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*Think Outside The Box*

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## Transforming Your Thoughts

Liya Panayotova, Psychologist, liyap.com5.9K reads

As you know by now, the way we think has a great influence on how we feel and what we do. When we fall into the trap of cognitive distortions, we create patterns of thoughts that hold us back from living our life to the fullest.

So let's see what we can do about these cognitive distortions - how can we challenge and replace them with the rational alternatives.

Now that you have recognized the cognitive distortions, linked to your fear of public speaking, you are ready for the next step. But, before we proceed, it's important for you to know that most of us deal with cognitive distortions. They often come as a regular part of life and don't imply that you are somehow damaged or incapable. Below you will find a comprehensive collection of steps you can take, to tackle cognitive distortions.

The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center. Below it, three quiz cards are displayed in a row. Each card has a white border and a central image. The first card shows a pair of red roller skates on a wooden deck. The second card shows a fan of colorful pencils. The third card shows a Ferris wheel at sunset. Below each image is the text 'Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2' for the first two, and 'Quiz: Flags in Europe' for the third. To the right of the cards is a red button with white text that says 'See all quizzes =>'.

## Examine the Evidence

Looking back to your previous experiences with public speaking can help you to identify the base of your irrational beliefs. If you are prone to self-critique, you should try to identify all the situations in which you were successful and thus counteract the negative, unrealistic belief that you are not good enough. For example, each time you managed to speak in public, regardless of how you felt.

## **Double Standard Method**

Remember how you talk to a friend who is in a similar situation as you? You are, probably, compassionate and gentle, but when it comes to yourself, your self-talk can be unfriendly and even harsh. Instead, try to use the same soft and understanding approach with yourself. For example, instead of, “Oh, I am such a coward for being so afraid of speaking in front of people” try “Public speaking is challenging for me, and I am afraid. But it’s okay to be afraid, and I am here, ready to speak, despite my fear, which is very brave of me.”

## **Thinking in Shades of Gray**

Don’t write off public speaking as a complete disaster, before anything has even happened. Instead, try to evaluate all aspects of your experience on a scale, ranging from 0 to 100.

For example, “The last time I had a public speech, my fear (on a scale of 0 to 100) was 76”.

Even if your speech or circumstances weren’t ideal, evaluate how successful your speech was, on the same 0-100 scale, while trying to remain positive, yet realistic.

For example, “Even though my fear of public speaking last time was 76, I did stand up in front of all those people and spoke. It wasn’t brilliant, but it’s wasn’t a complete disaster either. My performance was successfully at 60 (on the mentioned scale).”

## **Change Your Perspective**

Sometimes it’s hard to estimate objectively how realistic our thoughts are. If you are unsure whether your anxiety regarding public speaking is exaggerated or unwarranted, you should get an external point of view, by checking in with few close friends or family members. Their perspective may offer a new angle on the same situation.

## **Examine Your Definitions**

One of the most common cognitive distortions is giving yourself a label, such as “loser”, “weak” or “incompetent”. It is important to try and uncover these and other global labels you created. That will reveal what specific behaviors or behavioral patterns you marked with these labels. In this way, you’ll identify these patterns (for example: “I think of myself as a loser when I am afraid of public speaking”) and stop overgeneralizing them on your entire personality (“Just because I fear certain situations, it doesn’t mean that I am weak or a loser.”)

## **Re-Attribution**

Rather than seeing yourself as the center and direct cause of everything that can go wrong during your public speaking (or other situations), try to come up with other, realistic factors that may be a part of the problem. In this way, you’ll invest your energy into identifying these factors and taking them into account, instead of beating yourself up and telling yourself how you should (not) feel. However, it is crucial to remember that this step is not about avoiding

responsibility and blaming others for how you feel. You are the one in charge of your behavior and emotions – acknowledging that fact will empower you to do much better.

## Cost-Benefit Analysis

You can create a list of the advantages and disadvantages of your identified feelings, thoughts, and behaviors regarding public speaking. Then, make sure you take a close look at them and analyze what they may be enabling.

For example, if you work as a team member on a project, having a fear of public speak, can enable you to deny the role of a presenter and make sure you always have someone else to do it for you, out of sympathy.

One of the main reasons why it's so hard to abandon our deeply-rooted patterns of thoughts, behavior, and emotions, is because they don't only cause us discomfort, but some hidden gain as well. Find out what it is that your fear of public speaking is enabling. Naturally, this is very difficult to do, and may require the help of a licensed therapist, since those hidden gains are often a part of our subconsciousness.

## Question Your Distortions

An extra tool for examining and disputing your cognitive distortions, when an irrational belief has been identified, is challenging it with following questions:

- Is there any objective evidence, that is not just in my head, for and against this thought?
- What's the worst that can realistically happen? Can I survive that?
- Do I really must, should, or have to...?
- Can I entirely control this situation? Can I accept the things I can't control?
- Will this be important to me in a week, month or a year?
- Am I aggravating the problem by seeing it this way?

Remember, you are attacking your irrational beliefs while being supportive and kind to yourself!

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