

Cumulative Self-Talk (CST) – Structured Session (Beginner Worksheet)

A structured CST session is simply a guided pass through one small piece of your life, using audio, video, or text. You are not doing therapy. You are building a practical, creative habit of paying attention to what actually happens and how you respond to it.

This is DIY, non-clinical practice. The point is to let your devices serve you, not the other way round.

Use this worksheet when:

- you want more structure than a freestyle entry
- you would like a clear, repeatable way to work with one moment in your life
- you are happy for this to be slow, cumulative work, not a quick fix

Personal practice, not clinical advice. If you are struggling, seek appropriate support.

What this worksheet helps you develop

As you work through this sheet regularly, you are quietly building a set of skills.

Short-term, you are learning to:

- turn vague unease into something more specific and describable
- slow down enough to notice your body, mood, and energy before you dive in
- pick one focus, rather than trying to sort out your whole life in one go
- separate:
 - what actually happened
 - what you told yourself about it
 - what you did in response
 - what followed
- use audio, video, and text more intentionally, not just as background noise

Long-term, you are developing:

- a growing archive of entries you can refer back to
- better pattern recognition around your habits, moods, and responses
- more flexible interpretations of events (not just one harsh story)
- a stronger sense that you can make small, realistic moves in your own life
- a healthier relationship with technology: devices as tools, not masters

Each section below quietly points at one or more of these skills. Think of it as craft: you will get better by doing short, regular sessions, not by trying to be perfect.

1. Setup & Safety (about 1 minute)

This first step gives the session a clear shape: a time window, a medium, and a safety net. You are deciding in advance what you will do if it becomes too much.

Session window and mode

Pick something that fits your current energy and context.

- Window (tick one):
 - 7 minutes
 - 10 minutes
 - 15 minutes
- Mode (tick one):
 - audio
 - video
 - text

Place (where you are now):

Quick body check

You are not diagnosing yourself here. You are just checking how resourced you feel.

- Tension:

- low
- medium
- high
- Breath:
- easy
- a bit tight
- very tight
- Mood (0–5, where 0 = flat and 5 = buoyant):

-- / 5

Red plan (if overwhelmed)

Decide in advance what you will do if the session starts to feel too intense.

If overwhelmed, I will (tick as needed):

- pause the session
- ground myself (describe the room, name 5 things I can see, etc.)
- step outside or move to another room

Contact(s) if things escalate:

- Name / service 1: _____
- Name / service 2: _____

If you are in significant distress or at risk, contact appropriate services in your area.

Skill you are building here:

Setting limits, noticing your state, and having an exit plan. This is about safety and self-respect, not weakness.

2. Session Intent & Scope (about 30 seconds)

CST works best when each session has a small, clear task. You are not sorting out your entire life. You are choosing one slice.

Focus topic

Keep it brief and concrete.

Focus topic (one line, specific):

Question form

Turn your focus into a question. This encourages curiosity rather than self-judgement.

Frame it as a question (for example: 'What is going on with...?'):

Good-enough outcome for this session

Aim low and realistic: clarity, one option, or a slight shift is enough.

If this session goes well, I would be able to say:

Skills you are building here:

Framing, realistic expectation-setting, and moving away from all-or-nothing thinking.

3. Evidence Sweep (about 2 minutes)

Before theories or explanations, CST starts with evidence: small, dated moments. This keeps you grounded in what actually happened.

List three short, time-stamped examples linked to your focus. Think in scenes, not essays.

For each moment, note when, where, and what happened in sensory terms (what was seen, heard, said, done).

Moment 1

- When / where:

- What happened (sensory detail — what you saw, heard, said, did):

Moment 2

- When / where:

- What happened (sensory detail):

Moment 3

- When / where:

- What happened (sensory detail):

Keep names, locations, and timings real. You can generalise later. First, anchor yourself in specific scenes.

Skills you are building here:

Attention to detail, grounding in experience, and shifting away from vague global statements like ‘I always’ or ‘I never’.

