
CBT TOOLS FOR DISSERTATION SUCCESS

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WEEK 1 — INTRODUCTION & MINDFULNESS

BUILDING AWARENESS AND LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR CBT SKILLS

1. Weekly Overview

This week focuses on:

- Understanding the role of **thoughts, emotions, and behaviors** in stress and productivity.
 - Learning **basic mindfulness skills** to stay present and reduce distraction.
 - Setting intentions for your dissertation work.
-

2. Mindfulness Exercise

Daily Practice (5–10 minutes)

1. Find a quiet space and sit comfortably.
2. Close your eyes (or soften your gaze) and notice your **breathing**.
3. Observe **any thoughts** without judgment. Imagine them floating away like clouds.
4. Focus on the **present moment**—sights, sounds, sensations.

Reflection Questions:

- What did you notice about your thoughts and feelings?
- Did you feel tension or calm in your body? Where?
- How easy or difficult was it to stay present?

Tip: Even a few minutes counts—consistency matters more than duration.

3. Thought Awareness Worksheet

Situation	Emotion(s)	Thoughts	Reaction / Behavior

Instructions:

- Write down a situation that caused stress or distraction.
- Identify the emotions you felt.
- Notice the thoughts that went through your mind.

- Describe how you reacted or behaved.

4. Reflection Prompt

“Looking back at today's exercises, what did I learn about my mind, my emotions, and how I handle stress?”

Write your response below:

5. Weekly Goal Tracker

Day	Mindfulness Practice	Thought Awareness Worksheet Completed?	Notes / Wins
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Tip: Record even small wins! Consistency is more important than perfection.

6. Affirmation of the Week

"I notice my thoughts and feelings without judgment. I am building awareness and focus every day."

WEEK 2 — CHALLENGING COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

LEARNING TO IDENTIFY AND CHANGE UNHELPFUL THINKING PATTERNS

1. Weekly Overview

This week focuses on:

- Recognizing **cognitive distortions** (e.g., all-or-nothing thinking, catastrophizing, personalizing).
- Learning how to **challenge and reframe distorted thoughts**.
- Practicing **healthy self-talk** to reduce stress and increase productivity.

2. Cognitive Distortion Awareness Exercise

Step 1: Read the list of common distortions below:

- All-or-Nothing Thinking: Seeing things as black or white.
- Catastrophizing: Expecting the worst-case scenario.
- Personalizing: Blaming yourself for things beyond your control.
- Overgeneralization: Making broad conclusions based on a single event.
- Emotional Reasoning: Assuming your feelings reflect reality.
- Go to next page.

Step 2: Reflect on situations in the past week where you noticed one of these distortions.

Write them below:

Situation	Distortion Type	Thought	Feeling	Notes

3. Challenging Distortions Worksheet

Step 1: Choose one distorted thought from above.

Step 2: Ask yourself:

- What evidence supports this thought?
- What evidence contradicts it?
- Is there a more balanced or realistic perspective?

Step 3: Write the new, balanced thought:

Original Thought	Balanced Thought	Resulting Feeling / Behavior

4. Reflection Prompt

“How did noticing and challenging distorted thoughts change my perspective this week? Did I feel any relief, clarity, or control?”

Write your response below:

5. Weekly Goal Tracker

Day	Mindfulness Practice	Thought Awareness Worksheet Completed?	Notes / Wins
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Tip: Record even small wins! Consistency is more important than perfection.

6. Affirmation of the Week

"I can recognize unhelpful thoughts and choose balanced, empowering perspectives."

WEEK 3 — PERFECTIONISM & PRODUCTIVITY

OVERCOMING PERFECTIONISM TO MAKE CONSISTENT PROGRESS

1. Weekly Overview

This week focuses on:

- Understanding **perfectionism** and how it slows dissertation progress.
- Learning to **set realistic expectations** for work.
- Practicing strategies to **increase productivity without self-criticism**.

2. Perfectionism Awareness Exercise

Reflect on your work habits and responses to tasks:

Questions to answer:

1. Do I delay tasks because they aren't "perfect"?
2. Do I criticize myself excessively after completing a task?
3. Do I compare my work to others' work?

Write your responses below:

Task / Situation	Perfectionist Response	Feelings	Notes

3. Good-Enough Writing Exercise

Instructions:

1. Pick one dissertation-related task (writing, revising, research).
2. Set a timer for **15–30 minutes** and work with the goal of “**good enough**”, not perfect.
3. After the session, reflect:
 - What did I complete?
 - How did it feel to focus on progress instead of perfection?
 - Did I notice any negative self-talk?

