Thinking errors

It is well known that our thoughts have an impact on the way we feel and behave.
Most of us have thoughts that may not be wholly accurate: we judge ourselves unfairly, or we anticipate bad outcomes for ourselves, all of these can make us feel worse. Identifying these thoughts and then finding more accurate alternatives can help us immensely. Here are some common forms of thinking errors:

Overgeneralization
Govind gets late to class once or twice
Govind: Why am *I always running late! Why am I never on time!*

When we overgeneralize, we tend to use really broad language while evaluating ourselves or others or events (words like always, never, everybody). We tend to then start looking at things as patterns instead of individual events.

All or none thinking
John's friend gets him a gift
John: *He is the best friend one can ever have.*

John's friend does not pick up the phone once
John: *He is just the worst.*

When we think of things in extremes (either/or), we tend to overlook nuanced details and thus miss out on the many possibilities that lie mid-ground.

Personalization
Aarti is part of the team and they lose a match
Aarti: *I must have done something wrong. We lost because of me.*

We tend to take responsibility and blame entirely on ourselves while discounting the role that others probably played.

Mental filter; disqualifying the positives; focusing only on the negatives
Aruna scores well in all papers except one
Aruna: *I can't believe I did so badly*

When we focus on the negatives, we don't give ourselves enough credit for what we've done right or the good we've experienced.

Minimization

Kiran is invited by a group of people she often talks to

Kiran: Just because they invited me to the party doesn't mean they like me

When we downplay our own efforts or value, we deny ourselves the respect and appreciation we have earned so far.

Should statements

Samir has very high standards for himself and accepts no less

Samir: *I should be studying all the time and I must never make a mistake.*

Catastrophizing

Alia has been in a relationship but is worried about what will happen if they break-up

Alia: *If he leaves, I will never find anyone else again. I will remain alone forever.*

When we catastrophize, we tend to make the situation a lot more severe than it most likely is, and can leave us feeling much worse.

We also tend to make 'what-if', worst-case scenarios, and start reacting to them.

I am running late to class. The teacher is going to yell at me. Everyone is going to think I am an idiot.

Mind reading

Jai sees his friend walk from a distance and waves out. The friend doesn't wave back

Jai: *I just know that he thinks I'm stupid and did that on purpose'*

When we tend to assume is that others already are or will be judging us negatively.

Labelling

Ira gives the wrong answer once in class

Ira: *I am so stupid!*

Raj drops his books in the library

Raj: *I am so clumsy!*

When we label ourselves (or others), we take one characteristic and apply it to the whole, and start viewing ourselves (or others) through these labels. We overlook many other things that then which don't fit our view.

Emotional reasoning

Rahul is feeling uneasy since morning but not sure why

Rahul: *Today is going to be a bad day. I just know it.*

Sometimes, we are convinced that a premonition or a gut-feeling will definitely become true. It can be tricky because sometimes our emotions can take over our logical thoughts and reasoning.

Predicting the future/ fortune-telling

Samir assumes that if he goes up to Teena and initiates a conversation, she will be mean

Samir: *I know she will be mean to me so I will not talk to her*

We try to predict the future (where the outcome is often negative), and believe we won't be able to handle it.

Double standards

Divya did not get the post that she had applied for

Divya: *I am so stupid. I can't get anything right. I knew I shouldn't have applied.*

Divya's friend did not get the post she had applied for

Divya: *Such things happen. There were so many who had applied. I'm sure you'll get something else.*

We are unfairly critical and harsh towards ourselves while kinder to others.

As you may have noticed, there can be an overlap of the same thought in different categories. The important part, though, remains to identify them and examine their impact.

Thought diary

Maintaining a thought diary can help become conscious of what goes through our minds. Fill this in a couple of times and see what you notice:

Situation	Thoughts	Emotions/ Behaviours	Type of thinking error	A more balanced alternative
Where was I? What was happening?	*What thoughts were going through my mind?*	*How did I feel? What did I do?*	*Which category would it fit?*	*What might be a healthier thought?*

Finding healthier alternatives

Here are some questions you can ask yourself once you've identified your thoughts:

- What evidence do I have that this thought is true?
- Thinking about my past experiences, what evidence do I have that this thought is not true?
- If someone I care about came and told me this exact thought, what would I say to them?
- What are some costs and benefits of this thought?
- How likely is it that the thought is a 100 per cent true?
- What are some more balanced/realistic alternatives?

It is essential to remember that this is a process that takes continued effort. It is not necessary to be able to write the balanced thoughts on your own. So don't hesitate in reaching out to a counsellor at the Student Wellness Centre to help you identify healthier alternatives to the above thinking errors.