Advanced Self Talk
Mental Landmines and How to Counter Them

You have learned that certain thinking patterns lead to emotions and actions. When thinking becomes clouded, things don't go smoothly. People are prone to negative thinking. This type of thinking leads to negative emotions and actions that neither help the situation or make one feel better. We call the most common negative thinking encountered “mental landmines” because they often come unexpected and can cause serious damage.

The good news is that you can feel better and command your emotions by thinking straight. This worksheet will teach you how to counteract the mental landmines. When the situation occurs that triggers one of your mental landmines, you will be given a strategy to combat this. You will have to practice it many times before the counter or new way of thinking comes naturally. Like any habit, it will take time to develop. But you will be motivated to practice because the counter often leads to immediate positive emotions. In other words, you start to feel better the moment your thinking starts to change.

INSTRUCTIONS: Read through the document to rate how often you encounter the most common mental landmines. Total up your scorecard on the last page, the higher the score, the more you have to gain by learning these countering skills. Take note of those you encounter more often & how you can avoid and overcome them in the future.

AFTER: Do the 7-Day Mental Landmine Countering Journal worksheet to document your efforts to counter the mental landmines you encounter. Once you are able to better counter these mental landmines, you will have a much easier time reaching your full potential in athletics and life.

The 14 Most Common Mental Landmines

1. Absolute Thinking
2. Overgeneralizing
3. All or Nothing
4. Catastrophizing
5. Should
6. Must
7. Jumping to Conclusions
8. Mind Reading
9. Fortune Telling
10. Everyone Else
11. Negative Bias
12. My Past
13. Critical Self
14. Compare and Despair
#1 Absolute Thinking

**Description**
Reacting to a situation with extreme thinking that includes using words like always, never, everything, nobody, etc.

**Examples**
- A classmate rejecting an idea you had for a group project leads to the thought *Nobody ever listens to me, I never get what I want.*
- One bad call in a game results in the player thinking *We always get cheated by the referee.*

**Counter 1**
Tone it down. Instead of thinking *always,* think *often.* Instead of thinking *never,* think *seldom.* When applying for a job or scholarship, if you think that you will get turned down often, you will still have some negative feelings. But this is a lot better than thinking you will *always* get turned down. It's not everybody or everything; it's better if you say most people or most things.

**Counter 2**
Tone it down more. Instead of trying to quantify how much or how little something happens, focus on the *current situation* and what needs to be changed. In the example of the person whose idea gets rejected and ends up thinking *nobody listens to me, I never get what I want,* a counter to this negative type of thinking would be something like: *My first idea wasn't liked by the group, but if I listen and keep giving suggestions I'm sure one of my ideas will be liked.*

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______

#2 Overgeneralizing

**Description**
Allowing one single situation to trigger a thought that applies to many past and future situations.

**Examples**
- A person makes one mistake and concludes *I am a total failure* or *No matter how hard I try, I always screw it up.*
- A student gets a bad grade and concludes *I guess I am terrible at school.*

**Counter 1**
*Being mindful* that you tend to do this is a good start for this landmine and all the others. Then ask yourself: *Am I exaggerating the bad stuff and blowing this out of proportion? How would someone else see it?*

**Counter 2**
In the example above, a better way to react to a single mistake is self-talk like: *I am disappointed that I made a mistake. I bet I can learn from this and avoid doing it again.*

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______
#3 All or Nothing

**Description**
When people see things as black/white and rate things as good/bad, it leads to an over-reaction to things. There’s no gray area or in between. A single setback is seen as total defeat.

**Examples**
- Thinking *I got a 65% on the first test, I am going to fail the class now.*
- Thinking a big win is *the greatest moment of your life* while a tough loss is *the worst moment of your life.*

**Counter 1**
Changing a few words in self talk can have a huge impact. Instead of telling yourself that a setback is a huge failure, describe it more moderately like *disappointing.* It wouldn't hurt to add some self talk along the lines of: *I've had setbacks before, I will have setbacks again, but I always manage to work through them.* Things aren't totally black or totally white, instead mostly just shades of gray.

**Counter 2**
You can argue with the negative thought. You might remind yourself that great wins or tough losses are somewhere in between the worst and the greatest thing to ever happen to you. Even better, a self-talk statement like this works wonders: *I don't know what the result of the game will be, but I'm going to try to make it a positive or learning experience no matter what.*

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______

#4 Catastrophizing

**Description**
When one reacts to any negative or unpleasant situation by labeling it as horrible, awful, terrible or generally considering any negative experience a disaster, even if it is relatively minor. Or, imagining or believing that the worst possible thing will happen.

