

# Do you experience Cognitive Distortive thinking?

Cognitive Distortions are unrealistic thoughts that we habitually create, reinforcing negative thoughts, emotions, and moods. Many times these thoughts do not paint the whole picture and are not representative of the actual situation, but to oneself may seem totally logical. While common and normal—especially in academic environments—Cognitive Distortions can impact one’s confidence, motivation, and social interactions.

Some common Cognitive Distortions you may have experienced:

## All-or-Nothing Thinking

Thinking in absolutes—always, never, every—which forces you into believing a situation can only go two ways.

*Ex. “I never do well on assessments so I’ll probably fail this one too.”*

**Change your perspective:** *“Since my last assessment, I’ve practiced a lot, so I’m hopeful my skills will help me perform better this time.”*

## Discounting the Positives

Choosing to ignore positive feedback and instead focusing on the negative, or completely discounting your success to luck or outside factors.

*Ex. “The only reason I did well on that exam was because he made it easy, and I made good guesses.”*

**Change your perspective:** *“I did well on that exam because I studied hard, and I deserved it!”*

## Mind Reading

Interpreting the thoughts of others without any evidence, believing we “know” what others are thinking without considering other (more probable) possibilities.

*Ex. “I won’t even bother running for that position because I know my classmates don’t like me, and they won’t vote for me.”*

**Change your perspective:** *“I’m going to run for that position to give my classmates an opportunity to get to know me—once they hear my speech, I think I have a chance.”*

## Stanford Duck Syndrome

The belief that, at surface level, others are accomplishing all they do seamlessly and effortlessly; however, they do not allow you to see the work or stress they are under in order to do what they do.

*Imagine a duck floating on water--on the surface everything seems calm and easy, but if you glance underwater, the duck is continuously peddling its legs to keep afloat.*

*Ex. "I barely see her in the library, yet she always gets good grades and I know she still has time to exercise and go out-- she makes school look so easy."*

**Change your perspective:** *"She's probably studying at home and I know she must be just as busy as I am, especially with all that she does--she just may not show it as much."*

## **Emotional Reasoning**

Blurring reality with emotion—the belief that how one feels reflects the way things really are.

*Ex. "I feel like I've been such a bad friend, therefore I know I'm a bad friend."*

**Change your perspective:** *"I know I haven't always felt this way so I'll wait it out, but if it's still bothering me I should talk to my friends about it."*

## **Catastrophizing**

Believing that a current or predicted situation will lead to a drastic, worst case scenario outcome that's life changing, leading to intense personal pressure for the given situation.

*Ex. "If I don't ace this ocular disease exam, I'll never get into the residency of my choice."*

**Change your perspective:** *"I'm going to try my best on this exam and course, while keeping in mind that residencies look at more than just grades when assessing applicants."*