

## Cognitive Errors

The following are some common errors or distortions in the way we think.

1. **All-or-nothing thinking:** You see things in black and white categories instead of on a continuum. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure – *“If I don’t get a distinction on my exam, I have failed”*.
2. **Overgeneralising:** You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern - *“Because I felt uncomfortable at the meeting, I don’t have what it takes to make friends”*.
3. **Mental Filter:** You pick out a negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that eventually your vision of all reality becomes darkened – *“I got told off for turning up late – they must think I’m hopeless at this job”*.
4. **Disqualifying the positive:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for some reason of another. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences – *“Just because I did okay in my speech doesn’t mean I can speak well – I must’ve just got lucky”*.
5. **Jumping to conclusions:** You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.
  - a. **Mind-reading:** You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and don’t bother to check this out – *“He’s thinking that I don’t know what I’m doing in this job”*.
  - b. **Fortune-telling:** You anticipate that things will turn out badly and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact – *“I’ll panic – I’ll be a complete mess”; “I won’t enjoy myself”*.
6. **Magnifying (catastrophising) or minimising:** You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your mistakes or someone else’s achievements) or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other person’s imperfections) – *“Getting a mediocre evaluation proves how dumb I am”; “Getting a high mark doesn’t mean I’m smart”*.
7. **Emotional reasoning:** You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are; *“I feel it, therefore it must be true”*.
8. **Should statements:** You try to motivate yourself with “shoulds” and “shouldn’ts” as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. “Musts” and “oughts” are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements towards others, you feel angry, frustrated and/or resentful.
9. **Labelling and mislabelling:** This is an extreme form of overgeneralisation. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself; *“I’m a loser”*. When someone else’s behaviour displeases you, you attach a negative label to him/her; *“He’s a loser”*. Mislabelling involves describing an event with language that is highly coloured and emotionally loaded.
10. **Personalising:** You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event that in fact you were not primarily responsible for – *“That guy was looking in my direction – he must be thinking how strange I look”*.