**Examples**
- *I got a 65% on the test, not only will I fail this class, I will never get in college and will end up working my whole life at a fast food restaurant.*
- Someone who has difficulty catching their breath after running hard and thinks: *I can't catch my breath, I might have lung cancer.*

**Counter 1**
Stop using the words *horrible, terrible or awful* when labeling things. This will take discipline and practice. At first you will catch yourself using one of these words. When this happens, stop and replace it. Some good replacement or counters to these three words are things like *unfortunate, unlucky, disappointing or not what I expected.* If you get a low grade on an assignment, you might say to yourself: *This grade is unfortunate.* This kind of self talk will not make you feel good, but it is better to feel unfortunate than horrible.

**Counter 2**
You need a reality check and one of the best is to take your self talk statement and add “Am I really” to make it a question. When you think scoring a 65% of a test means *I am never getting into college* stop and ask yourself: *Am I really not getting into college?* Even asking yourself: “What are the odds of this actually happening? Or “What is most likely to happen?” Will go a long way of countering this type of negative self talk.

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______
## #5 Should

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| When a person continues to remind oneself of all the things one should, or ought to do. These might not be urgent. But these thoughts tend to nag the person and lead to guilt. If a lot of these are going on at once, the person feels a great deal of pressure, as if one is overwhelmed by how many things need one's attention. | - Feeling guilty because you feel you *should* be doing extra reps after practice, but have not been.  
- If you do engage in the action that you “should” be doing, it makes you feel resentment or some kind of other negative emotion because you don’t really want to do it.  
- Even at the best, you feel a temporary reprieve from guilt, which will soon creep back in instead of feeling good about finishing your "should". |

### Counter 1

The best solution is thought replacement. Instead of telling yourself that you *should or ought* to do something, either as a statement or question, rephrase it in terms of whether it would be *beneficial, profitable or advantageous* to you if you did the task.

### Counter 2

If you feel you need to work on something outside of practice, try focusing on how it would be beneficial to your next performance. Instead of thinking *I should stay after practice*, think *I may perform better in the future if I stay after practice*. Focus on the positive reasons for your actions to help avoid feeling pressure to do things you feel you should.

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______

## #6 Must

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| When people think in the Must mode, they only give themselves one option: they *must* meet the expectation or else. This causes huge pressure before and during the event. If the event does not meet the expectation of what must happen, then the event is seen as a complete disaster with very negative emotions attached. In the rare circumstance when the event does meet the “must” expectation, the most positive emotion is barely neutral, rather something along the lines of relief. | - *I must get an A in this class*  
- *I must play perfectly in this game*  
- *We must win this upcoming game* |

### Counter 1

*Being mindful* that you tend to do this is a good start for this landmine and all the others. You can also ask yourself: *Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up impossible expectations? What would be more realistic?*

### Counter 2

The counter for this landmine is thought replacement. Instead of thinking *I must get an A in this class*, think something like this: *It would be great if I got an A in this class*. Other replacements might be something like *I'm going to work hard and try to get an A in this class*; or *No matter what grade I get, I'm going to learn a lot in this class.*

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______

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#7 Jumping to Conclusions

**Description**
Studies show that most people are not good at accurately predicting odds or probabilities towards outcomes of future events. This can lead to people blowing things out of proportion or to make connections that aren't really there. Even when people have no or very little factual basis, they will come to a (faulty) conclusion. This conclusion leads to negative feelings and behaviors.

**Examples**
- A person is in a situation where their friend doesn't answer their text concludes *I guess we're not friends anymore*.
- An athlete sees two teammates huddled closely together and talking. The athlete jumps to the conclusion *They are talking about me*.

**Counter 1**
Mindfulness helps here too. Be aware of the tendency to make faulty conclusions because of poor estimates of probabilities blowing things out of proportion and trying to connect things that aren't really related. Pause and ask yourself if you have enough facts to support this conclusion. Also ask yourself or even a friend if the facts support the conclusion.

**Counter 2**
In the example above, imagine how this athlete would feel if instead of jumping to the conclusion that the two teammates are talking about him/her, the athlete thought *They're probably talking about how to execute a play that will help us win the game on Friday*.

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______

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#8 Mind Reading

**Description**
Assuming we know what other people are thinking (usually about us). This kind of self talk is usually negative and typically leads to bad feelings.

**Examples**
- A student gets a bad grade and thinks: *the teacher must think I am a bad student or that I didn't try on this assignment*.
- An athlete makes a mistake and thinks: *coach thinks I don't care about this game because I just made a mistake*.

**Counter 1**
Ask yourself: *Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What’s the evidence?* Tell yourself: *Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Maybe there is a more balanced and helpful way of looking at this situation*.

**Counter 2**
Being honest with yourself helps. Tell yourself. *I know I cannot read other people's minds*. Once you remind yourself of this it is okay to add something like: *I'm not sure what the teacher is thinking, but I hope she likes my work*.

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______
### #9 Fortune Telling

**Description**
The mental trap of thinking one can predict what is going to happen in the future. Usually, the predictions are negative and cause bad feelings.

