# Practice 3: Mindset

## WHAT → Know the Problem

“I am so stupid.”

“I must be the worst teacher ever!”

“I am miserable and nothing ever goes right for me!”

“My students don’t like me.”

“No one at the school likes me.”

Have any of these thoughts run through your mind? As educators, we have all had these miserable hope-hacking thoughts. They can be relentless, constantly criticizing, belittling, judging, condemning, shaming, and questioning. They make sure you do not forget anything you ever did wrong. They try to convince you that you did things you never did. They even criticize your thoughts: “What’s wrong with you thinking these kinds of thoughts? What kind of person are you? You must be crazy!”

Maybe you have heard of this phenomenon as the “inner critic.” You can choose to call it whatever you want to call it. That nagging voice is determined to make you feel like a real worry-wart. It’s like a super-anxious friend constantly scanning for danger, even if it’s not really there. It loves to blow things way out of proportion. It turns minor setbacks into full-on disasters and forgets to mention the good stuff that happens. It also loves to play fortune teller, with a negative twist. It predicts bad intentions in others, assuming they dislike you even with no evidence or questionable evidence to support it. This edgy pest makes you expect to be punished for any mistake, like falling out of favor. It fixates on any hint of lost affection in interactions, turning them into threats. This hypervigilance, always looking for what could go wrong, can lead to long-lasting anxiety. One of their favorite phrases is “what if.”

These voices in our mind try to sabotage us by getting us to grab hold of them and not let go. Guess what? These thoughts are not you and are not manufactured by you. Let that sink in. *These thoughts are not you and are not manufactured by you.* So what are they, where did they come from, and why do they appear?

There are a few reasons why we tend to think negatively. One has to do with the way our brains are wired. The brain's default setting is to think negative because it’s the way we were designed as humans. It evolved that way for good reason: our ancestors had a better chance for survival by honing in on the negative. The brain’s hardware is mainly operated by two very simple, yet ancient, systems: the amygdala, which activates emotions for both negative and positive events, and the frontal cortex, which helps us to interpret events. Cognitive distortions, also known as mentally deformed thoughts (we call them *hope-hacking thoughts*) play an enormous role in our lives, especially when it

comes to our mental health. These hope-hacking thoughts are the kinds of thoughts that our minds lead us to believe are true, when they are interpretations that may or may not be factual.

In addition to worry, there are other kinds of hope-hacking thoughts that can easily induce anxiety. Some common ones are catastrophizing, perfectionism, negative and pessimistic thinking, and obsessions or compulsions that keep you stuck in an anxiety loop constantly repeating thoughts and behaviors. When life is full of chronic, unrelenting stressors, and when our minds are kind of worn down by all the mental mayhem that constantly happens to us, that's when our hope-hacking thoughts start to take a real toll on us.

Our thinking is shaped not only by what's happening in our brains, but by society, culture, media messages, and the influences of our environment, family, and friends. As Jim Rohn famously said, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with," which highlights how the people around us play a significant role in shaping our thoughts and behaviors. To break down hope-hacking thinking, be aware that these are things that shape the thoughts that pop in our heads. Awareness is the first step towards change.

## HOW → Learn a Tool for Thriving

How can we change our operating system to have automatic hope-filled thoughts instead of hope-hacking thoughts? (By the way, don't be too hard on yourself. We all have these, and we are all a work in progress.) We will use the Catch-and-Release Model to work one hope-hacking thought one step at a time and watch joy come in one thought at a time

### Step 1: Catch

- **Recognize.** We must first learn which thoughts are hope-filled and which are hope-hacking. Once you realize there is a hope-hacker trying to hack in your system; then…
- **Stop.** Stop it dead in its tracks! Don't let it race around in your mind, over and over and over (rumination). This is chaotic and makes you feel completely out of control.

### Step 2: Release

- **Analyze.** Write it down at first-at least visualize it for this next part.
- **Put it on trial.** Is this thought fact or fiction?
- **Collect evidence.** What evidence is there that makes this a fact or fiction? For example, is there a bear chasing you, or is the thought a what if there was a bear chasing you. Do you see a real bear?
- **If it is fact,** then deal with it; run as fast as you can!
- **If it is fiction,** then release it. Let it go, and don't hold it any longer.

## Step 3: Rinse

- **Flip the script.** Flip the hope-hacking thought to a hope-filled thought. It must be hope-filled, attainable (not just a fairy tale!), encouraging, motivating, and actionable.