4. SIRO Pass

(Situation → Interpretation → Response → Outcome)

Now you zoom in on one of the three moments and walk it through the SIRO sequence. The aim is to separate:

- what happened
- what you made of it
- what you did
- what followed

Moment chosen

Which moment are you choosing? (1, 2, or 3) and why this one?

Situation (facts only)

Describe what happened as if a camera were filming. No opinions, no mind-reading.

Situation (observable facts):

Interpretation (the story you told yourself)

Notice how you filled in the gaps. These are meanings, not facts.

Interpretation (what I told myself about it):

Response (what you did, said, or avoided)

Include both visible actions and withdrawals or silences.

Response (what I did, said, or withdrew from):

Outcome (what actually followed)

What happened next, whether it matched your expectations or not.

Outcome (what actually happened afterwards):

One mismatch

Spot one place where your interpretation and the actual outcome did not quite match.

One mismatch between my Interpretation and the Outcome was:

Skills you are building here:

Basic cognitive awareness, emotional literacy, and the ability to notice gaps between your story and what actually unfolded.

5. Counter-Frame (re-key in 3 lines)

Drawing on frame ideas (Goffman and friends), you treat the same situation as if it belonged to a different kind of scene. You are not denying what happened. You are testing alternative ways of reading it.

As-if frame

If I treat this situation as if it were this kind of scene (for example: a training challenge, a clash of expectations, a misunderstanding, a boundary test):

New option

One new option that becomes available under this 'as if' frame:

Small cost / benefit

- Cost of trying that option (time, energy, discomfort):

- Possible benefit (what could improve or become clearer):

Skills you are building here:

Flexibility of interpretation, creative reframing, and the ability to loosen stuck stories.

6. Ladder Check (about 60 seconds)

This is a quick nod to the ‘ladder of inference’ — how we climb from raw data to conclusions. Here you separate what you actually noticed from the meanings you built on top.

Data

Data I actually saw or heard (short list):

Assumptions

Assumptions or conclusions I climbed to from that data:

A plausible alternative

You are not forcing yourself to believe this. You are simply showing yourself that another reading exists.

One plausible alternative explanation:

Skills you are building here:

Thinking more slowly, questioning automatic conclusions, and reducing the grip of unhelpful assumptions.

7. Medium Matters (about 45 seconds)

CST treats media as part of the practice, not just containers. Audio, video, and text each highlight different things.

What you used this time

Recorded as (tick one):

- audio
- video
- text

What this medium amplified

In this medium, what came through more strongly?
(for example: tone of voice, facial expression, pacing, word choice)

What this medium muted

What felt harder to notice or express in this medium?

Micro-rotation next time

One small tweak to the medium or setup for a future session (for example: 'try audio while walking', 'shorter video', 'bullet point text'):

Skills you are building here:

Media awareness, experimentation, and a more intentional relationship with your devices.

8. Defences, Coping, and Biases

(non-pathologising check – about 60 seconds)

This is a gentle inventory. You are noticing how your mind protects you, how you cope, and how your thinking bends. The question is not ‘What is wrong with me?’ but ‘How did this help or hinder this time?’

Psychological defences

Tick anything that showed up around this moment.

Defences noticed:

- intellectualising (staying in ideas rather than feelings)
- minimising (playing it down)
- rationalising (explaining it away at length)
- projection (placing your own feelings into others)
- dissociation (numbing, spacing out)
- other: _____

Net effect this time:

- mainly helpful
- mainly unhelpful
- mixed

Small adjustment next time (if any):

Coping strategies

Notice what you actually did to get through or settle yourself.

Coping used (tick any):

- short walk (5–10 minutes)
- paced breathing
- tea / water
- humour
- music
- called / messaged someone
- journalling / diarying
- other: _____

Keep, adapt, or swap?

Cognitive biases

Mark any thinking patterns that coloured how you read the situation.

