

Cumulative Self-Talk (CST) – Themes & Patterns Worksheet

Beginner–Intermediate

Use this worksheet after you've built up at least a few weeks of CST entries (audio, video, and/or text). It helps you look across your archive, spot recurring themes and patterns, and decide what to do with them next.

CST is an artistic and educational practice using everyday media. It is not therapy or medical care. If you are in crisis or at risk, please use local health and emergency services.

How to use this worksheet

- **Time needed:** 30–60 minutes (you can split it over a few sittings).
- **What you need:**
 - Your diary entries (audio, video, text, or a mix)
 - Somewhere to jot notes (this sheet, a notebook, or a notes app)
- **When to use it:**
 - After a busy patch of diarying
 - At the end of a month or project
 - When you feel “stuck” and want to see what’s actually going on

You don't have to complete every prompt. Treat this as a menu. Use what helps.

0. Check-in & boundaries

Before you start, take a quick temperature check.

Date: _____

Rough time window for this review (e.g. 30 mins): _____

Body check (circle or underline):

- Tension: low / medium / high
- Breath: easy / a bit tight / very tight
- Overall mood (0–5, where 0 = flat and 5 = buoyant): ___ / 5

If this gets too much, I can:

- Pause and come back later
- Ground myself (describe the room, notice 5 things I can see, etc.)
- Move to a different space
- Contact: _____
- Contact: _____

1. Choose a slice of your archive

Pick a realistic window to work with. You're not reviewing your entire life, just one slice.

Timeframe I'm reviewing (e.g. last 4 weeks / last 10 entries):

From that period, choose 5–12 entries that feel representative (not just the “dramatic” ones).

Entry #	Date	Medium (audio / video / text / mix)	Title / short label	Why this one? (1 line)
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

6

7

8

9

10

2. Entry snapshots (one line each)

Stay concrete. Think in “scenes”, not essays.

For each chosen entry, jot a brief snapshot.

Entry 1

- What was happening (scene, not theory):

- Main feeling in the moment (1–3 words):

- One phrase/image that stands out:

Entry 2

- Scene:

- Feeling:

- Phrase/image:

Entry 3

- Scene:

- Feeling:

- Phrase/image:

(Continue like this for all entries you selected. Use extra pages if needed.)

When you're done, skim your snapshots like you'd skim a screenplay or storyboard.

3. First pass: what keeps returning?

Now you zoom out. Look over your snapshots and note what keeps recurring.

3.1 Recurring situations

What kinds of situations appear again and again?

Examples: mornings alone, hospital or clinic appointments, scrolling on the phone late at night, walks, family contact, admin, money worries, creative bursts, media consumption.

Situations that repeat:

3.2 Recurring feelings & body states

Look for emotional “weather” and body sensations that keep showing up.

Feelings / states that recur:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Next to each, mark:

- + if it usually feels supportive or energising
- - if it usually feels draining or constricting
- ? if it's mixed or depends on context

Example format:

“quiet satisfaction (+)”, “fear of being judged (-)”, “alert curiosity (?)”

3.3 Recurring thoughts & phrases

Notice specific phrases or thought patterns, especially ones that sound like:

- “I always ...”
- “I never ...”
- “People like me ...”
- “They always ...”

Phrases / stories that repeat:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Optionally, mark where you think the voice comes from:

- **M** = me (current self)
- **P** = a past relationship / family
- **I** = an institution / system
- **C** = wider culture / media

4. Group them into themes

You're now going to name a small number of themes. Think of these as "threads" running through your entries, not diagnoses.

Aim for 3–6 themes. Keep the labels short and neutral.

Examples of theme labels:

"Fear of being a burden", "Curiosity about tech", "Grief and remembering", "Wanting solitude vs wanting connection", "Life admin panic", "Playing with creative gear".

