

Managing Stress

The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale

Understanding the Impact of Long-term Stress

People use the word "stress" to describe a wide variety of situations – from your cell phone ringing while you're talking on another phone – to the feelings associated with intense work overload, or the death of a loved-one.

But perhaps the most useful and widely accepted definition of stress (mainly attributed to Richard S. Lazarus) is this: Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that "demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize." In less formal terms, we feel stressed when we feel that "things are out of control."

Our ability to cope with the demands upon us is key to our experience of stress. For example, starting a new job might be a wholly exciting experience if everything else in your life is stable and positive. But if you start a new job when you've just moved into a new house, or your partner is ill, or you're experiencing money problems, you might find it very hard to cope.

How much of this does it take to push you "over the edge"? Not all unusual events are equally hard to deal with. For example, compare the stress of divorce with that of a change in responsibilities at work. Because of this, you need to be able to rate and measure your total stress score appropriately.

The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), more commonly known as the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale, was created to do just that. This tool helps us measure the stress load we carry, and think about what we should do about it.

This article looks at the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale, and explains how you can use it to manage the stress in your life.

The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale

In 1967, psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe decided to study whether or not stress contributes to illness. They surveyed more than 5,000 medical patients and asked them to say whether they had experienced any of a series of 43 life events in the previous two years.

Each event, called a Life Change Unit (LCU), had a different "weight" for stress. The more events the patient added up, the higher the score. The higher the score, and the larger the weight of each event, the more likely the patient was to become ill.

The Stress Scale

To score your stress levels, simply check the box in the right hand column next to all the events that have happened to you in the last year.

This scale must not be used in any way to cause harm to an individual's professional career.

	Life Event	Value	Check if this applies
1	Death of spouse	100	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Divorce	73	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Marital separation	65	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Jail term	63	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Death of close family member	63	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Personal injury or illness	53	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Marriage	50	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Fired at work/redundancy	47	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Marital reconciliation	45	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Retirement	45	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Change in health of family member	44	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Pregnancy	40	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Sex difficulties	39	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Gain of new family member	39	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Business readjustment	39	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Change in financial state	38	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Death of close friend	37	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Change to a different line of work	36	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	A large mortgage or loan	31	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	<input type="checkbox"/>

22	Change in responsibilities at work	29	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	Son or daughter leaving home	29	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	Trouble with in-laws	29	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Outstanding personal achievement	28	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	Spouse begins or stops work	26	<input type="checkbox"/>
27	Begin or end school/college	26	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	Change in living conditions	25	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	Revision of personal habits	24	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	Trouble with boss	23	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	Change in work hours or conditions	20	<input type="checkbox"/>
32	Change in residence	20	<input type="checkbox"/>
33	Change in school/college	20	<input type="checkbox"/>
34	Change in recreation	19	<input type="checkbox"/>
35	Change in church activities	19	<input type="checkbox"/>
36	Change in social activities	18	<input type="checkbox"/>
37	A moderate loan or mortgage	17	<input type="checkbox"/>
38	Change in sleeping habits	16	<input type="checkbox"/>
39	Change in number of family get-togethers	15	<input type="checkbox"/>
40	Change in eating habits	15	<input type="checkbox"/>
41	Vacation	13	<input type="checkbox"/>
42	Christmas	12	<input type="checkbox"/>
43	Minor violations of the law	11	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Your Total		<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: If you experienced the same event more than once, then to gain a more accurate total, add the score again for each extra occurrence of the event.

Score Interpretation

Score	Comment
300+	You have a high or very high risk of becoming ill in the near future.
150-299	You have a moderate to high chance of becoming ill in the near future.
<150	You have only a low to moderate chance of becoming ill in the near future.

What You Can Do About This

If you find that you are at a moderate or high level of risk, then an obvious first thing to do is to try to avoid future life crises.

Note 1:

Some scientists have suggested that the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale is weak in certain areas. For example, some feel that different cultural groups react differently to different life events.

One study compared scores of Americans with those of Malaysians. Interestingly, Malaysians had different attitudes toward breaking the law and toward relationships than the Americans did, meaning that their experience of stress was different at the same score.

Keep cultural differences in mind as you score your own life events.

Note 2:

While it's useful to know about this idea so that you can take action with it, don't dwell on it, and don't let this knowledge affect your mood. **Think positively!**

Key Points

The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale is a well-known tool for measuring the amount of stress you've experienced within the past year. Taking the test can help you see clearly if you're at risk of illness due to stress.

Burnout Self-Test

Checking Yourself for Burnout

Burnout occurs when passionate, committed people become deeply disillusioned with a job or career from which they have previously derived much of their identity and meaning. It comes as the things that inspire passion and enthusiasm are stripped away, and tedious or unpleasant things crowd in. This tool can help you check yourself for burnout.

Introduction

This tool can help you check yourself for burnout. It helps you look at the way you feel about your job and your experiences at work, so that you can get a feel for whether you are at risk of burnout.

Checking Yourself for Burnout

#	Question	Not at all	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often
1	Do you feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2	Do you find that you are prone to negative thinking about your job?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3	Do you find that you are harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4	Do you find yourself getting easily irritated by small problems, or by your co-workers and team?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5	Do you feel misunderstood or unappreciated by your co-workers?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6	Do you feel that you have no one to talk to?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7	Do you feel that you are achieving less than you should?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8	Do you feel under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9	Do you feel that you are not getting what you want out of your job?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10	Do you feel that you are in the wrong organization or the wrong profession?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11	Are you becoming frustrated with parts of your job?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12	Do you feel that organizational politics or bureaucracy frustrate your ability to do a good job?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13	Do you feel that there is more work to do than you practically have the ability to do?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14	Do you feel that you do not have time to do many of the things that are important to doing a good quality job?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15	Do you find that you do not have time to plan as much as you would like to?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#	Not at all	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often
1	1	2	3	4	5
2	1	2	3	4	5
3	1	2	3	4	5
4	1	2	3	4	5
5	1	2	3	4	5
6	1	2	3	4	5
7	1	2	3	4	5
8	1	2	3	4	5
9	1	2	3	4	5
10	1	2	3	4	5
11	1	2	3	4	5
12	1	2	3	4	5
13	1	2	3	4	5
14	1	2	3	4	5
15	1	2	3	4	5

Score Interpretation

Score	Comment
15-18	No sign of burnout here
19-32	Little sign of burnout here, unless some factors are particularly severe
33-49	Be careful – you may be at risk of burnout, particularly if several scores are high
50-59	You are at severe risk of burnout – do something about this urgently
60-75	You are at very severe risk of burnout – do something about this urgently

Note:

This tool uses an informal approach to assessing burnout. While it may be intuitively useful, it has not been validated through controlled scientific tests and must therefore not be used as a diagnostic technique. Please, therefore, interpret the results with common sense. Also, make allowances for any recent events that may have a disproportionate influence on your mood at the time you take the test!

How Good Are Your Communication Skills?

Speaking, Listening, Writing, and Reading Effectively

Communication skills are some of the most important skills that you need to succeed in the workplace.

We talk to people face to face, and we listen when people talk to us. We write emails and reports, and we read the documents that are sent to us. Communication, therefore, is a process that involves at least two people – a sender and a receiver. For it to be successful, the receiver must understand the message in the way that the sender intended.

This sounds quite simple. But have you ever been in a situation where this hasn't happened? Misunderstanding and confusion often occur, and they can cause enormous problems.

If you want to be an expert communicator, you need to be effective at all points in the communication process – and you must be comfortable with the different channels of communication. When you communicate well, you can be very successful. On the other hand, poor communicators struggle to develop their careers beyond a certain point.

So are you communicating effectively? Take this short quiz to find out.

The Communication Quiz

Statement	Not at all	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often
1 I try to anticipate and predict possible causes of confusion, and I deal with them up front.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2 When I write a memo, email, or other document, I give all of the background information and detail I can to make sure that my message is understood.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3 If I don't understand something, I tend to keep this to myself and figure it out later.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4 I'm sometimes surprised to find that people haven't understood what I've said.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5 I can tend to say what I think, without worrying about how the other person perceives it. I assume that we'll be able to work it out later.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6 When people talk to me, I try to see their perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7 I use email to communicate complex issues with people. It's quick and efficient.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8 When I finish writing a report, memo, or email, I scan it quickly for typos and so forth, and then send it off right away.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9 When talking to people, I pay attention to their body language.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10 I use diagrams and charts to help express my ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11 Before I communicate, I think about what the person needs to know, and how best to convey it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12 When someone's talking to me, I think about what I'm going to say next to make sure I get my point across correctly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13 Before I send a message, I think about the best way to communicate it (in person, over the phone, in a newsletter, via memo, and so on).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14 I try to help people understand the underlying concepts behind the point I am discussing. This reduces misconceptions and increases understanding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15 I consider cultural barriers when planning my communications.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not at all	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often
1	1	2	3	4	5
2	5	4	3	2	1
3	5	4	3	2	1
4	5	4	3	2	1
5	5	4	3	2	1
6	1	2	3	4	5
7	5	4	3	2	1
8	5	4	3	2	1
9	1	2	3	4	5
10	1	2	3	4	5
11	1	2	3	4	5
12	5	4	3	2	1
13	1	2	3	4	5
14	1	2	3	4	5
15	1	2	3	4	5

