


Introducing the ‘ABC(D)’ Technique - identifying ‘self-talk’...

	<h3>The ABC of CBT</h3> <p>The ABC 3 column form is the staple CBT worksheet -: it helps us to catch our ‘thoughts – and we use it to match the thoughts to feelings and events – usually working <i>backwards!</i> With us filling in the ‘emotional and behavioural’ that is troubling us or causing us problems <i>first</i>, and then identifying the event(s) and the exact thought(s) that accompany it. These simple forms help us to build awareness of ‘how’ we think – they help us to see patterns and links over time – and most importantly, they help us see that our thoughts are often irrational, illogical and unhelpful, so that we can dispute them and replace with positive self talk....</p>
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I have an important exam approaching	‘I’m going to fail! This is unbearable, I can’t stand it. I’ll never be able to prepare for it, not with life the way it is right now. I’m useless, why am I bothering?’	Anxious. Can’t sleep or focus on anything.
My partner has ended our relationship.	I can’t live without her. I’ll never find anybody like her again. Everybody always breaks up with me. I’ll never be in a proper relationship. Life is not worth living if I don’t have somebody to love and take care of me.	Depressed – I have no interest in going out, or even showering!
My friend got a job we went for, not me!	That is unbelievable – he’s a thick. And he’s not even good looking. Or funny. Or anything. Oh no, I must be even worse than him then! Or the interviewers are total idiots! Yes, they are. And I hate him. It’s not fair!	Angry, aggressive – irritable and flying off the handle.

**Task: fill in an ABC worksheet to identify your thoughts (can be hypothetical or real)**

( form and flip chart – use hypotheticals - use a separate sheet if you prefer and/or need more space)

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## Introducing the A-B-C & D Worksheet with Examples



**After identifying our thoughts, we need to challenge them when they are irrational (dispute them with evidence and facts and alternative healthy thinking...) – so we add a fourth column ‘D’...**

The following table gives several examples to show you how it’s done...

Reminder – identifying your unhealthy thinking and deliberately disputing the thoughts with healthy rational thinking will bring healthy emotional responses –

A = Activating Event	B = Belief/thought	C = Consequence feelings/behaviour	D = Dispute with Evidence –
I have to give a presentation!	I am going to make a show of myself. It’s going to be AWFUL. I’ll be shaking, my mouth will be dry, I can’t do it. People will laugh at me.	Anxious, afraid, can’t concentrate on putting together the content... feel ill, can’t stop thinking about it.	Fortune telling as an absolute fact that ‘I AM’ going to make a show of myself is irrational. That’s fortune telling a future that I have no clue about. It would be more correct to say ‘I am afraid I’ll make a show of myself, but I don’t know how it will pan out’. Same goes for ‘I will be shaking’, ‘I can’t do it’, and ‘People will laugh at me’. Fortune telling! I simply fear these imaginings, I have no actual evidence those thoughts are rational and correct. I will ‘thought stop’ and disagree with and derail these thoughts as they occur rather than running them over and over in my head.
I heard that the gang were out for dinner last week – without me!	Nobody likes me. I’m dull. I’m not nice. Life is horrible. I’m not talking to them, I want to ‘get them back’. No – I want to make them love me. Oh, I can’t stop thinking about it...	Ashamed, humiliated, embarrassed, anxious, worried. Can’t stop thinking about it. Re-running movie of it over and over in my head. Keep talking to everyone about it, asking for reassurance.	It simply is not factual that ‘nobody’ in the world likes me. I have and have had people in my life that have shown they like me, it would be more correct to say that I’m having problems with my social networking right now that I plan to work on. I’m being very hard on myself stating that I ‘am’ dull and not nice – I’ve had plenty of experiences where I was happy and had fun in situations, my feelings and behaviour varies depending on situations and people and moods, just like everybody else. It would be more correct to say that I’m not happy with the way I feel and behave right now, and am aiming to change it. It’s not true that ‘life is horrible’, I can think of lots of things that are the total opposite of horrible. It would be more correct to say that I’m not enjoying life as I wish I would, I find things difficult right now. It’s not healthy for me to obsess about revenge on or reassurance from the gang in this situation. I can make a decision to live with this and accept it. I do not know the circumstances of what happened and I shouldn’t assume the worst. And, even if there is conflict, I don’t have to join in. Just because someone thinks little of you, you don’t have to agree with it.
I have an interview!	I haven’t a hope of getting this job. There’ll be hundreds of applicants and I can’t compete. I’ll be nervous and ‘ordinary’ and tongue tied. It’s unbearable. I can’t stop worrying about it. It’s not worth putting myself through this, after all I know what will happen.	Anxious, nervous, can’t face preparing, trying to ‘ignore it’ until I have to face it.	Stating ‘I haven’t a hope’ or ‘can’t compete’ is irrational as I cannot tell what will happen in the future. It would be more correct to say that I’m nervous and worried that I won’t get it and will contrast poorly with other applicants. Most people would feel that way. Yes, I expect I will probably be nervous, but that’s perfectly normal and most people are nervous at interviews. I shouldn’t label myself ‘ordinary’, everybody is unique, that term is redundant. I may or may not be ‘tongue tied, but what is that anyway? It’s not rational to imagine my tongue actually ‘tying’ and being unusable, I will change that statement, it’s not useful. Using the term ‘unbearable’ is not correct, I can in fact bear it, it would be more correct to say I’m nervous and would rather not be in a situation where I need to ‘bear’ it. It’s not helpful or rational to opt out of it because of fortune telling, it’s more correct to say that I have no idea what will happen.

## WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE? Disputing: helpful strategies to challenge automatic negative thoughts:

Consider the following suggested questions to help you dispute irrational thoughts...



### 1. What is the Evidence?

- What evidence do I have to support my thoughts?
- What evidence do I have against them?

### 2. What Alternative Views Are There?

- How might an outsider view this situation?
- How would I have viewed it before I got anxiety/depression?
- How much more likely are the new alternatives?

### 3. How much does thinking this way cost me?

- Does it help me, or stop me, from getting what I want? How?
- What might be the outcome of looking at things in a healthier way?

### 4. Is My Thinking Realistic? (review the common thinking errors)

- Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms?
- Am I condemning myself as a total person on the basis of a single event?
- Am I concentrating on my weaknesses and forgetting my strengths?
- Am I blaming myself for something that is not my fault?
- Am I taking something personally which has little or nothing to do with me?
- Am I expecting myself to be perfect?
- Am I using a double standard - how would I view my best friend in this situation?
- Am I paying attention only to the bad side of things?
- Am I overestimating the chances of disaster?
- Am I exaggerating the importance of events?
- Am I doing 'should must and ought' instead of accepting and dealing with situations as they are?
- Am I assuming I can do nothing to change my situation?
- Am I predicting the future negatively instead of experimenting with it, even being excited by it?

### 5. What Action Can I Take?

- What can I do to change my situation?
- Am I overlooking solutions to problems on the assumption they won't work?
- What can I do to test out the alternative views I have arrived at?

So – let’s try the A-B-C&D model with our original ABC table! See if you can add hypothetical ‘disputes’ here (step into the protagonists shoes... use ‘empathy’)



**Task: complete this ABCD worksheet with rational alternatives/disputes ...**

(Pair up – move around! - worksheet or flip chart – Tip: what would you advise your best friend if they thought this?)

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My partner has ended our relationship.	I can’t live without her. I’ll never find anybody like her again. Everybody always breaks up with me. I’ll never be in a proper relationship. Life is not worth living if I don’t have somebody to love and take care of me.	Depressed – I have no interest in going out, or even showering!	
My friend got a job we went for, not me!	That is unbelievable – he’s a thick. And he’s not even good looking. Or funny. Or anything. Oh no, I must be even worse than him then! Or the interviewers are total idiots! Yes, they are. And I hate him.	A Angry, aggressive – irritable and flying off the handle.	



**Reminder** – We identify our **bad feelings**, then link the **event/situation**, then identify the **thoughts**, then **dispute** ...

**Tips for disputing:** What is the **evidence**? What **alternative** views are there? What is the **effect** of thinking the way I do? Is my thinking **realistic**? What would I tell my **best friend**?

**Task: Fill in your own personal ABCD form**

A = Activating Event	B = Belief/thought	C = Consequence feelings	D = Dispute

(Note: you may create the ABCD table on a blank sheet if you don't wish to write in your workbook)