4.1 Name your themes

Theme 1: _____

- Typical situations where it appears:

- Typical feelings that go with it:

- A line from your entries that captures it (paraphrased if needed):

Theme 2: _____

- Situations: _____
- Feelings: _____
- Capturing line: _____

Theme 3: _____

- Situations: _____
- Feelings: _____
- Capturing line: _____

(Add Theme 4–6 if helpful.)

5. Read your themes through different lenses

CST combines personal experience with wider contexts: relationships, technologies, and culture. Use these quick lenses to deepen your reading of each theme.

You can work with one theme at a time or create a mini table.

Lens A: Personal & emotional

- What does this theme seem to **protect** or **long for**?

- When does it feel most intense?

Lens B: Relational & situational (people & places)

- Which people, roles, or places tend to switch this theme on?

- How does it affect how you show up (frontstage vs backstage, performing vs relaxed)?

Lens C: Media & devices (media ecology)

- How does this theme show up differently in:
- Text entries? _____
- Audio entries? _____
- Video entries? _____
- What do your devices and platforms seem to *encourage* around this theme (e.g. doomscrolling, careful thinking, quick venting, performance)?

Lens D: Culture, systems & power

- Where might this theme echo wider scripts (e.g. “be productive or else”, “don’t make a fuss”, “be endlessly available online”)?
- What kind of life do those scripts push you towards?

You don’t have to fill all of this in. Even one or two lines per theme can be enough to shift perspective.

6. Decide what each theme is *asking for*

For each of your main themes, decide how you want to relate to it, for now. You’re not making a lifetime commitment; you’re sketching a provisional stance.

Use this format:

Theme: _____

- This theme is mainly:
 - Protective / cautious
 - Aspirational / hopeful
 - Mixed / unclear
- I'd like to:
 - Turn the volume **down** on it
 - Turn the volume **up** on it
 - Keep it **as is**, but understand it better
- One sentence that captures what this theme might be asking for (support, clarity, rest, connection, boundaries, creative outlet, etc.):

Repeat for each theme you named.

7. Turn themes into small experiments

CST favours tiny, realistic experiments rather than huge life overhauls. Pick one or two themes to work with over the next week or month.

7.1 Choose up to three “working themes”

For each working theme, design a small, testable experiment.

Working Theme 1: _____

- Tiny experiment I can try (specific, doable in the next 7 days):

- How I'll capture it in CST (audio / video / text / mix):

- What I'll look for afterwards (signs it helped / didn't help / needs tweaking):

Working Theme 2: _____

- Tiny experiment: _____
- Capture method: _____
- What I'll look for: _____

(Optional Working Theme 3 in the same format.)

8. Build prompts for future entries

Use your themes as prompts so your next entries are more intentional, not just reactive.

Write 3–6 prompts that you could read out loud or paste into your notes app.

Prompts I can use in upcoming entries:

1. “Today, the theme of _____ showed up when ...”
2. “When _____ kicks in, my body does ... and my first thought is ...”

3. "What would happen if I responded differently, even slightly, to _____?"
4. "How does _____ look in text versus audio versus video?"
5. "What would a kinder, more curious voice say about _____?"

9. Optional: working with AI as a reflective assistant

If you use AI to help you spot patterns, you can keep it contained and useful by:

- Sharing **anonymised** excerpts rather than whole archives.
- Asking for help with **patterns and options**, not diagnoses.
- Treating AI as one voice in the room, not the final authority.

You might paste a few anonymised excerpts and ask, for example:

"What themes and patterns do you notice across these entries, especially in how I talk about technology, relationships, and my mood?"

Then you can return to this worksheet and decide which of those observations actually feel true and useful to you.

10. Closing snapshot

Finish with a light-touch reflection.

Three things I'm taking from this review:

One theme I'd like to be kinder to myself about:

One concrete next step for my CST practice (small is fine):

You're not trying to become a perfect person here. You're learning to see your life, your media habits, and your self-talk more clearly, bit by bit, and to turn that awareness into realistic moves.