

# OPPOSING OVERTHINKING AND TAKING ACTION

*“Once you are enslaved to your emotions, you are never truly free.”*

[MODULE 4]

## Overthinking- What is it?



Do you ever catch your mind endlessly wandering in the middle of the night, jumping randomly from one thought to another like it was just out of prison? Like there were hundreds of tabs of your browser open and you were navigating again and again aimlessly?

There was this one day where I read an interesting story about a man and an Indian sage. The man asked the sage about what the earth rested upon. To this, the sage first said several great elephants, and the elephants rested on giant turtles. Large turtle on another large turtle, its turtles all the way down.

As usual, I lied down with an exhausted body but an overcharged brain. My mind was spiraling with a wave of doubtful questions. The layers of thoughts were peeling like an onion in a manner somewhat like this.

Layer 1- "I still have a full module left to right and the deadline is tomorrow. Can I make it?"

Layer 2- "I want to sleep more but this unhealthy way of working way late at night is taking it away and then mom yells in the morning."

Layer 3- "My brothers want to watch a movie tonight. Will I be able to make time for it? Or I will have to cancel again and listen to them say that I don't spend time with them? "

Layer 4- "Well that isn't true, I do spend time around. But, I think it is less than I think I do."

Layer 5- "It's way less than I think I do. But I have so many impossible deadlines...."

Layer 10- "I should not have stolen my brother's snacks, but I had fun having them after he made fun of the way I keep my room."

Layer 200- "It's just turtles all the way down really?"



This was the next thing that Farheen dealt with. The negative comments that she had received had made her ruminate consistently.

**Truth is, every person overthinks from time to time.** But sometimes it gets chronic, like when the switch gets turned on and you simply cannot turn it off. Thinking in endless circles gets exhausting and can create a lot of stress. You basically end up ruminating over the past and your doubts instead of working.

If you consistently ruminate and make it a habit, it becomes a loop that gets harder and harder to stop. This is when it becomes dangerous and destructive, and will start impacting your daily life. It can put your mental health at risk with increased chances of depression and anxiety.



## The forms of Overthinking

Overthinking encircles around two things- **ruminating about the past and worrying about the future.**

Overthinking is not healthy and is completely different from

self-reflection or problem-solving. While problem-solving involves thinking about a particular solution and self-reflection helps you gain new perspectives, overthinking is just dwelling on that problem.

**Overthinking will never help you gain new insights into any problem.** Rather, it will highlight the negative aspects of it and make you feel bad about it. You will feel like you have no control or solution to your problem.

Even if you spend 10-15 minutes overthinking, it won't make a difference. It does not enhance your life or results in productive behavior.

## Signs you are an Overthinker

Here are a few warning signs that show that you are a potential overthinker. Take it as a **self-assessment** and ask yourself these questions. If most of your answers are yes, you need to make a note of your habit and take it a bit seriously.

1. Do you tend to live embarrassing past experiences, over and over again and feel awful?
2. Do you repeat thinking about the mistakes you made negatively and let your emotions get affected?
3. Do you ask yourself a lot of doubtful questions starting with 'what if'?
4. Do you get lost in your thoughts being in the past or trying to be in the future, being oblivious of your surroundings?
5. Do you have trouble sleeping because the turn off button of your brain doesn't work?
6. When you are upset, do you think a lot about your problem? Obsess over them and feel paralyzed? Or do you make up a solution in your mind and never work on it?
7. Do you relive your conversations with people and keep wondering why they said something or obsess about the way you acted?
8. Do you worry over things you do not have control over?
9. Do you feel you are tired of making decisions even though you're not the one making those calls?
10. Do you look for a deeper meaning or struggle to control your thoughts?



## Why do I Overthink?

There are generally two broad categories- the environment and the mystery of the mind itself.

The environment here means our experiences with our surroundings, where we were raised, our success and failures. Sometimes there is a negative influence of people or the

atmosphere on us that gets us ruminating and overthinking. Maybe the environment can't be changed, but our minds can be controlled with some effort.



Our minds work in mysterious ways. Some of the research studies have shown that if we encounter negatives, our mind starts dwelling on them. But when we see success, we just get momentarily happy. In many cases, the reason for overthinking is fear. Instead of seeing the sunny side of things, you see and analyze the negatives that make you feel almost paralyzed.

Sometimes we develop a strange desire to always have control. This creates a string of self-doubts and you get into the habit of overthinking. To solve this, we need to develop a growth mindset instead of a fixed one.

