

The language we use in everyday life both represents and impacts how we experience our world. We attempt to capture thoughts and ideas, and to describe what we see around us using words. Inevitably, things get “lost in translation.” We lose information through “Generalizations”, “Deletions” of information, and “Cognitive Distortion.” Distortion is where some aspects of ideas and experiences are given more weight and focus than others. We all do this both consciously and unconsciously, and how we do this provides pointers to our underlying beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world.

**1. All or Nothing Thinking:** Seeing things as black or white, right or wrong, with nothing in between. Essentially, “if I’m not perfect, then I’m a failure.”

- ♦ *I didn’t finish writing that paper so it was a complete waste of time.*
- ♦ *There’s no point in playing if I’m not 100% in shape.*
- ♦ *They didn’t show, they are completely unreliable.*

**2. Overgeneralization:** Using words like *always* or *never* in relation to a single event or experience.

- ♦ *I’ll never get that promotion.*
- ♦ *She always does that.*

**3. Minimizing or Magnifying. (Also Catastrophizing):**

Seeing things as dramatically more or less important than they actually are. Often creating a “catastrophe” that follows.

- ♦ *Because my boss publicly thanked her, she’ll get that promotion, not me.*
- ♦ *I forgot that email! That means my boss won’t trust me again. I won’t get that raise and my wife will leave me.*

**4. “Shoulds”:** Using “should”, “need to”, “must”, or “ought to” to motivate oneself. Then, feeling guilty when you don’t follow through (or anger and resentment when someone else doesn’t follow through.)

- ♦ *I should have gotten the painting done this week.*
- ♦ *They ought to have been more considerate of my feelings, they should know I would be upset.*

**5. Labeling:** Attaching a negative label to yourself or others following a single event.

- ♦ *I didn’t stand up to my co-worker, I’m such a wimp.*
- ♦ *What an idiot, he couldn’t even see that coming!*

**6. Jumping to Conclusions:**

**a. Mind-Reading:** Making negative assumptions about how people see you without evidence or factual support. Your friend is preoccupied and you don’t ask why.

You’re thinking -

- ♦ *She thinks I’m exaggerating again.*
- ♦ *He still hasn’t forgiven me for telling Fred about his illness.*

**b. Fortune Telling:** Making negative predictions about the future without evidence or factual support.

- ♦ *I won’t be able to sell my house and I’ll be stuck here (even though the market is good.)*
- ♦ *No one will understand. I won’t be invited back again (even though they are supportive friends.)*

**7. Discounting the Positive:** Not acknowledging the positive. Saying anyone could have done it, or insisting that your positive actions, qualities, or achievements don’t count.

- ♦ *That doesn’t count, anyone could have done it.*
- ♦ *I’ve only cut back from smoking 40 cigarettes a day to 10. It doesn’t count until I quit completely.*

**8. Blame & Personalization:** Blaming yourself when you weren’t entirely responsible, or blaming others and denying your role in the situation.

- ♦ *If only I was younger I would have gotten the job.*
- ♦ *If only I hadn’t said that, they wouldn’t have...*
- ♦ *If only she hadn’t yelled at me, I wouldn’t have been angry and had the car accident.*

**9. Emotional Reasoning:** I feel, therefore I am. Assuming that a feeling is true without digging deeper to see if this is accurate.

- ♦ *I feel like such an idiot (It must be true)*
- ♦ *I feel guilty (I must have done something wrong.)*
- ♦ *I feel really bad for yelling at my partner, I must be really selfish and inconsiderate.*

**10. Mental Filter:** Allowing (dwelling on) one negative detail to spoil enjoyment, happiness, hope, etc.

♦ You have a great time at a restaurant with friends but your chicken was undercooked and that spoiled the whole evening for you.