## Step 4: Repeat

Here is an example of Catch, Release, Rinse, Repeat:

Catch, Release, Rinse, and Repeat Sample

| | |
|---|---|
| **CATCH** | *I notice myself thinking, 'There's too much to do—I'll never get it all done.' This thought is making me feel overwhelmed and stuck.* |
| **RELEASE** | *I pause and take a deep breath. I challenge this thought. Is it fact or just stress talking? I remind myself that I don't have to do everything at once.* |
| **RINSE** | *I reframe the thought: 'I can take one step at a time and prioritize what truly matters.' I focus on progress, not perfection.* |
| **REPEAT**<br>*I practice this shift daily, reinforcing the belief that small steps lead to big progress. Over time, I train my brain to focus on what I *can* do instead of what feels impossible.* | |

## Examples of Flipping the Script

**1. All-or-Nothing Thinking (Polarized Thinking):** Seeing things in extremes, with no shades of gray.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** "I messed up this presentation. I'm a complete failure."
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** "The presentation didn't go perfectly, but I can learn from my mistakes and improve next time."

**2. Overgeneralization:** Taking one negative event and applying it to everything.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “I got rejected for this job. I’ll never get a good job.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “This job application wasn’t successful, but there are many other opportunities out there.”

**3. Mental Filter:** Focusing only on the negative aspects of a situation and ignoring the positive ones.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “My boss only mentioned my mistakes in my performance review.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “My boss mentioned areas for improvement and also acknowledged some strengths.”

**4. Discounting the Positive:** Minimizing your accomplishments or positive experiences.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “They only complimented my work because they felt bad for me.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “I received a compliment because my work was very good.”

**5. Jumping to Conclusions (Mind Reading):** Assuming you know what someone else is thinking, without any concrete evidence.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “They’re not talking to me. They must be mad at me.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “I don’t know why they’re not talking to me, and I can always ask them directly.”

**6. Jumping to Conclusions (Fortune Telling):** Predicting that things will turn out badly, without any relevant evidence.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “I'm going to bomb this interview.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “I’m prepared for the interview, and I’m going to do my best.”

**7. Magnification (Catastrophizing):** Blowing a negative event out of proportion and imagining the worst possible outcome.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “If I make a mistake at work, I’ll get fired.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “Everyone makes mistakes at work. If I do make one, I can apologize and learn from it.”

**8. Minimization:** Making light of an unpleasant event or your feelings.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “It’s not a big deal that I got passed over for the promotion.” (when you secretly wanted it)
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “It’s okay to feel disappointed about not getting the promotion. I will focus on what I can do to improve my chances next time.”

**9. Emotional Reasoning:** Believing that your emotions reflect reality.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “I feel like a loser, so I must be a loser.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “My feelings are valid, but they don’t define who I am.”

**10. Should Statements:** Holding yourself or others to unrealistic expectations using *should*, *ought to*, or *must*.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “I should be able to handle this perfectly.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “It’s okay to ask for help if I need it. I’ve taken the word *perfect* out of my vocabulary. I’ll learn from my mistakes if I need to. I’m a work in progress. That’s perfect!

**11. Labeling and Mislabeling:** Assigning negative labels to yourself or others based on a single mistake.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “I made a mistake. I’m such a careless idiot.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “I made a mistake, but that doesn’t mean I’m a bad person. Everyone makes mistakes. I will learn from mine.”

**12. Personification:** Taking responsibility for events that are outside of your control.

- **Hope Hacking Thought:** “If I had been more outgoing, my friend wouldn’t have moved away.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “My friend moved away for reasons of their own, and that’s not something I can control.”

**13. Control Fallacies:** Believing that you have control over everything or that you have no control at all.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “If I worry enough about something bad happening, I can prevent it.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “I can control my own actions and reactions, but I can’t control everything that happens.”

**14. Fallacy of Fairness:** Believing that everything should be fair and that you are getting what you deserve.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “It’s not fair that they got the promotion and I didn’t.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “I may not have gotten the promotion this time, but there will be other opportunities.”

**15. Blaming:** Assigning fault to yourself or others for everything that goes wrong.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “It’s all my fault we lost the game.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “Everyone makes mistakes. Let’s learn from this game and focus on what we can do better next time.”

**16. Disqualification of the Positive:** Rejecting positive experiences because of a perceived flaw.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “Someone complimented my work, but they probably just said that to be nice.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “I received a compliment because my work was so good. I will accept it graciously.”