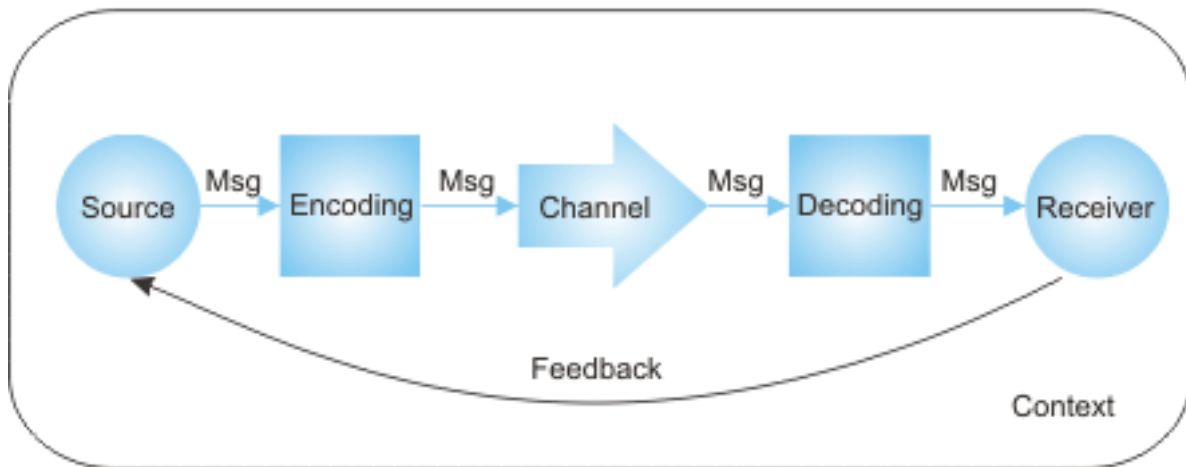
Score Interpretation

Score	Comment
56-75	Excellent! You understand your role as a communicator, both when you send messages, and when you receive them. You anticipate problems, and you choose the right ways of communicating. People respect you for your ability to communicate clearly, and they appreciate your listening skills.
36-55	You're a capable communicator, but you sometimes experience communication problems. Take the time to think about your approach to communication, and focus on receiving messages effectively, as much as sending them. This will help you improve.
15-35	You need to keep working on your communication skills. You are not expressing yourself clearly, and you may not be receiving messages correctly either. The good news is that, by paying attention to communication, you can be much more effective at work, and enjoy much better working relationships! The rest of this article will direct you to some great tools for improving your communication skills.

Detailed Interpretation

Whenever you communicate with someone else, you and the other person follow the steps of the communication process shown below.

The Communications Process



Here, the person who is the source of the communication encodes it into a message, and transmits it through a channel. The receiver decodes the message, and, in one way or another, feeds back understanding or a lack of understanding to the source.

By understanding the steps in the process, you can become more aware of your role in it, recognize what you need to do to communicate effectively, anticipate problems before they happen, and improve your overall ability to communicate effectively.

The sections below help you do this, and help you improve the way you communicate at each stage of the process.

The Source - Planning Your Message

(Questions 1, 2, 11)

Before you start communicating, take a moment to figure out what you want to say, and why. Don't waste your time conveying information that isn't necessary – and don't waste the listener or reader's time either. Too often, people just keep talking or keep writing – because they think that by saying more, they'll surely cover all the points. Often, however, all they do is confuse the people they're talking to.

To **plan your communication**:

- Understand your objective. Why are you communicating?
- Understand your audience. With whom are you communicating? What do they need to know?
- Plan what you want to say, and how you'll send the message.
- Seek feedback on how well your message was received.

When you do this, you'll be able to craft a message that will be received positively by your audience.

Good communicators use the **KISS** ("Keep It Simple and Straightforward") principle. They know that less is often more, and that good communication should be efficient as well as effective.

Encoding – Creating a Clear, Well-Crafted Message

(Questions 1, 5, 8, 10, 15)

When you know what you want to say, decide exactly how you'll say it. You're responsible for sending a message that's clear and concise. To achieve this, you need to consider not only what you'll say, but also how you think the recipient will perceive it.

We often focus on the message that we want to send, and the way in which we'll send it. But if our message is delivered without considering the other person's perspective, it's likely that part of that message will be lost. To communicate more effectively:

- Understand what you truly need and want to say.
- Anticipate the other person's reaction to your message.
- Choose words and body language that allow the other person to really hear what you're saying.

With **written communication**, make sure that what you write will be perceived the way you intend. Words on a page generally have no emotion – they don't "smile" or "frown" at you while you're reading them (unless you're a very talented writer, of course!)

When writing, take time to do the following:

- Review your style.
- Avoid **jargon** or slang.
- Check your grammar and punctuation.
- Check also for tone, attitude, nuance, and other subtleties. If you think the message may be misunderstood, it probably will. Take the time to clarify it!
- Familiarize yourself with your company's writing policies.

Another important consideration is to use pictures, charts, and diagrams wherever possible. As the saying goes, "a picture speaks a thousand words."

Also, whether you speak or write your message, consider the **cultural context**. If there's potential for miscommunication or misunderstanding due to cultural or language barriers, address these issues in advance. Consult with people who are familiar with these, and do your research so that you're aware of problems you may face.

Choosing the Right Channel

(Questions 7, 11, 13)

Along with encoding the message, you need to choose the best communication channel to use to send it. You want to be efficient, and yet make the most of your communication opportunity.

Using email to send simple directions is practical. However, if you want to delegate a complex task, an email will probably just lead to more questions, so it may be best to arrange a time to speak in person. And if your communication has any negative emotional content, stay well away from email! Make sure that you communicate face to face or by phone, so that you can judge the impact of your words and adjust these appropriately.

When you determine the best way to send a message, consider the following:

- The sensitivity and emotional content of the subject.
- How easy it is to communicate detail.
- The receiver's preferences.
- Time constraints.
- The need to ask and answer questions.

Decoding – Receiving and Interpreting a Message

(Questions 3, 6, 12, 14)

It can be easy to focus on speaking; we want to get our points out there, because we usually have lots to say. However, to be a great communicator, you also need to step back, let the other person talk, and just listen.

This doesn't mean that you should be passive. Listening is hard work, which is why effective listening is called **active listening**. To listen actively, give your undivided attention to the speaker:

- Look at the person.
- Pay attention to his or her body language.
- Avoid distractions.
- Nod and smile to acknowledge points.
- Occasionally think back about what the person has said.
- Allow the person to speak, without thinking about what you'll say next.
- Don't interrupt.

Empathic listening also helps you decode a message accurately. To understand a message fully, you have to understand the emotions and underlying feelings the speaker is expressing. This is where an understanding of **body language** can be useful.

Feedback

(Questions 3, 4, 9)

You need feedback, because without it, you can't be sure that people have understood your message. Sometimes feedback is verbal, and sometimes it's not. We've looked at the importance of asking questions and listening carefully. However, feedback through **body language** is perhaps the most important source of clues to the effectiveness of your communication. By watching the facial expressions, gestures, and posture of the person you're communicating with, you can spot:

- Confidence levels.

- Defensiveness.
- Agreement.
- Comprehension (or lack of understanding).
- Level of interest.
- Level of engagement with the message.
- Truthfulness (or lying/dishonesty).

As a speaker, understanding your listener's body language can give you an opportunity to adjust your message and make it more understandable, appealing, or interesting. As a listener, body language can show you more about what the other person is saying. You can then ask questions to ensure that you have, indeed, understood each other. In both situations, you can better avoid miscommunication if it happens.

Feedback can also be formal. If you're communicating something really important, it can often be worth asking questions of the person you're talking to to make sure that they've understood fully. And if you're receiving this sort of communication, repeat it in your own words to check your understanding.

Key Points

It can take a lot of effort to communicate effectively. However, you need to be able to communicate well if you're going to make the most of the opportunities that life has to offer.

By learning the skills you need to communicate effectively, you can learn how to communicate your ideas clearly and effectively, and understand much more of the information that's conveyed to you.

As either a speaker or a listener, or as a writer or a reader, you're responsible for making sure that the message is communicated accurately. Pay attention to words and actions, ask questions, and watch body language. These will all help you ensure that you say what you mean, and hear what is intended.

The 7 Cs of Communication

A Checklist for Clear Communication

Think of how often you communicate with people during your day. You write emails, facilitate meetings, participate in conference calls, create reports, devise presentations, debate with your colleagues... the list goes on.

We can spend almost our entire day communicating. So, how can we provide a huge boost to our productivity? We can make sure that we communicate in the clearest, most effective way possible.

This is why the 7 Cs of Communication are helpful. The 7 Cs provide a checklist for making sure that your **meetings**, **emails**, **conference calls**, **reports**, and **presentations** are well constructed and clear – so your audience gets your message.

According to the 7 Cs, communication needs to be:

- Clear.
- Concise.
- Concrete.
- Correct.
- Coherent.
- Complete.
- Courteous.

In this article, we look at each of the 7 Cs of Communication, and we'll illustrate each element with both good and bad examples.

1. Clear

When writing or speaking to someone, be clear about your goal or message. What is your purpose in communicating with this person? If you're not sure, then your audience won't be sure either.

To be clear, try to minimize the number of ideas in each sentence. Make sure that it's easy for your reader to understand your meaning. People shouldn't have to "read between the lines" and make assumptions on their own to understand what you're trying to say.

Bad Example

Hi John,

I wanted to write you a quick note about Daniel, who's working in your department. He's a great asset, and I'd like to talk to you more about him when you have time.

Best,

Skip

What is this email about? Well, we're not sure. First, if there is multiple Daniels in John's department, John won't know who Skip is talking about.

Next, what is Daniel doing, specifically, that's so great? We don't know that either. It's so vague that John will definitely have to write back for more information.

Last, what is the purpose of this email? Does Skip simply want to have an idle chat about Daniel, or is there some more specific goal here? There's no sense of purpose to this message, so it's a bit confusing.

Good Example

Let's see how we could change this email to make it clear.

Hi John,

I wanted to write you a quick note about Daniel Kedar, who's working in your department. In recent weeks, he's helped the IT department through several pressing deadlines on his own time.

We've got a tough upgrade project due to run over the next three months, and his knowledge and skills would prove invaluable. Could we please have his help with this work?

I'd appreciate speaking with you about this. When is it best to call you to discuss this further?

Best wishes,

Skip

This second message is much clearer, because the reader has the information he needs to take action.

2. Concise

When you're concise in your communication, you stick to the point and keep it brief. Your audience doesn't want to read six sentences when you could communicate your message in three.

