

# The Ten Major Thinking Errors Known As "Cognitive Distortions"

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|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. All-or-nothing thinking    | You see things in black-or-white categories. If a situations falls short of perfect, you see it as a total failure. When a young woman on a diet ate a spoonful of ice cream she told herself. "I've blown my diet completely." This thought upset her so much that she gobbled down an entire quart of ice cream!                          |
| 2. Overgeneralization         | You see a single negative event, such as a romantic rejection or a career reversal, as a never-ending pattern of defeat by using words such as "never" or "always." In response to finding some bird dung on his car, a depressed salesperson exclaimed, "Just my luck! Birds are always crapping on my car."                               |
| 3. Mental filter              | You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively. For example, you give a speech and get many complements and one small critique. You obsess for days on the later remark and ignore all of the positive feedback.   |
| 4. Discounting the positive   | You reject the positive experiences by insisting they don't count. If you do a good job, you tell yourself that anyone could have done as well.   |
| 5. Jumping to Conclusions     | You interpret things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion. Mind reading: Without checking it out, you conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you. Fortune-telling: You predict that things will turn out badly -- e.g. "I lost my job; I'm going to lose my house." This is also called "catastrophizing. |
| 6. Magnification              | You exaggerate the importance of your problems and shortcomings, or you minimize the importance of your desirable qualities.  |
| 7. Emotional reasoning        | You assume that your negative emotions reflect the way things really are. For example, a person will say, "It feels like this depression will never end; therefore it must be so," or "I'm scared of flying; therefore it must be unsafe."  |
| 8. "Should statements"        | Instead of accepting things as they are, you tell yourself that they should be the way you hoped or expected them to be – similar to "musts," "ought tos," and "have tos." Many people try to motivate themselves with "shoulds" or "shouldn'ts" which usually leads to a rebellious urge to do the opposite.                               |
| 9. Labeling                   | Labeling is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking. Instead of saying "I made a mistake," you conclude, "I'm a loser." These are useless abstractions that lead to low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. You can also label others, calling someone an "S.O.B." when they did something to anger you. This leads to dehumanization. |
| 10. Personalization and blame | Personalization occurs when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn't under your control -- e.g., "it's my fault their canoe hit that submerged rock." Blame holds the other person responsible-"My marriage is bad because my spouse is a jerk." Blame often leads to counter-blame from the other party.           |

# Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

Nelson, P. (1994). There's a hole in my sidewalk: The romance of self-discovery. Beyond Words Publishing

I

I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in  
I am lost . . . I am helpless  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place,  
But it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit.  
My eyes are open,  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.