**17. Labeling:** Assigning global negative labels to yourself or others based on a single event or behavior.

- **Hope-Hacking Thought:** “I forgot to call my friend back. I’m a terrible friend.”
- **Hope-Filled Thought:** “Forgetting to call someone back doesn’t make me a terrible friend. I can apologize and make it up to them.”

## Repeat

We build our hope-operational thinking (HOT) by building hope habits. At first you will need to make a conscious effort to repeat the hope-filled thoughts. Remember, this takes time and practice (63 days to be exact). In fact, building our endurance to notice the hope-hacking thoughts is, in and of itself, a big breakthrough.

We often don’t even realize we are entertaining hope-hacking thoughts. It usually takes focused practice to flip the script because these thoughts might be entirely new to us. Also, we may need help to even know what hope-filled thoughts to use to replace the hope-hacking thoughts. But, it is worth it!

This is the area where you will spend the most time and reap the most valuable gains! Hope doesn’t activate in isolation. Without endurance hope fades. Endurance is what makes hope sustainable. We learn endurance with the help of hope. When hope is lost, endurance becomes passivity (Rich 2021). With practice, the hope-filled thought will

become the automatic thought in time and will no longer take that focused energy. Endurance is vital.

## WHY → Understand the Importance

Imagine your brain is a supercomputer, constantly learning and updating itself based on the thoughts you feed it. The more you focus on fear and doubt, the stronger those neural pathways become. Here's the good news: you can flip the script and rewire your brain for hope, success, and resilience!

Increasing your hope-filled self-talk is like upgrading your mental software: it strengthens the part of your brain that helps you tackle challenges, find solutions, and stay motivated. The coolest part? Your brain can change at any age! Those old hope-hacking messages are simply outdated programming. You have the power to rewrite them!

The key is to keep it real. Hope-filled thoughts aren't about ignoring challenges or pretending everything is perfect. Instead, they're about seeing yourself achieving your goals and taking action to make it happen. By shifting from "I can't" to "I'm doing what it takes," you're training your brain to be a problem-solving machine.

The reality is, 90 percent of your thoughts are repetitive, so whatever you repeat often enough becomes a habit. If your hope-hacking thoughts take over, they can shape how you see yourself and your potential. If you flip the script to hope-filled thoughts, you can create powerful, habitual hope habits that drive success.

Think of your brain like a computer operating system. Your experiences, environment, and past messages all make up your programming. If you let hope-hacking thoughts run the show, it's like clicking on a virus link that corrupts your system. On the other hand, if you choose hope-filled thoughts, you're installing a stronger, more resilient mindset that can lead you to success, happiness, and balance.

As Alain de Botton says, "The difference between hope and despair is a different way of telling stories from the same facts." That's the power of Hope-Operational Thinking (HOT, HOT, HOT!)—rewiring your brain to see possibilities, take action, and create a better future!

Here are some benefits of flipping the script to hope-filled thinking:

- Strengthens problem-solving skills and resilience.
- Rewires the brain for success, motivation, and positivity.
- Encourages self-belief and unlocks potential.
- Maintains a realistic, actionable mindset without false optimism.
- Reinforces self-worth and confidence.

- Helps recognize challenges while focusing on solutions.
- Prevents negative thought loops from becoming habits.
- Promotes emotional balance and mental well-being.

Which type of thinking would you prefer: hope-hacking or hope-filled? The choice is yours. And don't worry, we're on this journey with you! As Best Questers, we're here to help you build the mindset, habits, and strategies that will bring more joy, success, and resilience into your life. Let's do this—together!

## SCIENCE BEHIND THE STRATEGY → Research for Practical Impact

It takes 63 days to develop a habit (Leaf 2021). During this process, the dendrites in your brain where memories and thoughts are stored begin to change. At day 63 of using the new thought, the new thought moves into your unconscious mind and becomes a habit. Just like a house that gets a makeover and is flipped, imagine giving your thinking a major renovation. Renovations take time, but they are worth it. We can upgrade our hope-hacked operational system for a new and improved hope-filled system that is transformed, empowered, and incredibly powerful.

Flipping the script—replacing negative self-talk with hope-filled thoughts—is supported by research in psychology, neuroscience, and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Below are key scientific principles that explain why this strategy works:

- **Thought rewiring**
  - The brain has the ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections based on repeated thoughts and behaviors (Doidge 2007).
  - Empowering self-talk strengthens neural pathways associated with resilience and problem-solving, while hope-hacking self-talk reinforces stress and anxiety (Davidson and McEwen 2012).
- **Hope-hacking thoughts**
  - The way we think affects how we feel and act (Beck 1976).
  - Reframing hope-hacking thoughts into more empowering, hope-filled perspectives that can reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms (Burns 1980).
- **Thought-to-reality outcomes**
  - The way we talk to ourselves can shape our results, either strengthening self-doubt or enhancing performance (Merton 1948).
  - When individuals shift to perceptions that serve them well, they are more likely to take proactive steps toward success (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968).
- **The role of the brain in emotional responses**
  - Repeated exposure to hope-hacking self-talk triggers stress responses, whereas hope-filled thoughts help regulate emotional reactivity in the brain (Fredrickson 2001).