- Are there any adjectives or "filler words" that you can delete? You can often eliminate words like "for instance," "you see," "definitely," "kind of," "literally," "basically," or "I mean."
- Are there any unnecessary sentences?
- Have you repeated the point several times, in different ways?

Bad Example

Hi Matt,

I wanted to touch base with you about the email marketing campaign we kind of sketched out last Thursday. I really think that our target market is definitely going to want to see the company's

philanthropic efforts. I think that could make a big impact, and it would stay in their minds longer than a sales pitch.

For instance, if we talk about the company's efforts to become sustainable, as well as the charity work we're doing in local schools, then the people that we want to attract are going to remember our message longer. The impact will just be greater.

What do you think?

Jessica

This email is too long! There's repetition, and there's plenty of "filler" taking up space.

Good Example

Watch what happens when we're concise and take out the filler words:

Hi Matt,

I wanted to quickly discuss the email marketing campaign that we analysed last Thursday. Our target market will want to know about the company's philanthropic efforts, especially our goals to become sustainable and help local schools.

This would make a far greater impact, and it would stay in their minds longer than a traditional sales pitch.

What do you think?

Jessica

3. Concrete

When your message is concrete, then your audience has a clear picture of what you're telling them. There are details (but not too many!) and vivid facts, and there's laser like focus. Your message is solid.

Bad Example

Consider this advertising copy:

The Lunchbox Wizard will save you time every day.

A statement like this probably won't sell many of these products. There's no passion, no vivid detail, nothing that creates emotion, and nothing that tells people in the audience why they should care. This message isn't concrete enough to make a difference.

Good Example

How much time do you spend every day packing your kids' lunches? No more! Just take a complete Lunchbox Wizard from your refrigerator each day to give your kids a healthy lunch AND have more time to play or read with them!

This copy is better because there are vivid images. The audience can picture spending quality time with their kids – and what parent could argue with that? And mentioning that the product is stored in the refrigerator explains how the idea is practical. The message has come alive through these details.

4. Correct

When your communication is correct, it fits your audience. And correct communication is also error-free communication.

- Do the technical terms you use fit your audience's level of education or knowledge?
- Have you checked your **writing** for grammatical errors? Remember, spell checkers won't catch everything.
- Are all names and titles spelled correctly?

Bad Example

Hi Daniel,

Thanks so much for meeting me at lunch today! I enjoyed our conservation, and I'm looking forward to moving ahead on our project. I'm sure that the two-week deadline won't be an issue.

Thanks again, and I'll speak to you soon!

Best,

Jack Miller

If you read that example fast, then you might not have caught any errors. But on closer inspection, you'll find two. Can you see them?

The first error is that the writer accidentally typed conservation instead of conversation. This common error can happen when you're typing too fast. The other error is using weak instead of week.

Again, spell checkers won't catch word errors like this, which is why it's so important to proofread everything!

5. Coherent

When your communication is coherent, it's logical. All points are connected and relevant to the main topic, and the tone and flow of the text is consistent.

Bad Example

Traci,

I wanted to write you a quick note about the report you finished last week. I gave it to Michelle to proof, and she wanted to make sure you knew about the department meeting we're having this Friday. We'll be creating an outline for the new employee handbook.

Thanks,

Michelle

As you can see, this email doesn't communicate its point very well. Where is Michelle's feedback on Traci's report? She started to mention it, but then she changed the topic to Friday's meeting.

Good Example

Hi Traci,

I wanted to write you a quick note about the report you finished last week. I gave it to Michelle to proof, and she let me know that there are a few changes that you'll need to make. She'll email you her detailed comments later this afternoon.

Thanks,

Michelle

Notice that in the good example, Michelle does not mention Friday's meeting. This is because the meeting reminder should be an entirely separate email. This way, Traci can delete the report feedback email after she makes her changes, but save the email about the meeting as her reminder to attend. Each email has only one main topic.

6. Complete

In a complete message, the audience has everything they need to be informed and, if applicable, take action.

- Does your message include a "call to action", so that your audience clearly knows what you want them to do?
- Have you included all relevant information – contact names, dates, times, locations, and so on?

Bad Example

Hi everyone,

I just wanted to send you all a reminder about the meeting we're having tomorrow!

See you then,

Chris

This message is not complete, for obvious reasons. What meeting? When is it? Where? Chris has left his team without the necessary information.

Good Example

Hi everyone,

I just wanted to remind you about tomorrow's meeting on the new telecommuting policies. The meeting will be at 10:00 a.m. in the second-level conference room. Please let me know if you can't attend.

See you then,

Chris

7. Courteous

Courteous communication is friendly, open, and honest. There are no hidden insults or passive-aggressive tones. You keep your reader's viewpoint in mind, and you're empathetic to their needs.

Bad Example

Jeff,

I wanted to let you know that I don't appreciate how your team always monopolizes the discussion at our weekly meetings. I have a lot of projects, and I really need time to get my team's progress discussed as well. So far, thanks to your department, I haven't been able to do that. Can you make sure they make time for me and my team next week?

Thanks,

Phil

Well, that's hardly courteous! Messages like this can potentially start office wide fights. And this email does nothing but create bad feelings, and lower productivity and morale. A little bit of courtesy, even in difficult situations, can go a long way.

Good Example

Hi Jeff,

I wanted to write you a quick note to ask a favour. During our weekly meetings, your team does an excellent job of highlighting their progress. But this uses some of the time available for my team to highlight theirs. I'd really appreciate it if you could give my team a little extra time each week to fully cover their progress reports.

Thanks so much, and please let me know if there's anything I can do for you!

Best,

Phil

What a difference! This email is courteous and friendly, and it has little chance of spreading bad feelings around the office.

Variations

There are a few variations of the 7 Cs of Communication:

- **Credible** – Does your message improve or highlight your credibility? This is especially important when communicating with an audience that doesn't know much about you.
- **Creative** – Does your message communicate creatively? Creative communication helps keep your audience engaged.

Key Points

All of us communicate every day. The better we communicate, the more credibility we'll have with our clients, our boss, and our colleagues.

Use the 7 Cs of Communication as a checklist for all of your communication. By doing this, you'll stay clear, concise, concrete, correct, coherent, complete, and courteous.

Stress Diaries

Identifying Causes of Short-Term Stress

Whether stress is caused by rush-hour traffic, a heavy workload, difficult customers, or unpleasant news, many of us experience it in some form during the day. The problem is that if stress goes unchecked, it can affect our productivity and, worse still, our health.

This is where keeping a Stress Diary can be useful. Stress Diaries are important for understanding the causes of short-term stress in your life. They also give you an important insight into how you react to stress, and they help you to identify the levels of pressure at which you prefer to operate. (After all, a little bit of pressure can be a good thing!)

The idea behind Stress Diaries is that, on a regular basis, you record information about the stresses you're experiencing, so that you can analyse these stresses and then manage them. This is important because often these stresses flit in and out of our minds without getting the attention and focus that they deserve.

As well as helping you capture and analyse the most common sources of stress in your life, Stress Diaries help you to understand:

- The causes of stress in more detail.
- The levels of pressure at which you operate most effectively.
- How you may be able to improve the way you manage stress.

Using the Tool

To get started, make regular entries in your Stress Diary (for example, every hour). If you have any difficulty remembering to do this, set an alarm to remind you to make your next diary entry.

Also, make an entry in your diary after any stressful incidents.

Every time you make an entry, record the following information:

- The date and time of the entry.
- The most recent stressful event you experienced.
- How happy you feel now, using a subjective assessment on a scale of -10 (the most unhappy you've ever been) to +10 (the happiest you've been). As well as this, write down the mood you're feeling.
- How effectively you're working now (a subjective assessment, on a scale of 0 to 10). A 0 here would show complete ineffectiveness, while a 10 would show the greatest effectiveness you have ever achieved.
- The fundamental cause of the stress (being as honest and objective as possible).

You may also want to note:

- The symptoms you felt (for example, "butterflies in the stomach," anger, headache, raised pulse rate, sweaty palms, and so on.).
- How well you handled the event: Did your reaction help solve the problem, or did it actually make things worse?

Analysing the Diary

Once you've kept a Stress Diary for a number of days, you can analyse it and take action on it:

- First, look at the different stresses you experienced during the time you kept your diary. Highlight the most frequent stresses, and also the ones that were most unpleasant.
- Working through the stresses you've highlighted, look at your assessments of their underlying causes, and your appraisal of how well you handled the stressful event. Do these highlight problems that need to be fixed? If so, list these areas.
- Next, look through your diary at the situations that cause you stress. List ways in which you can change these situations for the better.
- Finally, look at how you felt when you were under pressure, and explore how it affected your happiness and your effectiveness. Was there a middle level of pressure at which you were happiest and performed best?

Having analysed your diary, you should fully understand what the most important and frequent sources of stress are in your life, and you should appreciate the levels of pressure at which you are happiest. You should also know the sort of situations that cause you stress, so that you can prepare for them and manage them well.

Note:

You'll reap the real benefits of having a Stress Diary in the first few weeks that you use it. After this, you may find that you have better uses for your time.

If, however, your lifestyle changes, or you begin to suffer from stress again, then it may be worth using the diary approach one more time. You'll probably find that the stresses you face have changed.

Next Steps

Your next step is to get your stress under control.

Start by looking at the people and events that cause the most stress for you.

Some stresses will be unavoidable, especially if you're in a job with lots of responsibility.

Key Points

Stress Diaries help you to get a good understanding of the routine, short-term stresses that you experience in your life. Using them, you can identify the most important, and most frequent, stresses that you experience, so that you can concentrate your efforts on these. They also help you to identify areas where you need to improve your stress management skills, and let you to understand the levels of stress at which you are happiest, and most effective.

Albrecht's Four Types of Stress

Managing Common Pressures

Imagine that you work in human resources, and that you've recently been dealing with a lot of people problems. It's been another long day. You're now meeting with your last "client" before you go home.

