

# 15 Thinking Errors

Adapted from [Burns, David D., MD. 1989. The Feeling Good Handbook. New York: William Morrow and Company](#)

## 1. All-or-Nothing Thinking

You see things in black-and-white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure. *“I messed up. See, I’ll never do this right.”*

## 2. Overgeneralization

You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. *“Things never work out for me.”*

## 3. Labeling & Mislabeled

This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Mislabeled involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself. *“I’m a loser.”*

When someone else’s behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him. *“He’s a damn louse.”*

## 4. Negative Filter

You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors the entire beaker of water. *“If only I hadn’t made that one stupid remark—now it’s all ruined.”*

## 5. Disqualifying the Positive

You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences. *“That good outcome was just luck.”*

## 6. Jumping to Conclusions

You make an interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion. *“I just looked at her and knew she was my soulmate.”*

## 7. Mind Reading

You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don’t bother to check this out. *“Uh oh. Looks like she’s mad at me.”*

## 8. Fortune Telling

You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact. *“I just know the boss is going to fire me. No point to even try anymore.”*

## 9. Catastrophizing

You exaggerate the importance of things, such as your goof-up or some bad situation. *“Oh, no. This is the end of the world.”*

## 10. Minimizing

You inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny, like the consequences of your misbehavior. (Or you could also shrink your own desirable qualities or another fellow’s imperfections). *“So I had a few drinks before driving? No big deal.”*

## 11. Victim Mentality

You blame other people and circumstances for your choices. You overlook and excuse the ways that you contributed to a problem. *“After what she said to me, what else could I do?”*

## 12. Emotional Reasoning

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are. *“I feel unqualified, so it must be true.”*

## 13. Should-ing

You try to motivate yourself with “should” and “shouldn’t,” as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. “Musts” and “oughts” are also offenders. The emotional consequences are guilt. *“I should have prevented that.”*

When you direct should/must statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment. *“They should have known what I wanted.”*

## 14. Personalizing

You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event, which in fact you were not primarily responsible for. *“My dad passed away when he did because of my attitude.”*

## 15. Rationalizing/Justifying

You point out others’ excesses to justify your own, choosing only favorable comparisons. *“So I get a little angry and loud with my kids. I don’t beat them like some guys do.”*