Reflection Table:

Task	Time Spent	Outcome	Thoughts / Feelings

4. Reflection Prompt

“What did I learn about myself when I focused on progress rather than perfection? How can I apply this mindset in other areas of my dissertation?”

Write your response below:

5. Weekly Goal Tracker

Day	Mindfulness Practice	Thought Awareness Worksheet Completed?	Notes / Wins
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Tip: Record even small wins! Consistency is more important than perfection.

6. Affirmation of the Week

“Progress matters more than perfection. Each step forward counts.”

WEEK 4 — MOTIVATION & TASK ACTIVATION

TURNING INTENTIONS INTO CONSISTENT ACTION

1. Weekly Overview

This week focuses on:

- Understanding **motivation blocks** and procrastination triggers.
- Learning **task activation strategies** to start and sustain work.
- Applying **small, structured steps** to build momentum.

2. Motivation Awareness Exercise

Reflect on your current workflow and habits:

Questions to answer:

1. Which dissertation tasks do I avoid the most, and why?
2. What emotions or thoughts appear when I procrastinate?
3. How do I feel after completing avoided tasks?

Write your responses below:

Task Avoided	Reason for Avoidance	Emotions Felt	Notes

3. Task Activation Exercise — “Micro-Tasks”

Instructions:

1. Choose one larger dissertation task.
2. Break it into **3–5 small, manageable steps**.
3. Complete at least **one micro-task** today.
4. Reflect on your experience.

Reflection Table:

Main Task	Micro-Task Completed	Time Spent	Thoughts / Feelings

Tip: Start with the easiest micro-task first to build momentum.

4. Reflection Prompt

“How did breaking tasks into smaller steps affect my motivation and progress? What strategies helped me start more easily?”

Write your response below:

5. Weekly Goal Tracker

Day	Mindfulness Practice	Thought Awareness Worksheet Completed?	Notes / Wins
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Tip: Record even small wins! Consistency is more important than perfection.

6. Affirmation of the Week

"I take action one step at a time. Small actions create big progress."

WEEK 5 — MANAGING OVERWHELM

REDUCING STRESS AND REGAINING CONTROL OVER TASKS

1. Weekly Overview

This week focuses on:

- Recognizing **overwhelm triggers** and early signs of stress.
- Learning **strategies to break large tasks into manageable steps**.
- Practicing **grounding and reset techniques** to regain focus.

2. Overwhelm Awareness Exercise

Reflect on your current workload and feelings:

Questions to answer:

1. Which tasks make me feel most overwhelmed?
2. What physical or emotional signs appear when I feel overwhelmed?
3. How do I usually respond—avoidance, stress, or pushing too hard?

Write your responses below:

Task / Situation	Overwhelm Trigger	Feelings / Symptoms	Notes

3. Task Breakdown Exercise

Instructions:

- 1. Pick one overwhelming task.
- 2. Break it into **3–5 small, achievable steps**.
- 3. Complete at least one step today.

Reflection Table:

Main Task	Step Completed	Time Spent	Thoughts / Feelings

Main Task	Step Completed	Time Spent	Thoughts / Feelings

Tip: Focus on progress, not perfection. Completing even one step reduces overwhelm.

4. Grounding & Reset Exercise

Instructions: Use one of the following techniques when feeling stressed:

- **5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Check:** Name 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste.
- **Deep Breathing:** Inhale 4 counts, hold 4 counts, exhale 4 counts, hold 4 counts. Repeat 3–5 times.
- **Short Walk or Movement:** Step away from your workspace for 5 minutes.

Reflection Prompt:

“Which grounding technique helped me most? How did it change my focus or mood?”

5. Weekly Goal Tracker

Day	Mindfulness Practice	Thought Awareness Worksheet Completed?	Notes / Wins
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Tip: Record even small wins! Consistency is more important than perfection.

6. Affirmation of the Week

"I can manage my tasks step by step. Overwhelm is temporary, and I am capable."

WEEK 6 — BOUNDARIES THAT PROTECT YOUR PEACE

CREATING LIMITS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR ENERGY AND FOCUS

1. Weekly Overview

This week focuses on:

- Understanding **personal boundaries** and their role in managing time and energy.
- Learning to **say no** and prioritize dissertation work.
- Practicing **boundary-setting strategies** to reduce stress and distractions.

2. Boundary Awareness Exercise

Reflect on your current boundaries:

Questions to answer:

- 1. Which areas of my life feel overwhelming or draining?
- 2. Where do I struggle to say “no” or set limits?
- 3. How do boundary violations affect my focus or stress levels?