As you listen to this person's story, you start to get tense. You find yourself avoiding making direct eye contact with her, and you feel yourself shutting down emotionally. You don't want to listen to her complaints at all; instead, you just want to finish.

Rather than taking your frustrations out on this person, however, you apologize and ask for a five-minute break. You go for a quick walk outside, breathe deeply, and then stop for some water. When you go back into your office, you're smiling, refreshed, and ready to help.

Most people experience some degree of stress in their jobs. But if you understand the most common types of stress and know how to spot them, you can manage your stress much better. This, in turn, helps you to work productively, build better relationships, and live a healthier life.

In this article, we'll examine four common types of stress, and we'll discuss how you can manage each of them more effectively.

The Four Common Types of Stress

Dr Karl Albrecht, a management consultant and conference speaker based in California, is a pioneer in the development of stress-reduction training for businesspeople. He defined four common types of stress in his 1979 book, "**Stress and the Manager.**"

Albrecht's four common types of stress are:

1. Time stress.
2. Anticipatory stress.
3. Situational stress.
4. Encounter stress.

Let's look at each of these types of stress in detail, and discuss how you can identify and deal with each one.

1. Time Stress

You experience time stress when you worry about time, or the lack thereof. You worry about the number of things that you have to do, and you fear that you'll fail to achieve something important. You might feel trapped, unhappy, or even hopeless.

Common examples of time stress include worrying about deadlines or rushing to avoid being late for a meeting.

Managing Time Stress

Time stress is one of the most common types of stress that we experience today. It is essential to learn how to manage this type of stress if you're going to work productively in a busy organization.

First, learn good **time management skills**. This can include using **To-Do Lists** or, if you have to manage many simultaneous projects, **Action Programs**.

Next, make sure that you're devoting enough time to your important priorities. Unfortunately, it's easy to get caught up in seemingly urgent tasks which actually have little impact on your overall objectives. This can leave you feeling exhausted, or feeling that you worked a full day yet accomplished nothing meaningful.

Your important tasks are usually the ones that will help you reach your goals, and working on these projects is a better use of your time. Our article on **The Urgent/Important Matrix** explains how to balance urgent and important tasks, and our article on **prioritization** helps you separate tasks that you need to focus on from those you can safely put off.

If you often feel that you don't have enough time to complete all of your tasks, learn how to **create more time in your day**. This might mean coming in early or working late, so that you have quiet time to focus. You should also use your peak working time to concentrate on your most important tasks – because you're working more efficiently, this helps you do more with the time you have.

For instance, if you're a morning person, schedule the tasks that need the greatest concentration during this time. Our article "**Is This a Morning Task**" helps you learn how to prioritize your tasks and schedule them during your most productive times of day. You can leave less important tasks, like checking email, for times when your energy levels drop.

Also, make sure that you're polite but **assertive** about **saying "no"** to tasks that you don't have the capacity to do.

2. Anticipatory Stress

Anticipatory stress describes stress that you experience concerning the future. Sometimes this stress can be focused on a specific event, such as an upcoming presentation that you're going to give. However, anticipatory stress can also be vague and undefined, such as an overall sense of dread about the future, or a worry that "something will go wrong."

Managing Anticipatory Stress

Because anticipatory stress is future based, start by recognizing that the event you're dreading doesn't have to play out as you imagine. Use **positive visualization techniques** to imagine the situation going right.

Research shows that your mind often can't tell the difference, on a basic neurological level, between a situation that you've visualized going well repeatedly and one that's actually happened.

Other techniques – like **meditation** – will help you develop focus and the ability to concentrate on what's happening right now, rather than on an imagined future. Consider setting aside time daily – even if it's only five minutes – to meditate.

Anticipatory stress can result from a lack of confidence. For example, you might be stressing over a presentation that you're giving next week, because you're afraid that your presentation won't be interesting. Often, addressing these personal fears directly will lower your stress. In this example, if you put in extra time to practice and prepare for tough questions, you'll likely feel more prepared for the event.

Last, learn how to overcome a **fear of failure**: by making contingency plans and analysing all of the possible outcomes, you'll get a clearer idea of what could happen in the future. This can help diminish your fear of failure and give you a greater sense of control over events.

3. Situational Stress

You experience situational stress when you're in a scary situation that you have no control over. This could be an emergency. More commonly, however, it's a situation that involves conflict, or a loss of status or acceptance in the eyes of your group. For instance, getting laid off or making a major mistake in front of your team are examples of events that can cause situational stress.

Managing Situational Stress

Situational stress often appears suddenly, for example, you might get caught in a situation that you completely failed to anticipate. To manage situational stress better, learn to be more **self-aware**. This means recognizing the "automatic" physical and emotional signals that your body sends out when you're under pressure.

For example, imagine that the meeting you're in suddenly dissolves into a shouting match between team members. Your automatic response is to feel a surge of anxiety. Your stomach knots and feels bloated. You withdraw into yourself and, if someone asks for your input, you have a difficult time knowing what to say.

Conflict is a major source of situational stress. Learn effective **conflict resolution skills**, so that you're well-prepared to handle the stress of conflict when it arises. It's also important to learn how to **manage conflict in meetings**, since resolving group conflict can be different from resolving individual issues.

Everyone reacts to situational stress differently, and it's essential that you understand both the physical and emotional symptoms of this stress, so that you can manage them appropriately. For instance, if your natural tendency is to withdraw emotionally, then learn how to **think on your feet** and communicate better during these situations. If your natural response is to get angry and shout, then learn how to **manage your emotions**.

4. Encounter Stress

Encounter stress revolves around people. You experience encounter stress when you worry about interacting with a certain person or group of people – you may not like them, or you might think that they're unpredictable.

Encounter stress can also occur if your role involves a lot of personal interactions with customers or clients, especially if those groups are in distress. For instance, physicians and social workers have high rates of encounter stress, because the people they work with routinely don't feel well, or are deeply upset.

This type of stress also occurs from "contact overload": when you feel overwhelmed or drained from interacting with too many people.

Managing Encounter Stress

Because encounter stress is focused entirely on people, you'll manage this type of stress better by working on your people skills. To find out how good your people skills are, take our **quiz**, and discover the areas that you need to develop.

A good place to start is to develop greater **emotional intelligence**. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize the emotions, wants, and needs of yourself and of others. This is an important skill in interacting with others and in building good relationships.

It's also important to know when you're about to reach your limit for interactions in the day. Everyone has different symptoms for encounter stress, but a common one is withdrawing psychologically from others and working mechanically. Another common symptom is getting cranky, cold, or impersonal with others in your interactions. When you start to experience these symptoms, do whatever you can to take a break. Go for a walk, drink water, and practice **deep breathing exercises**.

Empathy is a valuable skill for coping with this type of stress, because it allows you to see the situation from the other person's perspective. This gives you greater understanding and helps you to structure your communications so that you address the other person's feelings, wants, and needs.

Key Points

Dr Karl Albrecht published his model of the four common types of stress in his 1979 book, "Stress and the Manager." These are:

1. Time stress.
2. Anticipatory stress.
3. Situational stress.
4. Encounter stress.

While everyone experiences different physical and emotional symptoms of stress, it's important to understand how you respond to each one. When you can recognize the type of stress you're experiencing, you can take steps to manage it more effectively.

Are You a Positive or Negative Thinker?

Learn About - and Change - How You Think

These are two powerful quotes. Combined, they tell us that if we think positively, we're likely to enjoy positive results. Negative thinking, on the other hand, can lead to outcomes we don't want.

Positive and negative thoughts can become self-fulfilling prophecies: What we expect can often come true.

If you start off thinking you will mess up a task, the chances are that you will: You may not try hard enough to succeed, you won't attract support from other people, and you may not perceive any results as good enough.

Positive thinking, on the other hand, is often associated with positive actions and outcomes. You're drawn to, and you focus on, the positive aspects of a situation. You have hope and faith in yourself and others, and you work and invest hard to prove that your optimism is warranted. You'll enthuse others, and they may well "pitch in" to help you. This makes constructive outcomes all the more likely.

When it comes down to it, positive, optimistic people are happier and healthier, and enjoy more success than those who think negatively. The key difference between them is how they think about and interpret the events in their life.

So, how do you think about your successes and failures? Do you have a predictable thinking pattern? Find out below.

Are You a Positive or Negative Thinker?

Take this short quiz to determine what kind of thinker you are.

	Question	Not at all	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often
1	When my boss or a customer asks to speak with me, I instinctively assume that he or she wants to discuss a problem or give me negative feedback.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2	When I experience real difficulty at work/home, I also feel negative about other parts of my life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3	When I experience a setback, I tend to believe the obstacle will endure for the long-term, e.g. "The funding didn't come through, so I guess that means they hate the project. All that work for nothing."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4	When a team I am on is functioning poorly, I believe that the cause is short-term and has a straightforward solution. For example, "We're	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	not working well at the moment, but if we can fix this problem, then we'll do much better!"					
5	When I'm not chosen for an assignment I really want, I tend to believe that I just don't have the specific skills they are looking for right now, <i>as opposed to thinking I am generally unskilled.</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6	When something happens that I don't like or appreciate, I can tend to conclude that the cause is widespread in nature and will continue to plague me. For example, "My assistant didn't 'cc' me on that email she sent to my boss. Administrative assistants are all out to prove how much smarter they are than their supervisors."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7	When I perform very well on an assignment, I believe that it's because I'm generally talented and smart, as opposed to thinking I am good in that one very specific area.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8	When I receive a reward or recognition, I can tend to figure that luck or fate played more of a role than my actual work or skill, e.g. "They asked me to be the key note speaker at the conference next year. I guess the other guys were all busy."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9	When I come up with a really good idea, I am surprised by my creativity. I figure it is my lucky day, and caution myself not to get used to the feeling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10	When something bad happens at work, I see the contributions that everyone made to the mistake, as opposed to thinking that I am incompetent and to blame.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11	After winning an award/recognition/contract, I believe it's because I am better than the competition. For example, "We won that large contract against two strong competitors. We're simply better than they are."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12	As the leader, when my team completes a project, I tend to attribute the success to the hard work and dedication of the team members, as opposed to my skilled leadership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13	When I make a decision that proves to be successful, it's because I have expertise on the subject and analysed that particular problem really well, as opposed to being generally a strong decision maker.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14	When I achieve a long-term and personally challenging goal, I congratulate myself, and think about all the skills that I used in order to be successful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question	Not at all	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often
1	5	4	3	2	1
2	5	4	3	2	1
3	5	4	3	2	1
4	1	2	3	4	5
5	1	2	3	4	5
6	5	4	3	2	1
7	1	2	3	4	5
8	5	4	3	2	1
9	5	4	3	2	1
10	1	2	3	4	5
11	1	2	3	4	5
12	5	4	3	2	1
13	5	4	3	2	1
14	1	2	3	4	5

