

Fifteen Styles of Distorted Thinking

1. **Filtering:** You take negative details and magnify them, while filtering out all positive aspects of a situation.
2. **Polarized Thinking:** Things are always black or white, good or bad. You have to be perfect or you're a failure – there is no middle ground.
3. **Overgeneralization:** You come to a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence. If something bad happened once, you expect it to happen over and over again.
4. **Mind Reading:** Without their saying so, you know what people are feeling and why they act the way they do. In particular, you are able to divine how people are feeling toward you.
5. **Catastrophizing:** You expect disaster. You notice or hear about a problem and start “What ifs” – What if tragedy strikes? What if it happens to you?
6. **Personalization:** Thinking that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to you. You also compare yourself to others, trying to determine who's smarter, better looking, etc.
7. **Control Fallacies:** If you feel *externally controlled*, you see yourself as helpless, a victim of fate. The fallacy of *internal control*, by contrast, has you responsible for the pain and happiness of everyone around you.
8. **Fallacy of Fairness:** You feel resentful because you think you know what's fair, but other people won't agree with you.
9. **Blaming:** You hold other people responsible for your pain, or tack the other tack and blame yourself for every problem or reversal.
10. **Shoulds:** You have a list of ironclad rules about how you and other people *should* act. People who break those rules anger you, and you feel guilty if you violate those rules.
11. **Emotional Reasoning:** You believe that what you feel must be true – automatically. If you *feel* naive and boring, you must *be* naive and boring.
12. **Fallacy of Change:** You expect that other people will change to suit you if you just pressure or cajole them enough. You feel the need to change people since your hopes for happiness seem to depend entirely on them.
13. **Global Labelling:** You generalize 1 or 2 qualities into a global negative.
14. **Being “Right” Fallacy:** You are continually on trial to prove that your opinions and actions are correct. Being wrong is unthinkable and you will go to any length to demonstrate your “rightness.”
15. **Heaven's Reward Fallacy:** You expect all your sacrifice and self-denial to pay off, as if someone was keeping score. You feel bitter when the reward does not come.

Fifteen Styles of Distorted Thinking: Exercise

This exercise is designed to help identify distorted thinking. Draw a line between the sentence in the first column and the distortion which it exemplifies in the second column.

NOTE: some statements might contain more than one style of distorted thinking.

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| 1. Ever since Lisa, I've never trusted a redhead. | Filtering |
| 2. Quite a few people here seem smarter than I am. | Polarized Thinking |
| 3. If you'd be more sexually open, we would have a much happier marriage. | Overgeneralization |
| 4. I worked and raised these kids, and look what thanks I get! | Mind Reading |
| 5. You're either for me, or against me! | Catastrophizing |
| 6. I could have enjoyed the picnic, except the chicken was burnt. | Personalization |
| 7. I feel depressed; life must be pointless. | Control Fallacies |
| 8. You can't fight the system. | Fallacy of Fairness |
| 9. It's your fault we're always in the hole each month. | Shoulds |
| 10. He was a loser from the time he showed up. | Blaming |
| 11. It isn't fair that you go out and have fun while I'm stuck doing homework. | Emotional Reasoning |
| 12. He's always smiling, but I know he doesn't like me. | Fallacy of Change |
| 13. I don't care what you think, I'd do it exactly the same way again. | Global Labelling |
| 14. We haven't seen each other for two days, and I think the relationship is falling apart. | Being "Right" |
| 15. You should never ask people personal questions. | Heaven's Reward Fallacy |