

How to do a thought record

When your mood drops fast, a thought usually got there first. A thought record slows one moment down so you can see that thought, weigh it against the evidence, and land somewhere more accurate. The goal is a view you can believe, not a positive one.

- 1 Situation**
One specific moment. Where you were, who was there, what happened. Stick to what a camera would have caught.
- 2 Feelings**
Name each one, usually in one word, and rate how strong it was from 0 to 100, or 0 to 10 if that is easier. “I feel like a failure” is a thought, not a feeling.
- 3 Thoughts and images**
What went through your mind, as statements. “What if they laugh?” becomes “They’re going to laugh at me.”
- 4 Hot thought**
The one that best explains how strongly you felt. Rate how much you believe it.
- 5 Evidence for**
Facts that support it. Be fair to it. Guesses about what others were thinking aren’t facts.
- 6 Evidence against**
Facts that don’t fit, or suggest it isn’t the whole story. The questions on the back help.
- 7 Balanced thought**
A thought that takes both lists into account, rated for how much you believe it. “Even though” and “and” help.
- 8 Feelings now**
Rate the same feelings again. A drop of 20 or 30 points is a good result. Some feeling usually stays.
- 9 What I learned**
What you noticed, and one small next step.

Tips

- Do it the same day, while the exact thought is fresh.
- Pick a medium-sized moment while you’re learning.
- If the feeling was strong and the hot thought seems mild, look underneath it. What would it mean about you if it were true?
- If the evidence mostly supports the thought, say what’s true and decide what to do about it.
- Believing it in your head but not your gut is common.
Testing the thought in real life often helps more than more writing.

When to get more help

- The same worry keeps coming back however often you examine it.
- You feel you must finish a record before you can feel okay.
- The thoughts are about a trauma.
- Records often leave you feeling worse.
- You’re thinking about suicide or harming yourself. In the US, call or text 988. In an emergency, call 911.

A finished example

From mythoughtrecord.com/examples, where there are seven more.

1 Situation	Tuesday, about 2 p.m., at my desk. I asked in the group chat if anyone wanted dinner Friday. An hour later nobody had answered, and it showed that two people had read it.
2 Feelings	Embarrassed 70, Lonely 60, Anxious 40
3 Thoughts	• They don't want to hang out with me. • I'm always the one who reaches out. • I pictured them in a separate chat, making plans without me. • Nobody really wants me around.
4 Hot thought	Nobody really wants me around. Believed 80.
5 Evidence for	• Two people read the message and didn't answer for an hour. • I organized the last two dinners.
6 Evidence against	• It's a Tuesday afternoon. Sam and Priya are at work until six. • Priya answered within minutes the last time I asked. • Sam invited me to his birthday two weeks ago. • I read messages at work and forget to answer all the time.
7 Balanced thought	Nobody has answered yet, and that stings. It's also a workday, and these same people invited me to things this month. A slow reply is more likely about their afternoon than about me. Believed 70.
8 Feelings now	Embarrassed 70 → 35, Lonely 60 → 40, Anxious 40 → 20. Hot thought 80 → 35.
9 What I learned	When I'm lonely I read silence as rejection. Writing down what I actually knew took some of the sting out. Next: Wait until the evening. If there's still nothing, text Priya on her own.

Questions for step 6

- Would a camera have recorded this, or is it my reading of what happened?
- What else could explain what happened? Try to come up with two or three possibilities.
- Has something like this happened before? How did it actually turn out?
- Have there been times when this thought wasn't true?
- If someone who cares about me saw the whole situation, what would they point out?
- If a friend told me this had happened to them, what would I say to them?
- Am I leaving anything out because it doesn't fit the thought?

Thinking styles to notice

- **All-or-nothing thinking.** Only two options, with nothing in between.
- **Overgeneralizing.** One event becomes a rule, often with "always" or "never."
- **Mental filter.** One bad detail colors everything else.
- **Discounting the positive.** Good things get explained away so they don't count.
- **Mind reading.** Assuming you know what someone else is thinking, usually something bad, without checking.
- **Fortune telling.** Treating a bad outcome as already decided.
- **Catastrophizing.** Jumping to the worst case and treating it as likely or unbearable.
- **Magnifying and shrinking.** Blowing up your mistakes or other people's strengths, and shrinking your own.
- **Emotional reasoning.** Taking a feeling as proof.
- **Should and must statements.** Rigid rules for yourself or others, followed by guilt or anger when they're broken.
- **Labeling.** Summing up a whole person, often yourself, with one word after one event.
- **Personalizing and blaming.** Taking all the blame for something with many causes, or putting all of it on someone else.