

Thinking traps	Examples
<p><b>All or nothing:</b> Giving up unless you can achieve exactly what you want. In reality a better solution might be that you could persist with a course of action, or you could explore alternatives</p>	<p>“If I can’t get the job in this organisation, then I’m just going to give up ever trying for anything there again.”          “I won’t pass the exam, so there’s no point in trying.”</p>
<p><b>Overgeneralisation:</b> Forming a sweeping judgement with little or no evidence to back it up. Using the word such as ‘always’ or ‘never’ to describe situations or events, when in fact there may be exceptions.</p>	<p>“I always mess up job interviews.”          “Employers never take on people unless they meet all the selection criteria.”</p>
<p><b>Mental filter:</b> Focusing attention to the bad stuff that happens to you, filtering out the good. For example, honing in on criticism and ignoring compliments.</p>	<p>“A couple of people looked bored so I must have done a poor job with that presentation.”          “1 of my evaluation sheets out of 15 had a critical comment, so the day must have been a disaster.”</p>
<p><b>Catastrophising:</b> Imagining the worst and that you won’t be able to cope with the outcome. In actuality, worst-case scenarios hardly ever happen. When they do, we are often surprisingly able to cope with it.</p>	<p>“I’m going to make a complete idiot out of myself, everyone will be talking about me and I’ll die of embarrassment.”</p>
<p><b>Must and should:</b> Telling yourself how you ‘should’, ‘must’ or ‘ought to’ feel and behave. A bit like you are a child with a parent telling you what to do. The result is constant anxiety and disappointment with yourself and/or with others around you.</p>	<p>“I must get a better paid job.”          “I should move to a different industry.”          “My husband/wife ought to stay in a stable job until the kids are grown up.”</p>
<p><b>Fallacy of fairness:</b> The world is not always a fair place. Expectations of fairness can create a lot of anger and resentment when seemingly unjust outcomes occur.</p>	<p>“It won’t be fair if I don’t get this promotion, as I’ve worked so hard.”</p>
<p><b>Perfectionism:</b> Exhaustively seeking the best, obsessing over outcomes and comparing yourself with others. This can lead to indecision, procrastination and/or self-criticism.</p>	<p>“I can’t hand in this report yet, until I’m sure it’s 100% perfect.”          “I may miss the deadline on this application form, as I don’t feel it’s good enough”</p>
<p><b>Fortune telling:</b> Predicting the future will turn out badly. In reality predicting this is impossible as there are too many unknowns.</p>	<p>“I will never be able to get over my anxiety.”          “My new boss is going to be a complete nightmare.”</p>
<p><b>Polarised thinking:</b> Looking at situations in black or white terms only. Things are either brilliant or terrible, a success or a failure. In reality, there’s usually a more nuanced explanation. In addition, one stumbling block rarely means a project is a failure.</p>	<p>“If I make one mistake, this project will be a complete failure.”          “If I don’t get a distinction in my Masters assignment, then I’ve messed up.”</p>
<p><b>Mind reading:</b> Supposing that people are thinking the worst of you. In reality we can rarely tell what someone’s really thinking!</p>	<p>“Other people think I’m stupid.”          “She doesn’t like me.”          “My supervisor doesn’t think I’m any good.”</p>
<p><b>Labelling:</b> Using one negative word to sum up what we think about ourselves. Rarely can anyone be summed up by only one word!</p>	<p>“I’m a loser.”          “I’m a failure.”          “I’m terrible at my job.”</p>

<b>Overestimating danger:</b> Overestimating the danger/risk involved.	“I feel stressed: I’m going to have a heart attack.” “I’ll go crazy.”
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[Adapted from Creative Career Coaching by Hambly and Bomford (2019)]