Score Interpretation

Score	Comment
14-31	Yikes! It must feel like there is a rain cloud that hangs overhead all day. You have gotten yourself into the habit of seeing things as your fault and you've learned to give up your control in many situations. Taking this quiz is the first step toward turning your pessimism around. Read the rest of this article carefully, and use the exercises daily. (Read below to start.)
32-50	You try to be optimistic and positive however some situations get the better of you. Identify your triggers for negative thinking and use rational thinking exercises to become naturally more optimistic. (Read below to start.)
51-70	Great job! You have a generally positive and optimistic outlook on life. You don't take things personally and you are able to see that setbacks won't ruin the rest of your life. (Read below for more.)

Turn Negatives into Positives

The first step in changing negative thinking is to become aware of it. For many of us, negative thinking is a bad habit – and we may not even know we're doing it!

If you're feeling bad after reading this, imagine how it would feel to surround yourself with that much negativity. Then ask yourself if this is the way you tend to think in your own life?

Dr Martin Seligman, who has been described as America's most influential psychologist, has done extensive research on thought patterns. In particular, he looks at the impact of an optimistic versus pessimistic outlook on life and success.

Seligman says we explain events using three basic dimensions of **Permanence**, **Pervasiveness** and **Personalization**, with optimistic people on one end of the scale and pessimistic people on the other. We look at these below.

Permanence

(Questions 3, 4, 9, 11)

Believing that something we are experiencing is either permanent or temporary. A low score implies that you think bad times will carry on forever. A high score shows confidence that you'll be able to get things back on course quickly.

Pessimist: I lost my job and I'll never find one as good again. No point even looking!

Optimist: I lost my job. Thank goodness there are other opportunities I can explore!

Pervasiveness

(Questions 2, 5, 6, 7 and 13)

Believing that situational factors cause an effect or that the effect is evidence of more universal factors at work. A low score shows that you tend to think that if you've experienced a problem in one place, you'll experience that problem wherever you go.

Pessimist: I lost my job. Companies are all the same; all they care about is money. I don't know why I bother putting in any effort at all.

Optimist: I lost my job. It's too bad our company has to reinvent itself to stay competitive. Thankfully I learned some great transferable skills!

Personalization

(Questions 1, 8, 10, 12 and 14)

Believing that something about you influenced the outcome or that something external to you caused it. A low score indicates that you tend to blame yourself for bad things, rather than attributing the cause to more general factors.

Pessimist: I lost my job. If I had been a decent employee they would have found a new job for me.

Optimist: I lost my job. I gave it my all, however they just can't use my skill set right now.

Re-shape Your Thinking

Your answers to the questions in this quiz can show whether you have a positive or negative pattern of thinking. They're also great starting points to become more aware of your thoughts - and the effect they have on your life.

When you're more aware of the way you think, you can take action to use positive situations to your advantage, and re-shape the negative ones. The goal is to think positively, regardless of the situation, and make a conscious effort to see opportunities instead of obstacles.

So, in our example, if you immediately think the receptionist is mad at you because she didn't say hello, how rational is that? Could she have been busy or distracted when you walked by? Did you say hello to her? Maybe she wasn't feeling well, or she was in a negative mood herself. These are all more rational reasons for her behaviour than simply assuming that you did something wrong.

To help you start thinking positively, see our comprehensive article on **Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking, and Positive Thinking**. This is a "must read" for everyone, even very positive thinkers, because it shows why positive thinking is so important, and it discusses how to turn negative thought patterns into positive ones.

Persistent negative thinking can cause mental health problems, including depression. While these positive thinking techniques have been shown to have a positive effect, they are for guidance only, and readers should take the advice of suitably qualified health professionals if they are experiencing persistent unhappiness.

Key Points

Becoming more positive is always a good thing. Using this quiz, you can identify where and how much you tend to think negatively. The more aware you are of your thoughts, the better you'll be able to change them to emphasize the positive.

Positive thinking usually attracts positive people, events, and outcomes. If you want to create an environment where you're successful and satisfied, you'll need the power of positive thinking on your side.

You may not be aware of all of your negative thoughts and the effect they have on your life, however, by taking some time to understand your own thought patterns, you can challenge those irrational, negative thoughts – and replace them with more positive, optimistic and empowering messages.

The ABC Technique

Overcoming Pessimistic Thinking

Robyn has worked hard on a report all week. The deadline was tight, and, as she hands it over to her boss for an initial read-through, she swells with pride. She knows her boss is going to commend the quality of her work.

However, as her boss reads it, she develops a small frown. A moment later, she hands the report back to Robyn.

"I think you did a good job," she says. "If you'll just rework section two and add the figures I sent over last night, this will be ready to present to the board."

Robyn heads back to her office, crushed. She worked so hard, and her boss thinks the report is lousy. She adds the new figures with a sinking heart, wondering how long it will be before she's demoted or fired. For the rest of the day, she can't get the image of her boss's frown out of her mind. Her mood is down, she's listless, and her work suffers. She even misses a sale with a key client, because she's not on her game.

Clearly, Robyn is blowing the situation way out of proportion. With her pessimistic outlook, she has assumed the worst, and has turned a small setback into a disaster.

How about you? Are you an optimist? Or would you have reacted in the same way as Robyn?

Optimists have been proven to be happier, healthier, more productive and more successful than pessimists. The good news is that optimism is a skill - you can learn how to be more optimistic. In this article, we'll show you how to use the ABC Technique to develop a more optimistic outlook.

About the Technique

This approach was originally created by psychologist, Dr. Albert Ellis. It was then adapted by Dr. Martin Seligman, a University of Pennsylvania professor and past president of the American Psychological Association. Seligman's adapted version was published in his 1990 book, "Learned Optimism."

ABC stands for:

- Adversity.
- Beliefs.
- Consequences.

In short, we encounter Adversity (or, an Activating Event, as per Ellis's original model). How we think about this creates Beliefs. These beliefs then influence what we do next, so they become Consequences.

Here's an example - you yell at your assistant because she forgot to print a key report before your meeting (Adversity). You then think, "I'm a really lousy boss" (Belief). You then perform poorly during your meeting, because your self-confidence has plummeted (Consequences).

The key point occurs between adversity and belief. When you encounter adversity, how you tend to explain it to yourself directly impacts your mind set and your relationships. Seligman calls this your "explanatory style," and he says that it is a habit that influences your entire outlook on life.

There are three dimensions to your explanatory style:

1. Permanence

Pessimistic people unconsciously assume that the causes of bad events are permanent, while optimists believe that bad events are temporary.

For instance, imagine you had a bad day and had no time to help a colleague who needed your expertise. A pessimist might think, "I should never be friends with anyone at work because I'm a terrible friend." An optimist might think, "I was a terrible friend today."

The difference is subtle, but it really matters for your outlook!

2. Pervasiveness

Pessimists make universal statements about their lives when something goes badly, while optimists make specific statements.

For instance, a pessimist might think, "All my reports are useless." An optimist might think, "This report was useless."

Again, the difference is subtle. Pessimists take one negative event and allow it to turn their entire work, or life, into a catastrophe. Optimists recognize that they might have failed in one area, but they don't allow that failure to overwhelm other parts of their lives.

3. Personalization

When we experience a negative event, we have two ways to think about it. We can blame ourselves for the event (internalizing it). Or, we can blame something outside ourselves (externalizing it).

Pessimists often internalize blame. They think, "This is all my fault," or "I'm too dumb to do this job." Optimists have higher self-esteem because they tend to externalize blame, thinking, "This is all John's fault," or "I haven't learnt enough about this skill yet; that's why I'm not doing well at this task."

Note:

Remember – adversity doesn't always cause negative beliefs. This will depend on the event, and your explanatory style.

Step 1: Track Your Inner Dialog

Begin by keeping a diary for several days. Your goal is to listen to your inner dialog, especially when you encounter a stressful or difficult situation.

For each situation, write down the adversity you experienced, the beliefs you formed after encountering the adversity, and the consequences of those beliefs.

Consequences can be anything, from happy or unhappy thoughts and feelings, to specific actions that you took. (Use our [worksheet](#) to get started.)

Example

Adversity: A colleague criticized my product idea in front of the team during our weekly meeting.

Belief: She's right; it was a dumb idea. I don't have much of an imagination, and now the entire team can see how uncreative I am. I should never have spoken up!

Consequences: I felt stupid and didn't speak up for the rest of the meeting. I don't want to attend any of the other team meetings this week, and have already made an excuse to avoid tomorrow's meeting.

Step 2: Analyse Results

Once you've written down several ABC situations, take a look at what you have found.

Here, you need to look for patterns in your thinking, specifically, how any broad beliefs have led to specific consequences.

To be optimistic, you need to change your beliefs following adversity. This, in turn, leads to more positive consequences.

Step 3: Use Distraction and Disputation

As you can see, the beliefs you develop after encountering adversity play a major role in your life, and determine whether you're an optimistic or pessimistic thinker. This makes it important to manage negative ABC patterns.

There are two ways to override these: distraction and disputation.

