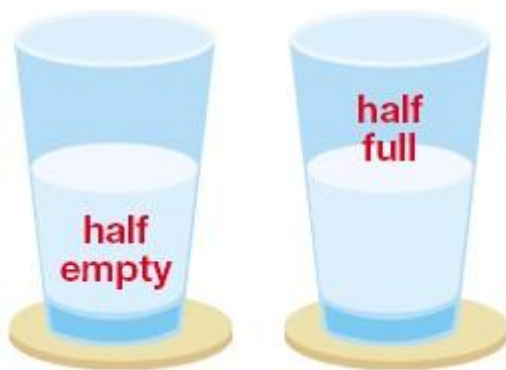


## How to Squash Negative Thoughts

Suppose you have the bad habit of dwelling too much on the same negative thoughts. And suppose there's no outward physical manifestation associated to them. It's just negative thinking, like "I'm so depressed" or "I hate my job" or "I can't do this" or "I hate being fat." How do you break a bad habit when it's entirely in your mind?



There are actually quite a number of ways to decondition a negative thought pattern. The basic idea is to replace the old pattern with a new one. Mentally resisting the negative thought will usually backfire — you'll simply reinforce it and make it even worse. The more you fire those neurons in the same way, the stronger the pattern becomes.

Here's a little method I use to break negative thought patterns. It's basically something I concocted from a combination of the swish pattern from NLP and a memory technique known as chaining. I usually find the swish pattern alone to be weak and ineffective, but this method works very well for me.

Instead of trying to resist the negative thought pattern, you will redirect it. Think of it like mental kung fu. Take the energy of the negative thought and rechannel it into a positive thought. With a little mental conditioning, whenever the negative thought occurs, your mind will automatically flow into the linked positive thought. It's similar to Pavlov's dogs learning to salivate when the bell rang.

Here's how it works:

Let's assume your negative thought is a subvocalization, meaning that it's like you hear a voice in your head that says something you want to change, like, "I'm an idiot." If the negative thought is visual (a mental image) or kinesthetic (a gut

feeling), you can use a similar process. In many cases the thought will manifest as a combination of all three (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).

### **Step 1: Turn the negative thought into a mental image.**

Take that little voice, and turn it into a corresponding mental picture. For example, if your thought is, "I'm an idiot," imagine yourself wearing a dunce cap, dressed very foolishly, and jumping around like a dork. See yourself surrounded by other people all pointing at you while you shout, "I'm an idiot." The more you exaggerate the scene, the better. Imagine bright colors, lots of animation, rapid movement, and even sexual imagery if it helps you remember. Rehearse this scene over and over in your mind until you reach the point where thinking the negative thought automatically brings up this goofy imagery.

If you have trouble visualizing, you can also do the above in an auditory fashion. Translate the negative thought into a sound, such as a jingle that you sing. Go through the same process with sound instead of imagery. It works either way. I happen to prefer the visual method though.

### **Step 2: Select an empowering replacement thought.**

Now decide what thought you'd like to have instead of the negative one. So if you've been thinking, "I'm an idiot," maybe you'd like to replace that with "I'm brilliant." Choose a thought that empowers you in a way that disrupts the disempowering effect of the original negative thought.

### **Step 3: Turn the positive thought into a mental image.**

Now go through the same process you used in Step 1 to create a new mental scene from the positive thought. So with the example "I'm brilliant," you might imagine yourself standing tall, posing like Superman with your hands on your hips. Picture a giant light bulb appearing just above your head. The bulb turns on so bright that it's blinding, and you see yourself yelling, "I'm bbbbrrrrrllllllliannnnntttt!" Again, keep rehearsing this scene until merely thinking the positive line automatically brings up the associated imagery.

### **Step 4: Mentally chain the two images together.**

Now take the images in Step 1 and Step 3, and mentally glue them together. This trick is used in memory techniques like chaining or pegging. You want to morph the first scene into the second scene. The NLP swish pattern would have you do a straight cut from one scene to the next, but I recommend you animate the first scene into the second. A cut is very weak glue and often won't stick. So instead pretend you're the director of a movie. You have the opening scene and the closing scene, and you have to fill in the middle. But you only have a few seconds of film left, so you want to find a way to make the transition happen as quickly as possible.

For example, one of the hecklers in the first scene might throw a light bulb at the idiot version of you. The idiot you catches the bulb and screws it into the top of his head, wincing at the pain. The bulb then grows into a giant bulb and turns on so bright it blinds all the hecklers. You rip off your dorky clothing to reveal a shining white robe beneath it. You stand tall like Superman and yell confidently, "I'm bbbbrrrrrllllllliannnnntttt!" The hecklers fall to their knees and begin worshipping you. Again, the more exaggeration you use, the better. Exaggeration makes it easier to remember the scene because our brains are designed to remember the unusual.

Once you have the whole scene worked out, mentally rehearse it for speed. Replay the whole scene over and over until you can imagine it from beginning to end in under 2 seconds, ideally in under 1 second. It should be lightning fast, much faster than you'd see in the real world.

### **Step 5: Test.**

Now you need to test your mental redirect to see if it works. It's a lot like an HTML redirect — when you input the old negative URL, your mind should automatically redirect you to the positive one. Merely thinking the negative thought should rapidly bring up the positive thought. If you've done this correctly, you won't be able to help it. The negative thought is the stimulus that causes your mind to run the whole pattern automatically. So whenever you happen to think, "I'm an idiot," even without being fully aware of it, you end up thinking, "I'm brilliant."

If you've never done visualizations like this before, it may take you several minutes or longer to go through this whole process. Speed comes with practice. The whole thing can literally be done in seconds once you get used to it. Don't let the slowness of the first time through discourage you. This is a learnable skill like any other, and it probably will feel a bit awkward the first time.

I recommend you experiment with different types of imagery. You'll likely find some variations more effective than others. Pay particular attention to association vs. dissociation. When you're associated in a scene, you're imagining seeing it through your own eyes (i.e. first-person perspective). When you're dissociated you're imagining seeing yourself in the scene (i.e. third-person perspective). I usually get the best results when I dissociate in both scenes. Your results may vary. You may have to do some mental camera work if you switch from dissociated to associated or vice versa, but it can be done with practice.

I did a lot of this type of mental conditioning during the early 90s. Whenever I uncovered a negative thought, I plucked it out and redirected it. Within a few days, I had reprogrammed dozens of negative thought patterns, and pretty soon it became hard for my mind to even produce a negative thought or emotion. Everything kept getting redirected to the positive side. I think that's partly why I felt so confident about starting my own business right out of college — I used mental conditioning to redirect the thoughts of self-doubt to a more can-do mindset. I also used this a lot while in college, and I'm sure it helped me graduate faster than normal. I still had to

deal with plenty of real-world challenges, but at least I wasn't battling my own self-doubt at the same time.

This type of mental conditioning gave me a lot more conscious control over my internal states. Today it's so internalized that I just do it automatically without even thinking about it. My subconscious took over at some point, so whenever I have a thought like "I can't," it automatically gets twisted into "How can I?" That's actually supposed to happen – with enough mental conditioning practice, your subconscious will take over. Memory experts similarly report that with practice, techniques like pegging and chaining are taken over by the subconscious, just like riding a bicycle.

Give this process a try the next time you notice yourself dwelling on a negative thought. I think you'll find it very empowering. And feel free to share it with others who could use a mental pick-me-up.