Write your responses below:

Situation / Area	Boundary Issue	Impact on Focus / Energy	Notes

3. Boundary-Setting Exercise

Instructions:

- 1. Identify one area where you need to set a boundary this week.
- 2. Decide on a clear, specific limit (e.g., "I will not check email after 7 PM").
- 3. Communicate it if needed.
- 4. Track your experience.

Reflection Table:

Boundary Set	Action Taken	Reaction / Outcome	Notes / Wins

4. Energy Drainer Identification

Instructions:

- List people, activities, or habits that drain your energy or focus.
- Note one small action to reduce their impact this week.

Energy Drainer	Effect on Dissertation Work	Strategy to Reduce Impact

5. Weekly Goal Tracker

Day	Mindfulness Practice	Thought Awareness Worksheet Completed?	Notes / Wins
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Tip: Record even small wins! Consistency is more important than perfection.

6. Affirmation of the Week

"I protect my focus and energy by setting healthy boundaries. My time and attention are valuable."

WEEK 7 — BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH SELF-TALK

USING POSITIVE AND REALISTIC SELF-TALK TO STRENGTHEN FOCUS AND PERSISTENCE

1. Weekly Overview

This week focuses on:

- Recognizing **negative or self-critical thoughts**.
- Learning to **reframe thoughts into supportive, constructive self-talk**.
- Practicing **resilience-building statements** to improve motivation and confidence.

2. Self-Talk Awareness Exercise

Reflect on your inner dialogue over the past week:

Questions to answer:

- 1. Which negative thoughts occurred most often?
- 2. How did these thoughts affect your emotions or behavior?
- 3. How would you like to speak to yourself instead?

Write your responses below:

Situation / Task	Negative Self-Talk	Emotion / Reaction	Notes

3. Self-Talk Reframing Exercise

Instructions:

- 1. Choose a negative thought from the table above.
- 2. Challenge it: What evidence supports or contradicts it?
- 3. Reframe it into **balanced, supportive self-talk**.

Reflection Table:

Original Thought	Reframed Thought	Resulting Feeling / Behavior

4. Resilience Practice

Instructions:

- Each day, write one **affirming statement** related to dissertation work or personal resilience.
- Repeat it aloud or write it multiple times.

Day	Affirmation	Notes / Reflection
Mon		
Tue		
Wed		
Thu		
Fri		
Sat		

Day	Affirmation	Notes / Reflection
Sun		

5. Weekly Goal Tracker

Day	Mindfulness Practice	Thought Awareness Worksheet Completed?	Notes / Wins
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Tip: Record even small wins! Consistency is more important than perfection.

6. Affirmation of the Week

"I am capable and resilient. My thoughts support my growth and progress."

WEEK 8 — INTEGRATION & LONG-TERM HABITS

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER AND BUILDING LASTING DISSERTATION SUCCESS HABITS

1. Weekly Overview

This week focuses on:

- Reviewing and integrating all strategies learned in Weeks 1–7.
- Creating **long-term habits** for productivity, resilience, and focus.
- Planning a **personalized sustainability plan** for dissertation progress.

2. Reflection & Integration Exercise

Reflect on the course so far:

Questions to answer:

- 1. Which strategies had the greatest impact on my focus, motivation, and resilience?
- 2. Which cognitive distortions do I notice the most, and how have I learned to manage them?
- 3. Which habits do I want to maintain long-term?

Write your responses below:

Strategy / Skill	Impact on My Work	Plan to Maintain / Improve

Strategy / Skill	Impact on My Work	Plan to Maintain / Improve

3. Daily Minimum Tracker

Instructions:

- Identify **1–3 essential tasks** you commit to completing every day.
- Even small progress counts toward long-term goals.

Day	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Completed?	Notes
Mon					
Tue					
Wed					
Thu					
Fri					
Sat					
Sun					

4. Long-Term Resilience Plan

Instructions:

- 1. Identify your **top three strategies** to maintain motivation, focus, and resilience.
- 2. Plan **how you will implement them over the next month.**

Strategy	Implementation Plan	Frequency / Schedule	Notes

5. Final Reflection Prompt

"Looking back over the 8-week course, what have I learned about my thoughts, habits, and ability to complete my dissertation? How will I continue building these skills moving forward?"

Write your response below:

6. Affirmation of the Week

"I have the tools, strategies, and resilience to succeed. I take consistent action toward my dissertation goals."