Distraction

If you want to interrupt your negative thoughts, you need to distract yourself. Simply telling yourself "not to think negatively" isn't going to work: you need to interrupt the cycle.

To do this, try distracting yourself when you start creating negative beliefs.

For example, you could wear a rubber band around your wrist. After you've gone through a stressful situation, and when you begin to formulate negative thoughts and beliefs as a result,

snap the rubber band against your skin. This physical sting will remind you to step out of the cycle of negative thinking.

Once you've interrupted your negative thoughts, you need to shift your attention somewhere else. Concentrate intently on something else for a minute.

Disputation

Although distraction is useful for interrupting negative thinking, a more permanent solution is to dispute them. Think of Disputation as a "D" after ABC.

To dispute your negative thoughts and beliefs, you argue with yourself rationally. In particular, you look for the mistaken assumptions about your explanatory style that we talked about earlier.

We'll use the previous example to illustrate this technique, below.

Adversity: A colleague criticized my product idea in front of the team during our weekly meeting.

Belief: She's right; it was a dumb idea. I don't have much of an imagination, and now the entire team can see how uncreative I am. I should never have spoken up!

Consequences: I felt stupid and didn't speak up for the rest of the meeting. I don't want to attend any of the other team meetings this week, and have already made an excuse to avoid tomorrow's meeting.

Disputation: I'm blowing this out of proportion. My colleague had every right to criticize my idea; it was nothing personal, and her critique was spot on. She even commended my creative thinking once the meeting was over. All I need to do is think my ideas through a bit better next time.

Tip 1:

Disputing negative thoughts is also a good way to **build self-confidence**.

Tip 2:

You can also add an "E" for "Energization" to the letters A, B, C and D. This is where you take time to think about the positive feelings, behaviours, and actions that could or do follow from having a more optimistic outlook.

Key Points

The ABC Technique is an approach developed by Albert Ellis and adapted by Martin Seligman to help us think more optimistically.

The technique is based on our explanatory style. That is, how we explain difficult or stressful situations to ourselves, across dimensions of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. These thoughts directly impact what we believe about the event, ourselves, and the world at large.

The Technique pushes you to analyse three aspects of a situation:

1. Adversity.
2. Beliefs.
3. Consequences.

Whenever you encounter adversity you develop thoughts and beliefs about the situation. This, in turn, leads to consequences.

To be optimistic, you must change what you believe about yourself, and the situation, when you encounter adversity. Positive beliefs will, in turn, lead to more positive consequences, and a more positive outlook.

Coping With Change

Managing Your Emotions and Expectations

"He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery."

– Harold Wilson, British politician

How much change have you experienced in the last year?

Perhaps you've had to learn a complicated new software system. You may have taken on new team members, or a new role. Or you might have gone through a merger or an acquisition.

Change is routine in today's workplace. And, no matter what you do, you probably can't – or shouldn't – try to stop it.

However, you can choose how you react to it.

If you can embrace and cope with change, you'll be valued highly in your organization. You'll be seen as a flexible and adaptable team player, and this reputation can open up many opportunities. If, however, you consistently resist change, you'll be seen as "part of the problem," and you'll get left behind.

In this article, we'll look at why coping with change is so important, and we'll discuss a framework that you can use to deal with it more effectively.

The Importance of Coping

So, what is coping? **One formal definition** says that it's a "process by which an individual attempts to minimize the negative emotions that arise from the experience of negative events." **Another** defines coping as "cognitive and behavioural efforts to deal with experiences that tax or exceed one's resources."

Put **simply**, coping describes the way that we think about and deal with stressful events.

Importantly, it's often your attitude towards change that determines your emotions and your experience of it. Some people view change positively, and see it as an exciting opportunity to learn and grow. Others see change negatively, as something to fear and to avoid.

It's important to know how to cope with change, because there's so much of it about. Organizations are continuously shifting, growing, downsizing, merging, and acquiring people and resources. Developments in technology mean that we need to learn new ways of working and communicating. We also need to know how to cope with smaller changes, such as getting to know a new team member, or learning new standards in a particular industry.

People who resist change will likely find themselves overlooked for important projects, passed over for promotions, or left behind entirely. The inability to cope with change can also lead to great stress, and other negative physical and psychological effects.

How to Cope with Change

Change can bring amazing opportunities, or it can bring defeat. It can lift an entire team up, or it can lead people to find other employment.

Researchers Mel Fugate, Angelo J. Kinicki, and Gregory E. Prussia argue that there are two major types of coping strategies: "control coping" and "escape coping."

"Control coping" is positive and proactive. You refuse to feel like a victim of change; instead you take charge and do whatever you can to be part of the solution, including managing your feelings.

"Escape coping" is based on avoidance. You experience thoughts and emotions, or take specific actions, that help you avoid the difficulties of change. For instance, you might deliberately miss training classes, or show up too late to attend a meeting about the upcoming change.

People can use both strategies simultaneously when coping with change. However, as you can imagine, control coping is the best option to choose, because it puts you in a position of positive control. Here, you proactively search for a way to be a part of the solution, instead of reacting to, and avoiding, the change.

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

So, how can you put yourself in control?

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman give us a useful way of doing this with their "**Transactional Model of Stress and Coping**". You can use this simple approach to look objectively at the change situation you're experiencing, and analyse what you can do to respond to it effectively.

There are three stages in this model:

1. Primary appraisal.
2. Secondary appraisal.
3. Coping efforts.

Let's look at each of these stages in greater detail, and think about how this can help you deal with change.

1. Primary Appraisal

In your primary appraisal, you evaluate the event and its significance to you, your unique situation, and your sense of well-being. You're answering the question "Is this change going to affect you in a positive or a negative way?"

A major part of coping with change is deciding whether the change represents a threat: at this initial stage, you might not be sure what risks or opportunities this change poses for you. Conduct

a **SWOT Analysis** to identify the possible threats and opportunities that you will face or experience. Next, conduct a **Risk Analysis** to get a better sense of the risks that you might experience in this situation.

It can also be helpful to conduct an **Impact Analysis** to identify the positive and negative consequences of the change you're facing. Does it threaten your expert status or your job, or is the impact smaller? Or will this change make your work easier or enhance your skills? You'll feel more in control and informed when you know both the positive and negative consequences, and this will also guide your actions in the next step.

It can often be useful to talk informally about what you're feeling – remember that it usually helps to have social support in these situations. It's also important to **manage your emotions**. Try not to take negative feelings out on others, and use techniques like **thought awareness** to keep control of your emotions.

And keep in mind that not all change is bad – often, it can be a very good thing! Try to get excited about what's coming.

2. Secondary Appraisal

Once you've determined how this change is going to affect you and your well-being, you can then go through a second appraisal.

In this assessment, you think about how you can control what's happening by asking, "What can I do about this situation?" You also begin to look at the resources you have available for coping with this change, and you start thinking about whether these are sufficient.

Next, make a list of things that might help you through this change. Which of your current skills will help you to succeed? Do you have a skill or knowledge gap that might hinder your ability to navigate this change? And do you need additional training?

Also, do your best to find out more about this change. Be proactive, ask for news and updates, and make sure that you share what you learn with your colleagues. This will help them feel informed and comfortable, but might also prevent the spread of rumours, which can lower morale and engagement.

Tip:

Consider becoming a "change agent" – an active supporter and promoter of the change. If you do this well, it can mark you out as a "rising star" in your organization.

3. Coping Efforts

Your coping efforts determine how well you handle the situation. This is where control coping and escape coping strategies often come into play.

It's important to avoid common escape coping strategies, like drinking too much alcohol, lashing out emotionally, and other negative behaviours. Instead, focus on control coping, and think about how you can take control of this situation and create a positive outcome for yourself and for the people around you.

People who have a positive outlook find it much easier to engage in control coping. So, use positive thinking techniques like **Affirmations** and **Visualization** to foresee a great outcome.

Next, keep up-to-date with what your colleagues are going through. If this change affects them as well, ask them how they're coping. Often, reaching out and trying to help others can also help you cope more effectively. Our article on **coaching through change** has many strategies that you can use to help your colleagues and team members cope.

Remember to take time for yourself. If you're going through a major organizational change such as a promotion, takeover, or acquisition, you might feel pressured to work longer hours, especially if your job is at risk. This is often appropriate, however, it's essential to take time out during the day to eat healthy foods, get some exercise, and de-stress; and it's also important to remember to **relax after a hard day's work**.

Last, try to maintain a positive outlook about the situation. Even if a change seems negative at first, there's often a positive outcome if you take the time to find it. Only you can decide whether you'll grow from the situation, or let it affect you negatively.

Tip:

See our article on the **Change Curve** to learn about another approach for helping people through change. Where change is significant, you can use this model to guide people through the stages of denial, anger, acceptance, and commitment that they might experience.

Key Points

In today's workplace, change occurs regularly. These changes can be small or large, and knowing how to cope with them effectively is essential to your career, as well as for your health and well-being.

Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping provides a useful framework for appraising your situation, and for coping with the anticipated outcome. It outlines three stages of coping:

1. Primary appraisal – where you assess the risks and opportunities that come with the change.
2. Secondary appraisal – where you plan how you'll adapt to, and, if appropriate, support the change.
3. Coping efforts – where you take control of the situation.

Overall, it's important that you maintain a positive attitude to change, where you sensibly should. This will help you cope with the situation, and grow from the experience.

Toffler's Stability Zones

Finding Peace Amid Chaos

How many times have you had "one of those days"? You know, when it seems as if everything in your life changed overnight? There are new initiatives at work, a new set of procedures to learn, new colleagues to get to know, a new office location to become familiar with. It just goes on!

At the end of one of those days, it's a huge relief to get home! You walk in the door, and suddenly the stress disappears. You're surrounded by the people you love, by all the comforts of your familiar things. Home is your safe place, and when you're there, the stress of work is far away.

The challenges that arise from change are common. Every time we turn around, it seems like technology has changed – and many people feel pressured to keep up with this fast pace. Do you carry your Blackberry everywhere and take working vacations? Instead of relaxing at night, do you use your laptop to catch up even more?

