

# Academic Mindsets

Students can benefit from increasing awareness of their academic mindset. One way to do this is to reflect on their college experience by exploring “**cognitive distortions.**” Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that can influence emotions. Everyone experiences cognitive distortions to some degree, but in their more extreme forms they can be harmful. Below are some examples.

- **Magnification and Minimization:** Exaggerating or minimizing the importance of events.  
*Do you ever believe that your academic achievements are unimportant, or that your mistakes are excessively important?*
- **Catastrophizing:** Seeing only the worst possible outcomes of a situation.  
*“I didn’t do as well as I had hoped on this quiz. Now I won’t pass this class.”*
- **Overgeneralization:** Making broad interpretations from a single event.  
*“I felt so awkward during my internship interview. I am always awkward.”*
- **Magical Thinking:** The belief that actions will influence unrelated situations.  
*“I attended every class. I should get an A.”*
- **Personalization:** The belief that one is responsible for events outside of their own control.  
*“My roommate is always upset. They would be fine if I did more to help them.”*
- **Jumping to Conclusions:** Interpreting the meaning of a situation with little or no evidence.
  - **Mind Reading:** Interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without adequate evidence.  
*“My professor gave me so much feedback. They probably think I shouldn’t be in this major.”*
  - **Fortune Telling:** The expectation that a situation will turn out badly without adequate evidence.
- **Emotional Reasoning:** The assumption that emotions reflect the way things really are.  
*“I feel like I let down my classmates on this project, therefore I must be a bad student.”*
- **Disqualifying the Positive:** Recognizing only the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive.  
*Do you ever focus on only critical feedback on an assignment when there is also positive feedback provided?*
- **“Should” Statements:** The belief that things should be a certain way.  
*“I should always enjoy my classes.” or “I should be more involved on campus.”*
- **All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Thinking in absolutes such as “always,” “never,” or “every.”  
*“I never do well on exams.”*

# Developing a Positive Mindset UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO Learning Center

Using your knowledge gained from the first page of this worksheet, select strategies to help defeat your cognitive distortions.

<p><b>Examine the Evidence:</b> Instead of assuming that a negative thought is true, examine the evidence. For example, if you feel that you never do anything right, you could list several things you have done successfully.</p>	<p><b>The Double-standard Method:</b> Instead of putting yourself down in a harsh, condemning way, talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you would talk to a friend with a similar problem.</p>	<p><b>Cost-Benefit Analysis:</b> List the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling, a negative thought, or a behavior pattern.</p>
<p><b>Thinking in Shades of Gray:</b> Instead of thinking about your problems in all-or-nothing extremes, evaluate things on a range from 1 to 100. When things don't work out as well as you hoped, think about the experience as part of your journey towards success.</p>	<p><b>The Survey Method:</b> Ask questions to find out if your thoughts and attitudes are realistic. For example, if you are having a hard time with an assignment, speak to classmates to hear about how they feel, then determine a plan to move forward together.</p>	<p><b>The Semantic Method:</b> Substitute language that is less colorful and emotionally loaded. This method is helpful for "should statements," Instead of telling yourself "I shouldn't have made that mistake," you can say, "It would be better if I hadn't made that mistake."</p>
<p><b>Re-attribution:</b> Instead of blaming yourself entirely for a problem, think about the many factors that may have contributed to it. Focus on solving the problem instead of using up all your energy blaming yourself and feeling guilty.</p>	<p><b>Define Terms:</b> If you label yourself in a negative way, ask what the definition of these labels mean. You might not have done as well as you had hoped on a test, but this does not define you.</p>	<p><b>The Experimental Technique:</b> Do an experiment to test the validity of your negative thoughts. For example, instead of reviewing critical feedback on your own, bring it to office hours to gain a better understanding of the feedback directly from your faculty member.</p>

## Campus resources to support positive academic mindsets:

<p><b>The Learning, Writing, and Speaking Centers (LWSC):</b> Meet with a peer tutor, a writing consultant, or speaking coach to assist you with your academic needs. The Learning Center also offers Academic Skills Coaching to support the development of positive academic strategies.</p>	<p><b>Center for Academic and Student Achievement (CASA):</b> Meet with your Academic Success Coach if you have questions or concerns about your academic journey or want support in setting and achieving academic goals within your major(s)/minor(s).</p>	<p><b>Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):</b> It is not uncommon for college students to experience mental health struggles. Therapists in CAPS provide short-term therapy to support students through issues of sadness, anxiety, loneliness, college adjustment, relationship struggles, and more.</p>
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## Reflection:

<p><b>Identify the distortion:</b> Write down negative thoughts to see which of the cognitive distortion categories your thoughts may fall into.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Develop a positive mindset:</b> Choose one of the strategies above to help combat this unhelpful thought.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Key considerations:</b> What are some other factors that are important to consider when developing a positive mindset?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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