

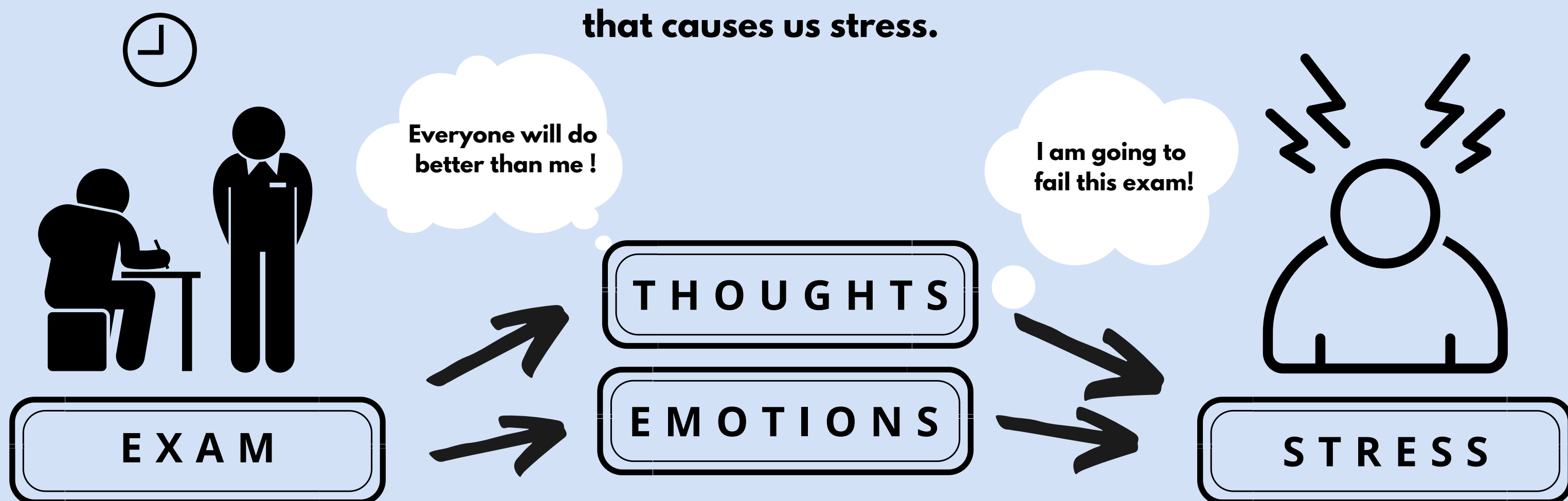
# THOUGHT CHALLENGE



Thought challenge is a technique based on cognitive restructuring which is designed to help us challenge our ingrained patterns of thinking or perceiving. This is particularly important because our thoughts and perceptions directly affect the way we respond to or feel about certain situations or contexts.<sup>1,4,5,6,8</sup>

We tend to find ourselves in certain situations and think that it is the situation itself that is stressing us out. However, nothing in our environment can directly stress us out. There's an in-between step which is what we think and feel about what is happening.<sup>2,3,6,7,9</sup>

For example, you have an exam coming up and it's causing you to think "I'm going to fail," to feel anxiety or fear, or to have both the thoughts and feelings together! That's why you can take an exam and find it stressful and someone else doesn't. It's how we perceive the exam that causes us stress.



The good news is, although a situation may be outside of our control, we may be able to choose how we perceive it. A commonly used and evidence-based strategy to achieve this is the Thought Challenge, which can be broken down into 7 steps.<sup>6,5,8</sup>



# SEVEN STEPS TO REFRAMING THOUGHTS

**1**

**What situation is causing your stress?**  
(E.g., You have an important exam the next day)

**2**

**What thoughts are you having about this situation?**  
("I am going to fail tomorrow's exam and never achieve anything in my life.")

**3**

**How do these thoughts make you feel?**  
("I am feeling stressed and anxious.")

**4**

**Challenge the thoughts: what evidence supports your thoughts and what evidence doesn't support them?**  
(Supporting evidence: "I did not study as much as I should have. "  
Alternative evidence: "I have done well on all my other tests this year.")

**5**

**What is an alternative, more balanced thought?**  
("I might not do as well as I would have wanted, but that doesn't mean it will affect the rest of my life and future achievements.")

**6**

**How does this more balanced thought make you feel right now?**  
("I feel my stress levels decrease a little")

**7**

**What do you want to do about this situation now that you have alternative ways of perceiving it?**  
(Reflect on feasible steps that you could take to change things if you choose to do so. Note that, perhaps, you're already doing everything that you can in this situation so maybe no change is needed.)

# SOCRATIC QUESTIONING THOUGHT CHALLENGE WORKSHEET.



**A helpful resource for the Thought Challenge is Socratic questioning, a technique used in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). This is a type of critical thinking in which you ask and answer questions to help challenge and reframe certain catastrophizing thoughts.**

**THOUGHT TO BE QUESTIONED:**

**WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE FOR THIS THOUGHT? AND AGAINST IT?**

**AM I BASING THIS THOUGHT ON FACTS, OR ON FEELINGS?**

**COULD I BE MISINTERPRETING THE EVIDENCE? AM I MAKING ANY ASSUMPTIONS?**

**DO OTHER PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SAME SITUATION? WHAT ARE THEY?**

**AM I HAVING THIS THOUGHT OUT OF HABIT OR DO THE FACTS SUPPORT IT?**

**IS MY THOUGHT A LIKELY SCENARIO OR A WORST CASE SCENARIO?**

**COULD MY THOUGHT BE AN EXAGGERATION OF WHAT'S TRUE?**

**Remember, although a situation may be outside of our control, we may be able to choose how we perceive it or think about it.**



For a **complete list of references** check out the Reference List page at [www.engineeringresilience.ca](http://www.engineeringresilience.ca)

Contact us for more information at [engineeringresilience.education@mcgill.ca](mailto:engineeringresilience.education@mcgill.ca)