If this sounds like you, you may feel burned out, overworked and overwhelmed.

The good news is that you can create personal "Stability Zones" to help you manage the change in your life. Familiar places – like home or a favourite coffee shop – can become much-needed escapes to let your mind and body re-energize and renew themselves.

Alvin Toffler first presented the concept of personal Stability Zones in his 1971 book, "Future Shock." Although the theory was never accepted academically, it's still interesting and relevant to what many of us face today.

Toffler's Stability Zones

Toffler's concept is fairly simple. Stability Zones are places or things that make you feel safe, relaxed, and secure. Think of them as buffers – types of protection or defence – against the outside world. When you're in or with your Stability Zone, you feel safe. It's something safe and familiar, something that doesn't change.

And they're not limited to specific places. They can be things, people, objects, or even ideas:

- **People** – People Stability Zones offer you a relaxing, restful atmosphere when you're with them. They listen to what you say, and you don't have to try to be a different person when they're around. They have values similar to yours, and they've probably been in your life for a long time. A Person Stability Zone could be a spouse, best friend, parent, or co-worker.
- **Ideas** – Idea Stability Zones could be anything from religious faith and political ideology to deeply held beliefs or values (such as environmental protection).
- **Places** – These are very common. Home is one of the most widely used places of refuge, to help someone feel "safe." But a Place Stability Zone can also be larger in scale – like a country – or much smaller in scale – like a specific room.
- **Things** – These could be favourite possessions – like a well-loved book or family heirloom – or favourite clothes that make you feel good.

- **Organizations** – A favourite club, professional group, or even your company could be your Stability Zone – any place or group that you identify with and where you feel welcome.

As an employer or leader, understand the importance of Stability Zones for your staff, and encourage your team to use them often. These can be most helpful when a company is going through a major transition, such as a takeover. But they can also help you and your staff handle the day-to-day stresses of the work environment.

If you work in a "hot desking" environment, where others use your desk or workstation when you're not there, it may be hard to have a Place Stability Zone at the office. In this situation, you may want to carry objects with you that create these zones – like photographs – or you may want to rely more on less physical types of Stability Zones – such as people or ideas – to help you manage change.

Identify Your Stability Zones

To determine your personal Stability Zones, start by thinking of two or three options for each type listed above. Then, narrow them down by asking yourself these questions:

- **How stable are they?** For example, if you listed a co-worker as a Person Stability Zone, are you sure that person will always be there for you? If you listed a favourite coffee shop as a Place Stability Zone, are you confident that it will be there for a while? Remember, you want places, people, and things that aren't going to change as fast as the rest of the world. Think in terms of constancy, dependability, and comfort.
- **How many of your Stability Zones can be influenced by you?** To what extent are the zones – these people, places, things, and so on – under your control?
- **Do you spend enough time nurturing these Stability Zones?** You may need to invest time developing and maintaining your Stability Zones, especially with the people in your life. If you don't have the time or desire to invest in these relationships, places, and things, then you might find that, over time, they aren't as comforting and constant as you once thought they might be.
- **Will your Stability Zones remain solid and steady over time?** The only thing you can ever really count on is change. Yes, you want stable things in your life that won't change quickly – but the fact is that, eventually, things **are** going to change. One day, you may discover that your home just isn't big enough, or one of your deeply held beliefs isn't the guiding force it used to be. Are the Stability Zones you've chosen able to endure over time?

Create Stability Zones for Your Team

In the workplace, it can be important for people to have Stability Zones. If you're in charge of a team and you think that members of your team are struggling with change, then teach them about Stability Zones, and help them find ways to use them during a difficult day to rest and re-gain energy.

Help create Stability Zones in your workplace by doing the following:

- Make sure that your team members take reasonable lunch breaks.

- Encourage your team **not** to spend their nights and weekends working.
- Consider offering workshops on positive thinking, leadership, or delegation.
- Consider offering incentives for your team to participate in physical exercise.

Key Points

Our world seems to change faster every day. Managing this change can make you feel stressed and overwhelmed. This is why having familiar, safe zones can be so important for your well-being. Stability Zones – people, places, ideas, objects, or organizations – can offer you a feeling of security. They can let your mind rest from the change and stress around you.

If members of your team are struggling with change, then educate them on the importance of Stability Zones, and have a plan to create Stability Zones in the workplace. Doing so may enable your staff to renew their mental energy, and it may give them the ability to cope better with stress and change

How Good Is Your Anger Management?

Controlling your anger before it controls you

We all get angry. It's a normal emotion. However, some of us handle our anger better than others.

While one person might be a bit unhappy when someone cuts him off in traffic, another is so angry that he shouts and swears, and starts driving aggressively himself.

How can the same event cause such different reactions? And how can you make sure that your reaction is the calm one, instead of the wild one?

How Good is Your Anger Management?

So how well do you manage your anger? Use the online test **below** to find out how well you do.

Instructions:

Please answer questions as you actually are (rather than how you think you should be), and don't worry if some questions seem to score in the 'wrong direction'.

Statement	Not at all	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often
1 I seem to get angry unexpectedly, without really understanding why.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2 When someone makes me angry, I try not to show my emotions, and pretend to tolerate it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3 When I encounter a problem, I identify the "right" solution myself and get it implemented as fast as possible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4 When I'm angry, I hit something (or I want to hit something).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5 When something frustrating happens, I know it's not the end of the world.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6 When something really frustrates me, I can usually see the humour in the situation, and I laugh at myself and/or the others involved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7 When people make me angry, I try to understand why they did or said what they did.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8 I feel that I'm able to control my anger.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9 I can forgive people after they've hurt or angered me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10 When I feel angry, I give myself a "time out" (I walk away to calm down).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11	I have an activity, hobby, or routine I use to release my feelings of anger.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12	When I'm angry, I tend to focus on my feelings and how I've been wronged.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13	After I've been angry, I think about what I could or should have done to control my anger better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14	When I'm angry, I find alternatives and give myself enough time to make a good choice to solve my problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15	When I'm angry, I tend to yell, curse, and say things that I later regret.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16	When someone asks me to do something I really don't want to do, I agree – and then I'm angry at myself later.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17	If I know a certain situation will make me angry, I avoid it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18	If another person damages something of mine due to carelessness, I confront the person and use the situation to talk about responsibility.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#	Not at all	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often
1	5	4	3	2	1
2	5	4	3	2	1
3	5	4	3	2	1
4	5	4	3	2	1
5	1	2	3	4	5
6	1	2	3	4	5
7	1	2	3	4	5
8	1	2	3	4	5
9	1	2	3	4	5
10	1	2	3	4	5
11	1	2	3	4	5
12	5	4	3	2	1
13	1	2	3	4	5
14	1	2	3	4	5
15	5	4	3	2	1
16	5	4	3	2	1
17	1	2	3	4	5
18	1	2	3	5	4

Score Interpretation

Score	Comment
18-41	You seem to let your anger control you, which probably causes you all sorts of problems. In turn, this may make you more angry. Fortunately, you can learn how to break this cycle.
42-66	You're able to manage your anger in some situations and not others. You have a few strategies that work for you, however, you'll benefit from a better understanding of what causes your anger, and what actions you can take to better manage your emotions.
67-90	Well done! You have a very good understanding of what makes you angry, and you know what to do when you start to feel signs of trouble. You've developed a wide range of anger management strategies, and you can be proud of these.

Manage Your Anger Constructively

The goal of anger management is not to eliminate anger completely: that isn't possible, since it's a natural human emotion. Rather, the objective is to control and direct your anger – so that it doesn't control you, or damage an important relationship or situation.

In **Anger Management: Channelling Anger into Performance**, we discuss Redford Williams's steps for controlling anger. There are three key elements to these:

1. Understanding what causes your anger.
2. Reducing your angry reactions.
3. Controlling your anger when you experience it.

Understand What Causes Your Anger

(Questions 1, 8 and 13)

One of the most effective approaches for managing anger is to identify the sources of the anger you experience. Once you know what makes you angry, you can develop strategies for dealing with it. When you're in the middle of a bad situation, it's hard to think logically and rationally, so understanding what causes your anger can help you plan how to deal with it.

- Use a diary or "anger log" to write down the times, people, and situations that make you angry.
- Look for trends, or things that make you angry often.
- Ask yourself why these things make you angry. Do you connect certain memories to these sources of anger? Do you feel that goals are being frustrated, or that something important to you is being threatened?

Reduce Your Angry Reactions

While you probably won't eliminate anger completely, you can certainly reduce the frequency and scope of your anger. The less angry you are in general, the more control you'll have over your emotions. Since much of our anger can come from frustration and stress, if you work on ways to ease and reduce these causes of frustration and stress, you'll reduce the amount of anger in your life.

Use Problem Solving Skills

(Questions 3, 5, and 14)

A great way to reduce stress is to improve your **problem solving skills**. We sometimes feel that everything we do needs to be correct and turn out well, and this can be frustrating when

things don't turn out as they should. Instead of expecting yourself always to be right, commit to doing your best. That way you can be proud of your effort even if the end result isn't what you want.

Also, accept that when something doesn't work out, the world usually won't end. Sometimes you just need to relax and not let things bother you. We may think that we should have an answer for everything – but the truth is, we don't!

Use Communication Skills

(Questions 7, 12, 15, and 18)

You can also reduce anger by improving your **communication skills**. When you relate well to other people, express your needs, and talk about issues that bother you, you deal with potential anger proactively.

- Build **empathy** – When you understand another person's perspective, it helps you analyse the situation objectively and understand your role in the conflict. Accept that you may not always know best!
- Learn to trust others – Assume the best in people, and don't take their actions personally.
- Listen – Use **active listening** to consider what the other person has to say, and then think before you speak. In many situations, the best way to deal with anger is to accept it, and then find ways to move forward. This can protect your relationships with people, and it allows you to acknowledge your feelings.
- Be assertive, not aggressive – By improving your **assertiveness skills**, you can reduce the frustration that you feel when your needs aren't being met. When you know how to ask for what you want, you'll generally feel more in control, and less likely to say things that you'll later regret.

