks I'm a failure.

## **Disqualifying the Positive:**

**Example:** His wife frequently compliments him on how helpful he is around the house, but he brushes off the compliments and focuses on the time she got upset because he didn't do a task she was counting on him to complete.

## **Personalization:**

**Example:** His wife is feeling down because of issues with her friend. He believes her sadness is entirely because of something he must have done.



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# Types of Filters/ Distortions

## **"Should" Statements:**

**Example:** I should always know what the best solution is within my marriage without having to bother my wife with the problem.

## **Fortune Telling:**

**Example:** After a disagreement with his boss, he thinks, "My boss hates me and will probably fire me."

## **All or Nothing Thinking (Black and White Thinking):**

**Example:** He forgot to send a birthday card to his wife's family member and concludes, "I can never get things right. I'm completely thoughtless."



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# How to Check Your Filters

- **EDUCATE YOURSELF:** To begin with, familiarize yourself with different types of cognitive distortions. This foundational knowledge will help you recognize them in your thoughts.
- **ENGAGE IN MINDFULNESS:** Being mindful means being fully present and aware of your thoughts, emotions, and environment without passing judgment. By incorporating mindfulness into your routine:
  - a. *You can observe your thoughts without getting caught up in them.*
  - b. *You can notice when you're having distorted thoughts and refrain from reacting impulsively.*
  - c. *Overtime you can recognize patterns in your thinking.*
- **PRACTICE SELF-REFLECTION:** Set aside a few minutes daily, like during peaceful morning or evening times, to reflect on your thoughts and actions. Consider how they align with reality or if there are any distortions present.



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# How to Check Your Filters

**BEWARE OF STRANGE STATEMENTS:** Be cautious of statements containing words such as "always," "never," "everyone," or "no one." These words frequently indicate all-or-nothing thinking, which is a prevalent cognitive distortion.

**PRACTICE PATIENCE WITH YOURSELF:** The process of identifying and dealing with cognitive distortions is ongoing. With regular mindfulness and reflection, you will improve in recognizing them over time.



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# How to Check Your Filters

- **CHALLENGE YOUR THOUGHTS:** Whenever you come across a negative or irrational thought:
  - a. question its validity. Is it a factual representation?
  - b. Probe for evidence supporting this belief. Is there actual proof or is it an assumption.
  - c. Contemplate alternative viewpoints or explanations that you might not have considered.
- **PRACTICE CRITICAL THINKING:** Foster curiosity and skepticism towards your own thoughts. Instead of accepting them as indisputable facts, question their sources, accuracy, and implications.
- **BE MINDFUL OF EMOTIONS:** Intense or abrupt emotions may signal hidden cognitive distortions. When you experience a strong emotional reaction, practice mindfulness to identify the thoughts or beliefs that are causing these feelings.



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# Let's Challenge Colt's Mental Filters

- **Challenged Thought:** "I can express my feelings and preferences. A healthy relationship requires compromise. If I honestly communicate my needs, Kim will understand."

## **This improved outlook may lead to:**

- Emotion: Serenity, assurance, and empathy.
- Behavior: Colt can calmly talk to Kim about his feelings, leading to a possible compromise, like visiting her friends for a single day or rescheduling the visit for another weekend.
- Colt can start establishing boundaries and prioritizing his needs in the relationship by identifying the patterns of his people-pleasing tendencies and the underlying distortions that drive them.



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- Detaching from thoughts, especially those that trigger strong emotions or appear unquestionably valid, can pose a challenge. It's essential to recognize that thoughts may not always align with facts, and emotions, though legitimate, may not always accurately reflect reality. Here are a few techniques to aid in distancing oneself from such thoughts:
- Practice mindfulness by observing thoughts without judgment, like watching clouds pass in the sky or leaves flow in a stream.

### **Challenge the Thought: Ask yourself a probing question.**

- Is this thought based on fact or interpretation?
- Are there instances where this thought might not be true?
- What evidence do I have that supports or contradicts this thought?

**Externalizing Your Thoughts:** Naming or visualizing a thought as an external entity can be beneficial. For instance, you can identify a repetitive negative thought as "the critic" and acknowledge its presence when it arises by saying, "Oh, here comes the critic again."

**Try reframing your thoughts:** Rather than thinking "I always mess up," try shifting your perspective to "I made a mistake this time, but I've also had many successes."



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