

Tell us what you think!



## WHAT IS PERSPECTIVE-TAKING?

Check out the evidence!

**Perspective is the way we think about a situation.**

When we focus on taking a specific perspective, we consciously **shift the way we think about that situation.**

This is important because our interpretation of a situation can be **helpful OR unhelpful.**

"In this big a class, I'll never meet anyone."

"How can I possibly do well in such a large class?"



Student A



Student B

"Wow, look at all of the people I can meet here!"

"I bet a lot of students will do well, given how big the class is."



Although they are in the exact same situation, Student A sees the **potential obstacles** of the situation and Student B sees the **opportunities** of the situation.



Our perspective acts like a **filter** between what's happening in the world and how our mind **interprets** what's happening.

So it's important to **be aware** of our perspective of a situation or the **tendencies of our thoughts**, as it can impact **how we feel and how we respond.**



**Being able to change or shift the way we see a situation is a skill we can build.**

### WHAT TENDENCIES DO OUR THOUGHTS HAVE?

When it comes to our thoughts, we have certain tendencies or unhelpful habits to watch out for.

One particular tendency is the tendency to **ruminate**. This happens when thoughts just keep repeating over and over again in our minds in different ways.



- Sometimes it feels as if we have **no control** over these thoughts.
- They can **interrupt** our sleep, our enjoyment of pleasant moments, and our focus on the task at hand.

### Three examples of rumination are:

**1 Stuck in negative thinking:** focusing on a negative thought and thinking about it over and over



**SITUATION:** A friend makes a joke in passing about how you never want to go for coffee because you're always studying. For the rest of the evening, you keep ruminating about what they meant.

**THOUGHTS:**

"Does this mean people think I'm not fun? Do people avoid inviting me out?" "Why would she say something like that?"

**2 Excessive worry:** constant worry about what could have happened or might yet happen

**SITUATION:** You submit your final paper to your professor, and that evening you ruminate about all the potential problems with your paper and the worst possible outcomes.



"What if I fail?"

"Oh no, was the structure even clear?"

**THOUGHTS:**  
"I don't think I referenced enough sources."

**3 Past or future focus:** excessive focus (not necessarily negative) on past or future events

**SITUATION:** It's a beautiful summer day and you're eating your favourite food. Instead of enjoying it, you're ruminating on past behaviours or planning the future.

**THOUGHTS:** "I have to remember to schedule in writing sessions."

"I wonder what would have happened if I studied cue cards instead of just reading the textbook."

"I keep forgetting to pick up creamer, I should write it down so I remember next time."

This kind of rumination or thought tendencies can **interfere with our well-being**. But, sometimes we believe that it can **help us**:

"If I analyze or think about the situation enough...."



...I'll be able to figure out a solution.



...I'll have a better understanding of why my friend said what they did.



...I'll be better prepared for the future.

"If I worry enough and think of all the ways this situation could end, I'll keep myself safe from anything bad that might happen."



These statements are **not true!** They are just what we **believe** to be true about rumination. They don't actually help us or solve the problem.

**INSTEAD, TRY:**

### Mindfulness



It helps us **pause and become aware of the present moment**, by focusing our attention on purpose and experiencing the present moment without judgement.<sup>2</sup>

Practicing mindfulness helps us acknowledge that we are ruminating, which makes it **easier to recognize that rumination is unhelpful** and not going to solve our problem.

**Ask yourself:**

"Is it helpful to lie in bed and think about a 10-minute interaction for an hour?"

"What is this going to change? What is this going to solve?"

[View the Mindfulness resource!](#)



### KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER:



A thought is **just a thought**.

Thoughts **don't have the power** to do anything just by themselves.



But, if we have the same type of thought again and again, or give in to our tendencies to ruminate,

for example getting stuck in negative thinking, worrying excessively, or overly focusing on the past and future - **this can be harmful and challenge our well-being.**

In addition to the difficulty of **rumination**, which refers to persistent, ongoing unhelpful thoughts, there are also common unhelpful ways of thinking about situations in the moment.



But, there are ways we can **change our perspective** or the way we think about a situation.

### ALTERNATIVES TO COMMON UNHELPFUL PERSPECTIVES<sup>5</sup>

**1 Catastrophizing:** Assuming the worst will happen

*Specific unhelpful thought:*

"When I do my presentation, I will be so nervous that I will do really badly. The professor and other students will think I am stupid and completely incompetent."



*Alternative thought:*

"Even if I do really badly, I'm sure the professor and students have seen plenty of worse presentations and probably won't even remember after a couple of days."



**2 Black and white thinking:** Thinking in extremes

*Specific unhelpful thought:*

"My presentation needs to be perfect or else it will be complete garbage."



*Alternative thought:*

"It's unlikely that my presentation will be perfect, because nothing is perfect. If I work hard, it won't be garbage either; it will be good."



**3 Disqualifying the positive:** When positive things happen, thinking they are flukes or a stroke of luck.

*Specific unhelpful thought:*

"I only did well on the presentation because I got lucky being assigned an easier topic."



*Alternative thought:*

"I did well on my presentation not only because I got an easy topic, but also because I worked hard and practiced presenting."



These types of unhelpful thoughts **happen naturally to all of us** at times!  
When they naturally arise in our minds, just **notice them and replace with a helpful alternative.**

**!** This is easy to say and difficult to do!

There are some strategies we can use to **help us become aware of our own thoughts and build our skills** in shifting our perspective as needed.

### EXERCISES FOR PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

#### Reframe our unhelpful thoughts:

We identify the thoughts we are having about a situation, → weigh the evidence for the unhelpful thought, and create a more balanced alternative thought.



This alternative thought **helps us feel better** about the initial situation.

[View the Thought Challenge resource!](#)

#### Use mindfulness to observe your thoughts:<sup>3</sup>

One way to make it easier to change our perspective is to **become mindfully aware that our thoughts are just thoughts** and do not have meaning on their own.



Thought meditation is a strategy that can help us **observe our thoughts with acceptance and without judgment**, where we simply notice the thoughts as they pass through the mind.

[View audio for Thought Meditation](#)

#### Recognize our common humanity:

When a difficult situation happens, we can often feel like we are the only ones experiencing this, and we can feel really isolated and alone.

In these situations, we can remind ourselves that **difficult life situations are a part of being human** and that other people have also experienced similar difficulties.<sup>4</sup>



This is called **common humanity** and can help us feel connected and less alone in our difficulties.<sup>1, 4</sup>



Do a **writing exercise** by writing down the ways in which your experience is connected to the larger human experience.<sup>1</sup>

This helps us acknowledge that **part of being human** means going through difficult situations



and **many other people share those experiences**, no matter what they are or how difficult they are.

#### 'Big picture' perspective:

In some situations, it is easy to lose our **perspective** of the big picture.

For example, when you have difficulties with friends, it may feel devastating in the moment.



However, it can be comforting to recognize that in the **'big picture'** of our entire lifetime, **this difficulty or event will not have a lasting impact.**



How important is this experience to me in the big picture?

#### ASK YOURSELF:



How critical is it to my life?



Will this matter to me in 10 years? 20 years?

Some things do matter to us for the rest of our lives.

Other things, no matter how difficult, won't be **what matters the MOST** to you in the long term.

### FEEDBACK & CONTACT INFORMATION

**EDUCATION**  
FOR  
**MENTAL**  
**HEALTH**  
**RESILIENCE**



View the reference list for this infographic



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