Tip:

Don't try to communicate when you're still upset. See the next section on controlling your anger for ideas on how to do this.

Release Your Anger

(Questions 2, 8, 11, and 16)

You can reduce the likelihood of losing control by releasing the anger that you've built up. When you get rid of angry feelings on a regular basis, you'll feel calmer and more even-tempered, and you'll be more able to deal with the ups and downs of daily life. You can do a variety of things to release your anger, including the following:

- Take 10 deep breaths. It really does work!
- Do some physical activity – walk, run, swim, play golf, or do some other sport. This can be great for releasing the stress and frustration you've built up!
- Use a punching bag or a pillow to physically express your anger (in a way that's not harmful).

- Do yoga, or another relaxing form of exercise.
- Participate in a fun activity or hobby.
- Use a journal and/or art to express your feelings.
- Forgive. At some point, it helps to let go and move on with a fresh attitude.

Some people believe that they have to hold their anger in to control it. This is not an effective anger management strategy. Even if you don't show anger to others, that emotion has to go somewhere: it can be stubborn, and it usually doesn't go away on its own.

Control Your Anger When You Experience It

(Questions 4, 6, 10, and 17)

When you start to feel angry, what do you do? Controlling yourself in a bad situation can be difficult, and your actions will have consequences.

External reactions – like kicking and screaming – don't help. You may feel good for a little while, but later, you'll surely feel foolish and sorry. Also, you may do permanent damage to relationships and your reputation.

When you feel that you can't hold your anger in any longer, here are some great strategies to try:

- **Change Your Environment**
 - Take a break and physically remove yourself from the conflict. Go to another room, go for a walk, or count to 10. This may give you time to gain perspective and simply calm down.
 - Learn to avoid situations that you know will cause your anger. If you don't like your teammate's messy desk, don't go into her office.
 - If you regularly do something that makes you angry, try to find something else to do in its place. For example, if the crowded elevator upsets you every morning, take the stairs.
- **Use Humour**
 - Think of something funny to say (but don't be rude or sarcastic).
 - Try to see the funny side of the situation.
 - Imagine the other person in a silly situation.
 - Learn to laugh at yourself.
 - Smile. It's hard to be angry with a smile on your face.
- **Calm Yourself Physically**
 - Use physical relaxation techniques. Take slow, deep breaths and concentrate on your breathing.
 - Tighten and release small muscle groups. Focus on your hands, legs, back, and toes.

- Repeat a word or phrase that reminds you to stay in control and remain confident. For example, say, "You'll get through this. Relax! You're doing a great job!"
- Practice **imagery** techniques. Use your imagination or memory to visualize a calming place or situation.

If your anger is truly out of control, you may want to seek professional support. The effects of uncontrolled anger can be very harmful – to yourself and to those around you. Don't let it get to that point.

Key Points

It is natural to feel, express, and release anger. However, there are appropriate ways to do so – and that's what anger management is all about.

You can get a strong insight into your anger issues by understanding what makes you angry. From there, you can create a plan to minimize frustration and anger in your life.

When you do get angry, there are many approaches you can try to calm down – including changing your environment, using humour, and practicing relaxation techniques. It's also important to release your anger on a regular basis.

Don't let your anger control you. Instead, face it – and take back control of anger – and of your life!

Anger Management

Learning to Control Aggression

Anger can be normal and healthy emotion that helps us instinctively detect and respond to a threatening situation. More than this, when it is properly channelled, it can be a powerful motivating force – we all know how hard we can work to remedy an obvious injustice.

However it can also be an emotion that gets out of control, leading to stress, distress, unhealthiness and unhappiness. Uncontrolled anger can seriously harm your personal and professional life, because it can become incredibly destructive – to yourself and the people around you.

And in a modern workplace that often demands trust and collaboration, it can cause great damage to working relationships.

This article teaches an effective 12-step approach that helps you direct your anger constructively rather than destructively. The 12-step approach is based on the ideas of Duke University's Redford Williams, MD, who with his wife, authored the best-selling book *Anger Kills*. (In this book, Williams discusses 17 steps for controlling anger – these are often abridged to the 12 steps described here.)

Understanding the Theory

Anger is a well-developed coping mechanism that we turn to when our goals are frustrated, or when we feel threat to ourselves or to people, things and ideas we care about. It helps us react quickly and decisively in situations where there is no time for a careful, reasoned analysis of the situation. And it can motivate us to solve problems, achieve our goals, and remove threats.

Acting in anger can serve, therefore, to protect yourself or others. A positive response and constructive outcome can improve your self-esteem and self-confidence.

The Danger of Anger – Foolishness...

On the other hand, a negative response can damage relationships and lead to a loss of respect and self-respect. This is particularly the case when we react instantly and angrily to what we perceive to be a threat, but where that perception is wrong. This can leave us looking very foolish.

So we need to learn to use anger positively, and manage it so that it is constructive and not destructive. Where situations are not immediately life-threatening, we need to calm down and evaluate the accuracy of our perceptions before, if necessary, channelling anger in a powerful but controlled way.

Anger management, then, is the process of learning how to "calm down" and diffuse the negative emotion of anger before it gets to a destructive level.

A Subjective Experience

People experience anger in many different ways and for many different reasons. What makes you angry may only mildly irritate one of your colleagues, and have little to no effect on another. This subjectivity can make anger difficult to understand and deal with; it also highlights that the response is down to you. So anger management focuses on managing your response (rather than specific external factors). By learning to manage your anger, you can develop techniques to deal with and expel the negative response and emotions before it causes you serious stress, anxiety and discomfort.

Despite our differences in the level of anger we feel toward something, there are some universal causes of anger that include:

- Frustration of our goals.
- Hurt.
- Harassment.
- Personal attack (mental or physical) on ourselves.
- Threat to people, things or ideas that we hold dear.

We commonly experience these potential anger triggers in our daily lives. An appropriate level of anger that is situation in a positive manner. If we can learn to manage our anger, we will learn to express it appropriately and act constructively.

Using the Tool

So when you're angry, use Redford Williams' 12 steps to calm down:

Step 1: Maintain a "Hostility Log"

Use a Hostility log to monitor what triggers your anger and the frequency of your anger responses. When you know what makes you angry, you will be in a much better position to develop strategies to contain it or channel it effectively.

Step 2: If You Do, Acknowledge That You Have a Problem Managing Anger

It is an observed truth that you cannot change what you don't acknowledge. So it is important to identify and accept that anger is a roadblock to your success.

Step 3: Use Your Support Network

If anger is a problem, let the important people in your life know about the changes you are trying to make. They can be a source of motivation and their support will help you when you lapse into old behaviour patterns.

Step 4: Use Anger Management Techniques to Interrupt the Anger Cycle

- Pause.
- Take deep breaths.
- Tell yourself you can handle the situation.

- Stop the negative thoughts.

Step 5: Use Empathy

If another person is the source of your anger, try to see the situation from his or her perspective. Remind yourself to be objective and realize that everyone makes mistakes and it is through mistakes that people learn how to improve.

Step 6: Laugh at Yourself

Humour is often the best medicine. Learn to laugh at yourself and not take everything so seriously.

The next time you feel tempted to kick the photocopier, think about how silly you would look and see the humour in your inappropriate expressions of anger.

Step 7: Relax

Angry people are often the ones who let the little things bother them. If you learn to calm down you will realize that there is no need to get uptight and you will have fewer angry episodes.

Step 8: Build Trust

Angry people can be cynical people. They believe that others are going to do something on purpose to annoy or frustrate them even before it happens. If you can build trust in people you will be less likely to become angry with them when something does go wrong and more likely to attribute the problem to something other than a malicious intent.

Step 9: Listen

Miscommunication contributes to frustrating and mistrusting situations. The better you listen to what a person is saying, the better able you will be to find a resolution that does not involve an anger response.

Step 10: Be Assertive

Remember, the word is assertive NOT aggressive. When you are angry it is often difficult to express yourself properly. You are too caught up in the negative emotion and your physiological symptoms (beating heart, red face) to put together solid arguments or appropriate responses. If you learn to assert yourself and let other people know your expectations, boundaries, issues, and so on, you will have much more interpersonal success.

Step 11: Live Each Day as if it is Your Last

This saying may be overused, but it holds a fundamental truth. Life is short and it is much better spent positively than negatively. Realize that if you spend all your time getting angry, you will miss out on the many joys and surprises that life has to offer.

Step 12: Forgive

To ensure that the changes you are making go much deeper than the surface, you need to forgive the people in your life that have angered you. It is not easy letting go of past hurts and resentments but the only way to move past your anger is to let go of these feelings and start fresh. (Depending on what, or who, is at the root of your anger, you may have to solicit the help of a professional to achieve this fully.)

These 12 steps form a comprehensive plan to get control of inappropriate and unproductive anger. And the quicker you begin the better. Anger and stress are highly correlated and the effects of stress on the body are well documented.

Even if you are not at the point where you feel your anger is a problem, it is a wise idea to familiarize yourself with the processes listed. If you do not have the tools to deal with anger correctly, it has a way of building-up over time. Before you know it, you can be in a position where anger is controlling you and becoming a negative influence in your life. Being proactive with anger management will help to ensure it remains a healthy emotion that protects you from unnecessary hurt or threat.

Key Points

Anger is a powerful force, both for good and bad. Used irresponsibly, it can jeopardize your relationships, your work and your health.

Redford Williams' 12-step approach for dealing with unconstructive anger is a well-balanced system that emphasizes knowing yourself and your triggers and then using that awareness to replace negative angry behaviour with more positive actions and thoughts. While you don't want to quell your anger completely, you do need to manage it if you're to use it creatively.

And remember that anger can be creative. People act when they get angry. And providing their actions are constructive, this actually helps drive change and get things done.

