

# thought control

the way you think can enhance your performance or weaken it!



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**We all have an ongoing inner dialogue running through our minds - a stream of conversation or chatter.**

**The majority of this self-talk will be comprised of ordinary, everyday thoughts such as, "I must remember to put the rubbish out today" "I wonder what the weather will be like on Sunday" and so on.**

However, when our self-talk assumes negative undertones, for example, "I bet I don't make this putt" "I'm not going to miss that water obstacle"; "I hate this hole, I never play well on this hole" we run the risk of triggering a chain reaction of events that can affect our golf negatively.

A direct connection exists between the way you think and the way you perform. The way we think, affects the way we feel and the way we feel affects the way we act.

**What are the consequences of thinking unhelpful, deconstructive or negative thoughts on the golf course?**

Anxiety, Annoyance,  
Doubt, Concern



Tension



Change in rhythm and tempo



Change in performance

**You will enhance your performance if you gain control over your thought processes.**

NB: Not all negative thoughts are necessarily bad. Some negative thoughts are potentially useful - they act as alarm signals, a warning that we need to take action e.g. "Oh no, this is a wedge shot and I haven't practised my wedge play for ages." ACTION: To build wedge play practice into my next weeks practice sessions.

Regular negative self talk can also lead to the development of a limiting belief or set of limiting beliefs. For example, take the golfer who continually tells himself on arriving at the 9th hole at his local club that he will not miss the water obstacle. It is likely that this way of thinking will result in the chain reaction described above.

On approaching his shot, his negative thoughts are likely to make him feel apprehensive and nervous. His rhythm and tempo will be disrupted and he will probably end up steering the shot rather than taking a nice, fluid swing. The chances are that his ball will end up finding the water and so a self-fulfilling prophecy cycle has occurred!

**Your mind should be your greatest asset not your biggest enemy!**

Commit to taking charge of your thinking on the golf course. Remember - they are your thoughts - you can decide what you want to listen to.

The way you choose to think can enhance your performance or weaken it. You cannot stop thoughts popping into your mind but you can train yourself to deal with these thoughts effectively. You control your thoughts, not the other way round.

**Choose to think helpful, constructive, empowering thoughts.**

**How Can You Gain Control Over Your Thoughts?**

It can be helpful to formulate a thought plan and experiment with it over a number of weeks in practice and then competition.

**Thought Plan**

**Action One - Become Aware of Your Thoughts:**

- Become aware of your self-talk. Acknowledge what you are thinking generally e.g. around the supermarket, in the car on the way to work, in the shower. Listen to what you are saying to yourself during golf specific occasions e.g. during practice, on the way to the golf course, during your warm up, during competition.
- Notice the type of self-talk that is detrimental and unhelpful to your performance.

**Action Two - Plan:**

Where you see undesirable patterns in your thinking, for example:

- Negative self talk – “I am a useless putter!?!?!”
- Unhelpful self talk – “I might as well give up now and head back into the golf club!?!?!”
- Deconstructive self-talk – “Well I think my mother-in-law could chip better than that!?!?!”

**Challenge these thoughts:**

- Is the way I am thinking helping me to play well?
- Am I thinking as my ideal golfer would think?
- What are the advantages/ disadvantages of thinking this way?
- What would be a more constructive way of interpreting this situation?
- What would be more useful for me to focus on?

**You can deal with these thoughts by planning more constructive and useful alternative thoughts.**

**If this happens...**  
I am on the 9th hole with a water obstacle to negotiate.



**I tend to say this...**  
I just know I am going to find that water again.



**When I should be saying this...**  
Check my set up, nice and slow, middle of the green.

OR

**If this happens...**  
I am not playing well.



**I tend to say this...**  
I have only got five holes left to recover my score.



**When I should be saying this...**  
Keep it simple - trust your pre-shot routine! It makes sense to play one shot at a time. Look after the process and the outcome will look after its self.

**Tips:**

- It is useful to identify the times that you usually fall into negative thinking e.g. on the drive to the golf club, as you are warming up, on the first tee, before a particular hole, after a bad shot etc. If you can recognise those times you may be able to catch yourself before you start!
- Emphasise self-instructing, motivational, simple and present tense replacement thoughts.
- Plan and rehearse what you are going to say to yourself beforehand.

**Action Three – Re-Frame:**

- When you notice yourself thinking in an unhelpful way take control of your thoughts.
- Take a nice even breath to slow the situation down and regain control.
- Pinch your nose/Adjust the Velcro on your glove/Visualise a STOP sign.
- Repeat to yourself “I refuse to carry on thinking like that!”
- Be forceful with yourself.
- Substitute that thought with one of the positive and constructive thoughts you have identified.

**Action Four – Take Control of Your Thinking:**

- **Choose** to think helpful, constructive, empowering thoughts.

**Summary**

Thought control entails recognising what you are focusing your thoughts on and then choosing to listen to helpful, positive and constructive advice. This is not an easy feat to pull off and will take some time, so be patient and persevere. Practice is the key! ⚡