



NEGATIVE THINKING AND PREPARING FOR EXAMS

Negative thinking is much like distracting thinking, only worse. With negative thoughts, not only are you distracted, but also you practice critical or self-debasing thinking. The more you practice negative thinking, the better you get at it, and the more it becomes automatic in your thinking. When individuals are stressed (like at the time of an exam), they tend to not think clearly and use automatic thinking more often. If you've rehearsed negative thinking, you will most likely think negatively automatically at the time of an exam.

To decrease negative thinking and practice more functional thinking while preparing for an exam:

1. As you read or review the study material, attend actively to your "running dialogue." Your running dialogue is your thoughts, attitudes, or feelings about what you are reviewing or may be distracting thoughts.
2. Examples of negative thoughts include:
 - a. "I should know this by now."
 - b. "I am never going to get through all this material."
 - c. "I may know this stuff now, but I'll surely forget it by the time the test occurs."
3. Remind yourself that you do not want to have such negative thoughts become rehearsed and to occur automatically at the time of an exam.
4. Write out negative thoughts on paper as they come to you.
5. After writing, take the opportunity to reframe the negative thought and make it more functional or positive. This must be done in a realistic, non-fluff way. Your reframed thought (the thought you hope will become automatic) is something that you have to believe.
6. Examples of reframed negative thoughts include:
 - a. "I should know this by now" → "I learn different content areas at different paces. Some info will be remembered easily and some will be more challenging" OR "If I continue to follow my study plan, I will remember and be able to verbally recall more and more" OR "It doesn't serve me to be frustrated right now. I need to 'stay the course' and continue to focus until the break."
 - b. "I am never going to get through all this material" → "Although there is a lot to go through, I'm going to prioritize the study material and focus upon the most important information first."
 - c. "I may know this now, but I'll likely forget it on the test" → "I have recalled important details on previous tests" OR "If I relax, concentrate, and take one section at a time, I'll succeed" OR "A relaxed mind recalls much more information than a stressed mind."
7. Although initially reframing negative thinking is time consuming, the more you do it, the more proficient (or automatic) you do it. As you become more proficient, you'll reframe negative thinking automatically.

