



Assignment

Jumping to negative conclusions without stepping back to assess a situation can cause problems for a character in a story/novel. We have seen how a character's choice of action may be influenced by a reflexive thought or feeling if he/she doesn't reflect on the situation first.

Here's a chance to examine one of these instances in an important moment in the story/novel and re-think it.

Step 1: Choose an important moment in the story/novel, a point of conflict or deciding event. Re-read the scene so that it is fresh in your mind.

Do reflexive thoughts and feelings negatively affect the outcome of the event? Use the attached chart ("Common Reflexive Reactions") to help you identify types of reflexive responses.

Step 2: Choose one of the characters involved in this event/conflict – a character whom you suspect might be falling victim to reflexive thoughts. Re-write the scene from this character's point of view.

Make sure you take into account the factors that influenced this character's perspective. How does he/she understand the conflict? What reflexive thoughts or feelings influence his/her actions?

Try to draw on the 'voice,' temperament, and knowledge of this character in creating your new scene.

Step 3: Choose one or more of the strategies described in the Student Reading Assignment "Slow down and look around you" from *Brain Driver's Education: Operator's Guide*. Which of these strategies could have helped your character? Re-write the scene again, this time, allowing your character to use some of these strategies. Did the outcome change?

Step 4: Write a brief reaction to this exercise: re-read the scene in the story/novel and the scene you've created. How did it feel to get inside this character's head? Did it make his/her actions more understandable? Do you believe the outcome of this conflict would have been different if the character had used the strategies? Why or why not?



Common Reflexive Reactions

Reaction	Description	Example	Alternative Strategies	Example
Overgeneralization	If it's true in one case, it's always true	I missed every attempted basket today. I'm not a very good athlete.	Look for an alternative explanation	I do OK in soccer. Maybe what I need is some extra practice shooting baskets.
Personalization	I am responsible for failures and other negative events	It is my fault that my parents are getting divorced.	Look for alternative sources of responsibility	It is my parents' responsibility to work on their marriage and to figure out whether or not it is going to work.
Mind-reading	Assuming what others think or assuming I know an outcome without checking	My teacher must think I don't deserve to be in the advanced class	Look for evidence to support/refute the assumption/prediction	I have done well on homework and tests in this class and I often participate, so he has seen that I can understand the material.
Fortune-telling	Predicting without evidence	Our team lost our first game – we're going to lose all the games this season	Look for evidence to support/refute the assumption/prediction	It's only the first game. Last year we lost the opening game, too, but then we got better and even made it to the playoffs.
Catastrophizing	I know the worst thing that I can imagine will happen	If I ask her out, she'll laugh in my face and tell all her friends.	Calculate the probability that the worst will happen. What is the evidence that it won't?	She spent half an hour talking with me after school, and she really laughed hard at my jokes. If she didn't like me at least a little, that wouldn't have happened.
All-or-none thinking	Things are either black or white; all or none	If my friend isn't excited to hear from me every time I call, she must not like me anymore.	Learn to use a continuum for evaluating situations	Sometimes people need time alone or some time with family and other friends – my friend can still care about me at the same time.



Common Reflexive Reactions
(continued)

Reaction	Description	Example	Alternative Strategies	Example
Emotional Reasoning	My emotions equal fact. If I feel it, then it's true.	I know I'm going to make a fool of myself in front of the class when I read my speech.	Separate the objective facts from emotional beliefs	I've spoken in front of the class before and did fine. It's actually a pretty good speech, and I don't need to have it memorized.
"Should" Statements	I just know how I "should, must, or ought to be," and how others ought to be. If things aren't that way, I feel guilty or resentful.	I need to bring an expensive gift, because all the other kids can afford to. The presents will be opened in front of everybody.	Recognize that "should" statements represent preferences instead of vital needs	It would be great to be able to buy a fancy present, but money is pretty tight right now. She really liked it the last time I gave her one of the bracelets I made.
Emotional Labeling	I tend to use extreme emotional terms in describing myself, events, or others, no matter what.	It's the end of the world when my friend and I have a fight, because I'm all alone.	Separate objective facts from emotional beliefs	We've argued before and we were able to work it out. I have other good friends, too, so it's not as if I have no one to talk to.
Minimization/Magnification	Positive events count less than negative events; failures count more than successes	Even though I came in 1 st in the 200-yard race and did well in my relay, I let myself and the team down because I didn't win the 400-yard race.	Identify all parts of a given situation (positive, negative, and neutral)	Wow, I won the 200-yard race! I wish I'd done better in the 400, but I feel good that I helped my relay team do well.