

Identifying Automatic Thoughts

In this example, imagine you are thinking about an upcoming test or exam in a challenging class. In the left column are examples of thoughts that you might notice coming into your mind automatically. You can counter these negative thoughts with more productive, positive thoughts like those in the right column.

By paying attention to your thoughts and replacing the negative thoughts that can sometimes pop up automatically with positive thoughts, you may find it easier to cope with worrisome or stressful situations like tests.

Automatic Thoughts	Coping Thoughts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm going to fail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I probably won't get an A, but maybe I'll do okay.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm not prepared at all - Why didn't I study more? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Next time, I'll try to be more organized and start studying earlier - Given how much I had on my plate, I studied as much as I could have. - I had to choose between sleeping and studying, and I chose sleeping. That's an okay choice to make even if it means I'm less prepared.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My GPA is going to go way down 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'll have to work really hard to get my grades back up, but I can do it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My teacher is going to think I'm a slacker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I should go talk to my teacher about the test.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My parents are going to be so pissed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My family (and I) should be happy with my best performance – there's nothing else I can do but try hard.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why should I even bother taking the test - I should just skip class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I should at least see if there is any way to reschedule the test. - I can do this! I've been stressed before, and I'm generally a good student.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This school is too hard - This class is too hard for me - I can't do this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm at a demanding school – expectations are high, but I know I'm getting an amazing education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everyone else gets this stuff - I'm such an idiot - I bet I'm not even in the top 10% of my class - I can't ever do anything right 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I have strengths other than being the highest achieving kid in school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm never going to get into a good college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One test probably won't ruin everything. I just need to make a plan about next steps to make sure I remain competitive for college applications - If I went to Harvard, college probably wouldn't be all that fun anyway – I'd constantly be stressed about the work. I'd rather have a good balance of working hard and enjoying my time.