Spot the Thought, Find the Pattern

Notice automatic thoughts, assumptions and rules without judging yourself.

Thoughts are not always facts. First capture your own words, then explore whether a thinking pattern might be narrowing your view. You do not have to force a positive thought.

1 NOTICE THE MOMENT

Choose one specific situation rather than a whole difficult day.

What happened? Where were you, and who was involved?

Example: My colleague did not reply to my message.

2 NAME THE FEELING

Feelings and thoughts are different kinds of experiences.

What emotions did you notice? How strong (0–100%)?

Example: Anxiety 75%; sadness 40%.

What did you notice in your body or urge to do?

Example: Tight chest; wanted to check my phone repeatedly.

Helpful distinction: “I feel anxious” names an emotion. “They must be upset with me” is a thought about what may be happening.

Catch the Words

Write down the exact thought before deciding whether it is accurate.

3 AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

A quick thought, image or prediction that appeared in the moment.

What went through your mind at that moment?

Example: They are annoyed with me. I have done something wrong.

How much did you believe this thought at the time (0–100%)?

Example: 85%.

4 LOOK UNDERNEATH

An assumption often has an “if ... then ...” form; a rule often says “must” or “should”.

Is there an underlying assumption? Try “If ..., then ...”.

Example: If someone does not reply, it means I have upset them.

Is there a personal rule or demand? Try “I must ...” or “I should ...”.

Example: I must never disappoint anyone.

Not every thought has a deeper assumption or rule. Leave a box blank if it does not fit. These are possibilities to explore, not labels you have to accept.

Which Thinking Pattern Fits?

Tick any patterns that seem relevant. More than one may apply, or none.

☐ **Black & white thinking**

Seeing only extremes, without middle ground.

Example: If I am not perfect, I have failed.

☐ **Overgeneralising**

Turning one event into a rule about everything.

Example: I got this wrong; I always mess things up.

☐ **Mind-reading**

Assuming you know what another person thinks.

Example: They think I am boring.

☐ **Catastrophising**

Predicting the worst possible outcome.

Example: This will be a disaster.

☐ **Emotional reasoning**

Treating a feeling as proof of a fact.

Example: I feel anxious, so it must be dangerous.

☐ **Should rules**

Using rigid expectations or demands.

Example: I should always be able to cope.

Which pattern feels most relevant, and what words suggest it?

Example: “They think I am boring” may be mind-reading because I cannot know their thoughts.

Check, Reframe and Try

A thought is a hypothesis, not a verdict.

5 CHECK THE EVIDENCE

Consider what you know and what you might be assuming.

What facts support the thought? (Separate facts from guesses.)

Example: I have not received a reply yet.

What facts or other explanations might also fit?

Example: They may be busy; they have replied later before.

6 FIND A FLEXIBLE VIEW

Aim for a fair, believable thought rather than forced positivity.

What is a more balanced or flexible way of seeing this?

Example: I do not know why they have not replied. I can wait before drawing a conclusion.

What small, helpful action could you try? What might you learn?

Example: Wait until tomorrow rather than checking repeatedly; notice what happens.

After reflecting, how strongly do you believe the original thought (0–100%)? You can add this rating in the final box above. Change is not required; noticing is useful learning.