



Reality Testing is “the ability to assess the correspondence between what is experienced and what objectively exists. Reality testing involves “Tuning in” to the immediate situation. It is the capacity to see things objectively, the way they are, rather than the way we wish or fear them to be. Testing this degree of correspondence involves a search for objective evidence to confirm, justify and support feelings, perceptions and thoughts. The emphasis is on pragmatism, objectivity, the adequacy of your perception and authentication of your ideas and thoughts. An important aspect of this component involves the ability to concentrate and focus when trying to assess and cope with situations that arise. Reality testing is associated with a lack of withdrawal from the outside world, a tuning in to the immediate situation and lucidity and clarity in perception and thought processes. In simple terms, reality testing is the ability to accurately “size up” the immediate situation”.

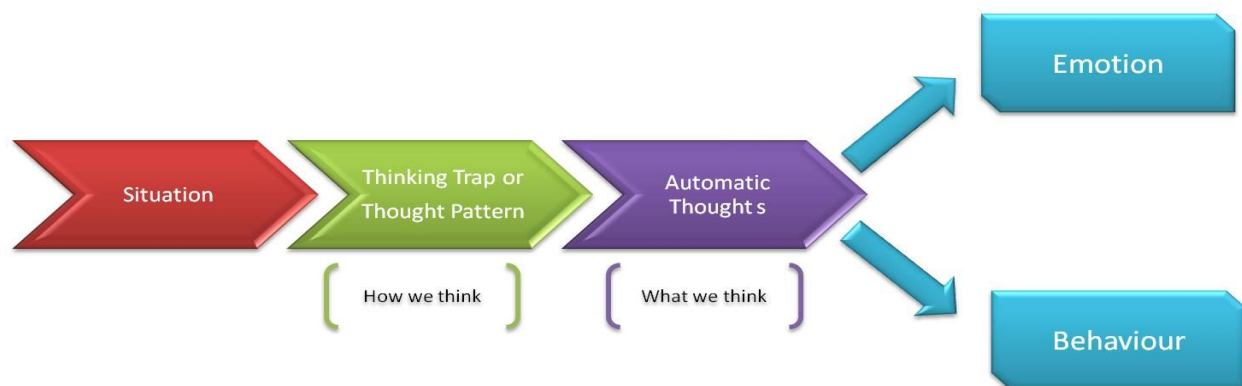
Excerpt from “**The EQ Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success**” by Steven Stein & Howard Book

“Illusions commend themselves to us because they save us pain and allow us to enjoy pleasure instead. We must therefore accept it without complaint when they sometimes collide with a bit of reality against which they are dashed to pieces” Sigmund Freud

Reality Testing

The first step towards building good reality testing habits is to give up your assumption that your first impression of a situation is always accurate. It is hard to know the objective truth of situations. Each of us sees only one side, generally our own, of every interaction. Sometimes what you see is what you have trained yourself to see from your life experience. Reality is often more complex than our simple senses are capable of appreciating. Sometimes our thinking patterns can become a habit that is not productive for us.

We all find ourselves in situations that trigger automatic Thought Traps or problematic Thinking Patterns. These patterns and traps lead to well rehearsed Automatic Thoughts that just sneak by our filter and are accepted as truth. These thoughts then lead to difficult emotional responses or cause us to behave in ways that are troublesome.



Getting to Know Your Thinking Traps and Thought Patterns

All of us, at different point in our life have thought patterns that are unproductive. It is important to explore your thoughts and see if there are some patterns. Check out the common patterns to see if any of them ring true for you. Once you can recognize them, you can work toward shaping and balancing these thoughts to help change how you see things.

Try these on for size...see if some of these common problematic thought patterns fit for you.

All or Nothing Thinking:

You see things in black-and-white categories. For example, if your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.

Over-generalisation:

You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Mental Filter:

You pick out a single negative detail (ignoring the positives) and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like a drop of ink that discolours the entire beaker of water.

Discounting the Positive:

You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief even though it is contradicted by your everyday experiences.

Jumping to Conclusions:

You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

- **Mind Reading.** You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don't bother to check this out. You make assumptions about what another person is thinking.
- **The Fortune Teller Error.** You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.

Magnification (Catastrophising) or Minimization:

You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else's achievement), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other person's imperfections).

Emotional Reasoning:

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true." ("I feel stupid, so I must be.")

Should Statements:

You try to motivate yourself with should's, shouldn't's, musts and oughts. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you can feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

Personalisation:

You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which, in fact, you were not primarily responsible for.

Adapted from: Burns, David D., Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy. Signet, 1980. New York.

Development Tips...

How to Change Your Negative Thinking ...and have a better view of your reality

1. Try to "*listen in*" on your self-talk.

- Remember that self-talk is your inner conversation, the things you say to yourself after a situation, the automatic thoughts that just appear and the instant beliefs that you have about yourself and your ability to handle a situation. Anytime you notice that you are experiencing an unpleasant emotion, stop and ask yourself what you were just thinking about.

For Example...

These are some common thoughts that enter into people's inner conversations uninvited...

I'm a loser, an idiot, a failure.

I'll never be able to do it.

I'm losing control.

I feel like dying.

People always put me down.

They don't care if I fail.

They'll laugh at me.

Do any of these sound familiar?!?!

2. Pay attention to those thoughts!

Try and pick out the thought(s) that really make you feel the emotion the most. Consider this the *hot thought(s)*.

3. Challenge and examine them!

Take these thoughts on, challenge them, they are not reality unless they have been explored in a balanced way. Try writing down the *evidence for and against* the hot thought(s). Can you see the situation differently? Remember that we all make thought errors or fall into thinking traps sometimes. It might be helpful to identify which one you have made. Look at all the evidence. What is the balanced or realistic way of looking at things?

4. Now...take time to notice how you feel when you balance the hot thought.

Did the emotion decrease in intensity? Did any other positive emotion come, such as relief, as a result of changing your negative thinking?

[Reality Testing Questionnaire](#)

[Personal Development Plan](#)

A Note from Your FG Coach...

We all experience thinking traps and patterns that cause us problems in our personal and academic lives. This is completely normal! The good news is that you can start to notice which thoughts are causing you the most difficulty by leading to very difficult emotional responses or behaviours that cause you problems. Change in this area is not easy, but it is so worth it. These thought traps are causing your view of reality to be skewed a bit because you have not fully explored the evidence for and against the problematic thought. This may be a difficult task to take on and you may want help figuring out your thinking patterns and traps. Just so you know...there are counsellors here at Mohawk College who would love to help you explore and develop better thought habits!