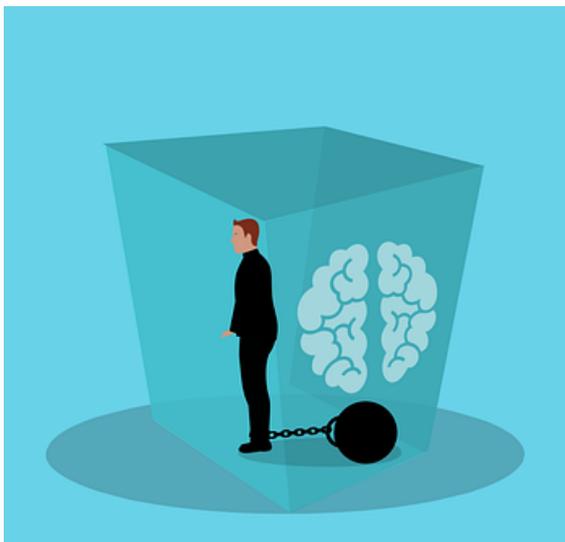
Overthinking can also be linked to anxiety and depression. If you doubt that your overthinking can be a result of anxiety, you can consult a psychologist. To understand better, try taking this short self-assessment from [psy.com](https://www.psy.com).

## Dangers of Overthinking

There is a legendary story about a master magician, Harry Houdini. He was renowned for his mind-bending illusions. One day, he put out a challenge that he could break through any prison cell in an hour. He just had to walk in there with his street clothes. A very old jail down south heard about the claims of Houdini and accepted his challenge.



Many people gathered outside on the day of the event to see Houdini perform his ultimate trick. Houdini confidently walked into the jail cell and saw the metal doors shut behind him.



The first thing he did was remove his belt and unveil a 10-inch long, tough, and flexible wire of steel. He started working on the door then.

In about 30 minutes, the confident expression with which he had walked in had vanished in thin air. In an hour, he was drenched in his sweat. Within 2 hours of being there, Houdini collapsed against the door. Surprisingly when he leaned on the door, it flung open.

The door opened because it was never locked! The door was firmly locked by the lock of the greatest locksmiths that ever lived, but only in Houdini's mind.

It's not just Houdini that had his door locked, we have locked several doors of our mind that are not locked in reality because of the unhealthy habit of overthinking.

Our mind is a very powerful object and is the only enemy we will face on our path to success. Remember the voice we spoke of in the first module? Well, that mind tells you several things that seem to be believable, but it is not.

"You can't do it. You don't have the potential. You are probably tired."

Believe it or not, but that voice lies to you. It creates mental doors of prison to keep you enslaved. But the doors in reality are always open for you.

## 7 Observed Ways to Stop Overthinking and Start Acting

When Farheen was overwhelmed by the unending circle of overthinking, she tried all these seven steps. Not only did she gain control over her thoughts, but they also stopped distracting and influencing her.

### Get out of the triangle

It is the human tendency to blame others or situations and play the victim card. It is easiest to create a drama triangle and blame forces, nature, people, and everyone else. It takes courage to realize the fact that we have a choice.

We can either get better by becoming self-aware or stay at the mercy of our thoughts as it drains and mentally sickens us each day.

### Be aware of overthinking

Trace the patterns and read the signs. The human mind generally follows the same rules when it commits errors or lies. Realize when it is happening and if it is even worth it. This is a good way to control your mind from getting obsessive.

One more way is to control your emotions. One of the factors that cause overthinking is fear. Try being more self-aware and develop emotional intelligence to stop your mind from getting stuck in those endless loops.

### Practice Mindfulness and Meditation



If you feel that your overthinking habits are not letting you have a peaceful sleep at night, try practicing mindfulness and meditation.

Mindfulness is just a practice to be present and observe your body, emotions, thoughts, and surroundings. Meditation is helping your mind focus on one thing, like your breathing and letting go of negative thoughts and emotions.

These practices will seem tough at the beginning, but will greatly help you calm down your restless mind that snots around like a child each night.

## Challenge your thoughts

Once you have listened to your thoughts enough, try encountering them with these questions.

- Is this correct? If it is, what are the sources?
- Is there a solution that can be put into action?
- Why am I thinking this way?
- Does it hold any value? How?
- What are other possible outlooks I have not considered?



By putting forward these questions, you are shifting your brain from overthinking to reflecting and looking for solutions. When we get the answers we are looking for, we stop analyzing and start acting.

## Embrace its futility

Overthinking will go on in endless cycles until you give it that important and believe it has value. You will never be able to get out of the loop until you stop and realize that it is worthless and a complete waste of time.

Ask yourself- How many times have you found solutions that you have acted on? Or how many times has it benefited you, even a little bit? Was it associated with more positivity or negativity?

Relate these questions with your past encounters with overthinking and you will have the answer.

## Train your brain to act, not avoid



Our brains adapt and learn quickly. It is we who have to decide to change our behavior and taking action first.

We do not have to take big leaps all at once. Start with minor changes and be consistent.

Once we start actions, our thinking patterns will change. Instead of being paralyzed because of dwelling in solutions, it will start finding freedom in actions.

## Address your thoughts

Pushing your obsessive thoughts may sound good, but it is hard to practice and is only a short-term solution. Instead of running away from them, try listening to them and maybe challenging them.

Allot them a fixed time, like okay you have ten minutes to speak whatever you need to and then just leave me alone. Our thoughts may not stop flowing, but the timeframe will allow your brain to agree and move forward.



It may seem tough to control your thoughts this way because they are powerful. But with continuous practice and following timeframes, you will control them from falling into the overthinking trap.

## References

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