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<td>• A person thinks: <em>I didn't win the award the last time I was nominated so I won't win it this time either.</em></td>
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<td>• A person thinks <em>I don't want to go to the party tonight because it will not be any fun.</em></td>
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**Counter 1**
Similar to others it's good to be aware of this mental trap as the first step to prevention. Also ask yourself: *Am I really thinking I can predict the future? How likely is it that what I am thinking might actually happen?*

**Counter 2**
It's okay to say to yourself the kind of future you would like to have happen, such as *I can't know for sure what's going to happen, but I will try hard and hope I get a good grade on the test.*

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______

### #10 Everyone Else

**Description**
Also called the conformity bias. It's the belief that *If everyone else is doing it, so should I.*

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<td>• Some of your teammates aren't putting in much effort during a drill when coach isn’t watching. Everyone Else thinking would lead one to believe that <em>I should also slack off when coach isn’t watching because that’s what everyone else is doing.</em></td>
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**Counter 1**
Don't use words like *everyone* or *everybody.* Be realistic. State the facts. It's better to say something like: *I know four people have done this so maybe I should do it.* It's also probably wise to ask yourself: *Should I do it just because four other people have done it?*

**Counter 2**
Even better is to just consider the act itself (*Is it a good idea to be lazy during this drill?) instead of focusing on the fact that others are doing it.

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______
## #11 Negative Bias

**Description**
Most people tend to be more negative than positive. In thinking about a situation, we tend to notice the negative elements more than the positive ones. This is called negative bias.

For instance, in the Catastrophizing and All or Nothing landmines, we tend to presume the most negative or unfavorable possibilities.

**Examples**
- Thinking *coach isn't going to play me in the game today* just because you made a mistake in practice yesterday.
- Thinking *I got a 65% on the test, I am going to fail the class* without taking into account the other good grades you received on other assignments.
- Making a mistake and thinking *I am a terrible player* and not choosing to also focus on the good plays you made earlier in the game.

**Counter 1**
Be aware of this bias and ask yourself: *Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? What would be more realistic?*

**Counter 2**
Tone down the negative words. As suggested with other landmines, avoid words like horrible, terrible and awful. When possible, try to describe the situation with neutral terms. It's usually better if you stick to the bare facts of the situation rather than trying to come to conclusions or interpretations. This will help you be more objective.

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______  Sometimes_______  Often_______

## #12 My Past

**Description**
Past negative experiences can affect how one feels today. This can be when a thought pattern focuses on the negative elements of the past experience and incorporates a belief that the person must continue to feel this pain because of what happened to them. Or, a current situation triggers a bad memory that causes distress right now.

**Examples**
- Thinking you need to feel bad because someone *criticized your abilities last week, last month, or even last year*
- *I feel terrible about playing my sport ever since my mistake that cost our team the championship last year.*

**Counter 1**
It does no good to pretend that the experience did not happen or that it was not that bad. Address the situation by saying something like *That was a bad experience or I don't ever want to go do that again.* Then you need to address the present and how you would like to feel. A good example is: *I'm glad I don't have to go through that again, and today is going to be a good day.*

**Counter 2**
The past memory was then, and this is now. You now get to choose how you want to feel in the present and that this leads to a feeling of emotional control or empowerment.

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______  Sometimes_______  Often_______
#13 Critical Self

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| Putting ourselves down, self criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not (totally) our responsibility. | - After the team loses a close game, thinking *It is my fault we lost because I missed that one shot early in the game.*
| | - Thinking *I'm not surprised I got a 65% on the test, because I am stupid.* |

**Counter 1**
Be aware of this bias and ask yourself: *Am I only focusing on the negative when I self reflect? Am I filtering out the positives? Is this something that I am totally responsible for?*

**Counter 2**
Try thinking: *There I go, bullying myself again. Would most people who really know me say that about me?*

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______

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#14 Compare and Despair

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| Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and getting upset when comparing ourselves negatively against them. These types of comparisons usually arouse highly negative feelings. | - *I wish I was thin like Josie. It’s not fair. She eats junk food all the time!*  
- *Alex is so smart, he got an A when he didn’t study as much as I did and I got a B!*  
- *I am probably not going to make the team this year, everyone else got better and I stayed the same.* |

**Counter 1**
Try to be aware of when you do this as this is the best way to curb the comparison thinking. As soon as you notice you are starting to compare yourself to others, stop before it triggers negative feelings.

**Counter 2**
Comparison looks at others to evaluate our worth instead of the more useful view: Looking directly at ourselves. Remember to stay in your own lane. Let the others stay in their lanes and you stick to yours. You’ve got a long, wonderful, and exciting future ahead.

I encounter this mental landmine: Never_______ Sometimes_______ Often_______
# Mental Landmines Scorecard

Add a checkmark to the appropriate frequency of you encountering each mental landmine

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**TOTAL Column Checkmarks**

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Add Up the 3 Columns Points for TOTAL SCORE

**Circle Your Mental Landmine Danger Zone**

Total Score: 0-4 = Low Danger  5-9 = Medium Danger  10+ = High Danger