- **The 63-day habit-formation process**
    - Research suggests it takes approximately 63 days to form a lasting habit, including thought patterns (Leaf 2021).
    - Consistently practicing empowering self-talk can help replace deeply ingrained hope-hacking thoughts over time.
- **Hope theory, resilience, and emotional well-being**
    - Snyder's Hope Theory states that hope consists of goal-directed thinking, agency (motivation), and pathways (solutions) (Snyder 2002).
    - Individuals who practice hope-filled thinking demonstrate higher resilience and improved emotional well-being (Cheavens et al. 2005).
- **Gratitude and positive psychology**
    - Expressing gratitude and focusing on empowering self-talk can increase levels of dopamine and serotonin, neurotransmitters linked to happiness and emotional stability (Emmons and McCullough 2003).
    - Positive psychology emphasizes strengths-based approaches to improve well-being (Seligman 2011).

## MEET THE TEACHER → Real-Life Application

Mr. Navarro slammed his overflowing lab coat drawer shut, the clatter echoing through the cluttered science classroom. A rogue test tube skittered across the counter, coming to rest beside a growing pile of ungraded papers and half-eaten granola bars. Burnout, a familiar foe, clung to him like a wet shirt.

Middle school science—once a thrilling whirlwind of bubbling beakers, erupting volcanoes, and electrified curiosity—now felt like a battlefield, littered with the casualties of impossible expectations as far as the eye could see. Standardized tests loomed, demanding a relentless focus on rote memorization (the dang periodic table again!), choking the life out of scientific discovery. Meanwhile, his inbox overflowed with emails about committee meetings, parent conferences, and yet another online training—this time on lab safety and the mating habits of the common fruit fly.

*I should be able to handle all of this. I feel like such a failure,* Mr. Navarro thought, the pressure tightening in his chest.

His students, once a source of endless fascination, now felt like a burden. Their low test scores, a constant reminder of his perceived shortcomings, fueled his self-doubt. A forgotten permission slip morphed into proof of nonexistent parental support, a reflection of his inadequate communication skills. *If only I had explained the deadline more clearly,* he thought, guilt gnawing at him.

A whispered joke during a dissection suddenly felt like an attack on his teaching. *Don't they respect me? Don't they care about learning about these amazing creatures?* His frustration simmered, threatening to boil over.

The passion that once lit up his classroom now flickered, struggling against the weight of frustration, exhaustion, and doubt.

## A TEACHER'S MEMOIR → Learn from Others

*I sank into my chair, exhaustion pressing down on me like a weight I couldn't shake. My shoulders ached, my mind was foggy, and the day had drained every ounce of energy I had left. I can't keep doing this. The thought hit like a dagger, one of many that had been creeping in lately. Teaching had become a relentless cycle of pushing through, running on empty, and wondering if I even made a difference anymore.*

*Then, a teacher at my school recommended* High Five to Thrive*, saying it had completely changed the way she handled stress. She mentioned a tool called Catch, Release, Rinse, and Repeat, but as soon as I heard the steps, it sounded too difficult to even try. I could barely keep up with my workload—how was I supposed to monitor every negative thought and reframe it? It felt like just another thing to add to my already overwhelming to-do list. But I was desperate. Something had to change. If I didn't shift my thinking, burnout wasn't just a possibility; it was inevitable. I told myself I had nothing to lose and finally persuaded myself to give it a try.*

***CATCH:** I noticed the thought creeping in: I should be able to handle all of this. That "should" statement was setting an impossible standard, dragging me deeper into self-doubt.*

***STOP:** I paused, took a deep breath, and reminded myself that this thought wasn't helpful. It was just fueling my exhaustion.*

***RELEASE:** I put the thought on trial. Was it fact, or just a harsh narrative I'd built up? I thought back to last week's astronomy lesson—my students debating black holes with genuine excitement. They were engaged. They were learning. That moment was proof that I was making an impact.*

***RINSE:** I flipped the script. I can't do everything perfectly, but I can find better ways to manage my workload. I can create engaging lessons without burning out.*

