

Thought Record – Courtroom Trial

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) suggests that how we think affects how we feel. Everyone has hundreds of ‘automatic’ thoughts each day. Unless you pay attention to them, you might not be aware that they’re happening.

Automatic thoughts can be positive (they lead to positive emotions like joy or excitement), negative (they lead to negative emotions like sadness or anxiety), or neutral (they don’t make you feel much at all).

These thoughts can also be *biased*: not every thought is 100% true. Because your thoughts affect how you feel, biased thinking can contribute to emotional difficulties, like anxiety and depression.

Keeping a thought record can help you become more aware of your automatic thoughts and evaluate whether they’re accurate or useful. It can also help you address biases in your thinking. The *Thought Record – Courtroom Trial* offers a step-by-step process for challenging your negative automatic thoughts. It involves putting your negative thoughts ‘on trial’ and examining the evidence that supports and does not support them.



How could this tool help me?

- It can help you to think more accurately, improving your mood.
- It can help you practice questioning your thoughts, rather than accepting them as facts.
- It can help you address unhelpful biases in your thinking.



How should I use it?

It is best to practice completing some thought records with your therapist first. Once you are familiar with the process, fill in the *Thought Record – Courtroom Trial* whenever you experience a negative automatic thought.

Each column will prompt you to record a different part of your experience.

- **Accusation.** Write down the negative thought that is troubling you. Then, imagine that it’s an accusation that’s been made against you.
- **Prosecutor’s arguments.** What evidence would you present to convince a jury that the accusation is true?
- **Defence’s arguments.** What evidence would you present to convince a jury that the accusation isn’t true?
- **Jury’s verdict.** Set aside your feelings and look at the evidence you’ve recorded from an impartial perspective. Would an objective jury agree you are guilty of the accusation or not?
- **Summarize your final judgment.** If you’re not guilty of the accusation (i.e., your thought isn’t true), what would a fairer perspective be?



Helpful tips

- Try to fill the record in as soon after your automatic thought as possible, while your memory of it is still clear.
- When you play the role of the defense and the prosecution, remember that your job is to present as much compelling evidence as possible, whether or not you fully believe it.
- To reach a guilty verdict, the accusation should be 100% true – beyond all reasonable doubt. If the evidence isn’t as persuasive as that, then you must reach a not guilty verdict.
- Thought records take time to master: the more you practice, the easier and more helpful they will become.

The form is titled 'Thought Record – Courtroom Trial' and is divided into several sections:

- Accusation:** A box for writing the negative automatic thought.
- Prosecutor's arguments:** A large box for writing evidence supporting the accusation.
- Defence's arguments:** A large box for writing evidence refuting the accusation.
- Jury's verdict:** A section with two columns: 'Guilty' (The accusation is 100% true beyond all doubt) and 'Not guilty' (The accusation is not 100% true).
- Summarize your final judgment:** A box for writing a fairer perspective if not guilty.

Thought Record – Courtroom Trial

Accusation

What was your negative automatic thought?

Imagine your automatic thought is an accusation made against you. Next, from the perspectives of your inner 'prosecution' and 'defense', explore the evidence that supports and contradicts this accusation.

Prosecutor's arguments

What evidence suggests that this accusation is true?

- What information would a prosecuting attorney use to convince a jury that the accusation is true?
- Can you think of evidence that confirms you are guilty of committing this 'crime'?

Defense's arguments

What evidence suggests that this accusation is false?

- What information would a defending attorney use to convince a jury that the accusation is false?
- Can the prosecutor's evidence be reframed in ways that don't support the accusation?

Jury's verdict

After hearing both sides of the argument, would an impartial jury agree you are guilty of the accusation?

Guilty

The accusation is **100% true** beyond all doubt.

Not guilty

The accusation is **not 100% true**.

Summarize your final judgment

If you are not guilty of this accusation, what would a fairer perspective be?

Given all the evidence, is there a more balanced and realistic way of viewing this accusation?
Sum up what you've learnt from the courtroom trial.

Thought Record – Courtroom Trial

Accusation

What was your negative automatic thought?

I'm stupid.

Imagine your automatic thought is an accusation made against you. Next, from the perspectives of your inner 'prosecution' and 'defense', explore the evidence that supports and contradicts this accusation.

Prosecutor's arguments

What evidence suggests that this accusation is true?

I made lots of mistakes in my last assignment.

I didn't get selected for a class that I really wanted to join.

I've failed tests in the past, like my driving test.

- What information would a prosecuting attorney use to convince a jury that the accusation is true?
- Can you think of evidence that confirms you are guilty of committing this 'crime'?

Defense's arguments

What evidence suggests that this accusation is false?

There were errors in my assignment, but my overall mark was pretty good.

I've succeeded at things too, like getting into college.

I've passed lots of tests in the past.

- What information would a defending attorney use to convince a jury that the accusation is false?
- Can the prosecutor's evidence be reframed in ways that don't support the accusation?

Jury's verdict

After hearing both sides of the argument, would an impartial jury agree you are guilty of the accusation?

Guilty

The accusation is **100% true** beyond all doubt.

Not guilty

The accusation is **not 100% true.**

Summarize your final judgment

If you are not guilty of this accusation, what would a fairer perspective be?

I'm not guilty! I have failed at some things – but everyone fails sometimes and that doesn't make me stupid. There are times when I've succeeded too. I wouldn't be this hard on a friend, so maybe I should be kinder to myself too.

Given all the evidence, is there a more balanced and realistic way of viewing this accusation?
Sum up what you've learnt from the courtroom trial.