***REPEAT:** The cycle started again.*

*When I caught myself thinking, If I had just explained the permission slip deadline more clearly... I paused. Was that entirely on me? Several students had asked about the trip earlier, proving they had heard me. I let go of the guilt and reframed the thought: I can send a reminder email and set up a better system next time.*

*Then came the toughest thought: Do these kids even respect me? Do they even care about science? I stopped myself. I was assuming what they thought without any proof. I remembered a student's specific question about an experiment—clear evidence of curiosity and engagement. I replaced my doubt with a more hopeful thought: Maybe they process information differently today, and I can try a new approach tomorrow.*

*This wasn't just positive thinking—it was science, and I read about it in High Five to Thrive. The book explained that if we repeatedly replace negative thoughts with positive*

*ones, our brains start to rewire. It takes a long time for new thought habits to become natural, but each time we catch ourselves and flip the script, the new thought habit gets more automatic.*

*With each small success, I felt my mindset shifting. My brain was slowly rewiring itself for resilience. My internal system was upgrading from stress-driven survival mode to something stronger—hope and empowerment. I wasn't just trudging through the day anymore; I was reclaiming my energy, my confidence, and my purpose. For the first time in a long while, I felt like myself again. And that was enough.*

# Highlights of Mr. Navarro's Experience

Mr. Navarro's journey with the *Catch, Release, Rinse, and Repeat* tool marked a turning point in his teaching career. He hadn't realized how much his own thinking was fueling his exhaustion and stress—until he stepped back and **e**xamined his thought patterns. Once he recognized the impact of his mindset, he committed to trying a new approach, and the results were too powerful to ignore.

### Rewiring Negative Thought Patterns

Mr. Navarro realized that negative thoughts fueled his stress and self-doubt.

- Research shows these patterns reinforce anxiety and burnout (Beck 1976; Burns 1980).
- By shifting to solution-focused thinking, he rewired his brain for resilience (Doidge 2007).

### Pausing to Regain Control

He learned to stop and take a deep breath whenever negative thoughts spiraled, giving himself a moment to assess their accuracy instead of reacting emotionally.

- Mindful pauses help regulate emotions and reduce stress (Porges 2017).

- Releasing self-defeating thoughts prevented stress responses, promoting a calmer mindset (Fredrickson 2001).

### Flipping the Script: From Doubt to Confidence

Mr. Navarro began questioning whether his self-doubt was based on facts or assumptions. Instead of thinking *I'm failing as a teacher*, he asked, *What evidence do I have to support or challenge this thought?*

- Reframing self-doubt boosted confidence and motivation (Merton 1948; Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968).

- Changing thought patterns strengthened resilience and success (Seligman 2011).

**Regulating Emotional Responses**

As he replaced self-criticism with constructive thoughts, he noticed a shift in how he handled challenges. Instead of frustration, he felt hope; instead of obstacles, he saw possibilities.

- Releasing negativity and focusing on hope improves emotional control and clarity (Leaf 2021).

- Hope-based thinking enhances problem-solving and resilience (Snyder 2002).

**The 63-Day Habit Formation Process**

Mr. Navarro committed to practicing this tool daily, even when it felt unnatural at first. Over time, positive thought replacement became more automatic.

- New habits form in about 63 days as the brain adapts (Leaf 2021).

- Repeating Catch, Release, Rinse, and Repeat strengthened his hopeful mindset.

**Hope Theory, Resilience, and Teacher Well-being**

This mindset shift transformed his teaching experience, helping him reconnect with his students, reignite his passion for education, and approach challenges with a sense of possibility rather than defeat.

- Hope Theory links goal-setting, motivation, and problem-solving to resilience (Snyder 2002; Cheavens et al. 2005).

By consistently applying the Catch, Release, Rinse, and Repeat tool, Mr. Navarro ensured that his hopeful mindset became a lasting habit. Through small, intentional shifts in thinking, he rewired his approach thinking about teaching—and rediscovered the joy that had once inspired him to step into the classroom.

## YOUR TURN → Take Action for Traction

Now, it's your turn. Remember, when hope-hacking thoughts creep in, use Catch, Release, Rinse, and Repeat to shift your mindset. Catch the thought and recognize its impact. Release it by questioning whether it’s fact or just stress talking. Rinse by flipping the script with a hopeful, solution-focused perspective. Repeat this process daily to rewire your brain for resilience and confidence. Small shifts in thinking lead to lasting change, so start today and take control of your mindset!


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