Bias flags:

- confirmation bias (only noticing what fits the existing story)
- catastrophising (jumping to worst-case)
- hindsight bias (telling yourself you ‘should have known’)
- fundamental attribution bias (seeing others as ‘just like that’ rather than looking at context)
- other: _____

One counter-move I can try next time:

Skills you are building here:

Self-awareness without self-attack, and the ability to work with your own mind rather than against it.

9. Decision and Next Step (≤ 10 minutes; schedulable)

CST is cumulative. The strength comes from many small moves over time, not one dramatic gesture.

Tiny action

One tiny action I can reasonably do this week
(for example: 'send one email', 'try a different opening line', 'walk the longer route once'):

Where and when it lives

Put the action somewhere it can actually happen.

Where it lives (calendar, reminder, notebook, app):

When I intend to do it (day and rough time):

Success signal

In 7 days, I would be able to say...

Skills you are building here:

Follow-through, realistic planning, and linking reflection to small, concrete action.

10. Archive and Index (Future-you will thank you)

CST is about accumulation. Titles, tags, and simple cross-links make it easier to revisit and re-use earlier material.

Title and tags

Plain-language title:

Three tags (for example: #attention #walking #craft):

Thread this adds to (motif / series / recurring theme):

File and location

Suggested filename format:

YYYY-MM-DD_HHMM_[audio|video|text]_[3-word-title]

Actual filename used for this session:

Where it lives (folder, app, link):

Cross-links to 2 related entries (titles or dates):

Skills you are building here:

Archiving, pattern-tracking over time, and treating your entries as a growing body of work.

11. Ethics, Consent, and Privacy (if others appear)

CST can involve other people, but your archive does not have to expose them. This section keeps privacy and consent in the conversation.

Does this entry include anyone identifiable?

- no
- yes

If yes:

Consent to record / use has been:

- obtained
- not obtained (keep this private)

Identifiers to redact or mask (names, faces, locations, specific details):

If sharing visuals, a short alt-text / caption describing what is shown:

Visibility decision for this entry today:

- private archive
- consider sharing later
- publish now

If publishing now, where?

(for example: personal site, close-friends feed, private mailing list):

Skills you are building here:

Ethical awareness, respect for others, and clearer boundaries around what you publish.

12. Craft Notes (trim friction for next time)

Here you treat CST as a craft. You are not judging your character; you are tuning the process so that future sessions feel smoother and more inviting.

Pacing

How was the pacing this time?

- too fast
- too slow
- about right

One tweak to pacing next time (length, breaks, focus):

Audio notes (if audio used)

Mic, room, and level.

Any audio adjustments for next time?

Video notes (if video used)

Framing, light, and steadiness.

Any video adjustments for next time?

Text notes (if text used)

Length, clarity, and sensory detail.

Any text adjustments for next time?

One procedural improvement

This could be about templates, tags, titles, or how you approach the session.

One small process improvement I want to try next time:

Skills you are building here:

Process design, lowering friction, and taking yourself seriously as a maker of your own material.

13. One-Page Structured Quickstart

(tear-off or quick reference)

This section compresses the whole sheet into something you can keep in mind during a session.

Pick one focus, one moment, one shift, one action.

Keep it light and repeatable.

Focus and question

- Focus: _____
- Question: _____

Lens (optional, to flavour how you read the moment)

Tick one primary lens if helpful:

- Goffman (frames, roles, scenes)
- Foucault (power, discipline, normalisation)
- McLuhan / Ong (media and orality)
- Hall / Gramsci (culture, ideology, articulation)
- Bourdieu (habitus, field, capital)
- Bauman / Habermas (liquidity, communication, public sphere)

Moment chosen (from your 3 evidence moments)

When / where:

SIRO shorthand

- S (Situation — facts): _____
- I (Interpretation — story): _____
- R (Response): _____
- O (Outcome): _____

Counter-frame

New 'as if' frame (one line):

Ladder alternative

Alternative explanation (one line):

Medium tweak

Next medium or tweak to try:

Tiny action (≤ 10 minutes)

- Action: -----
- When / where: -----

Archive

- Title: -----
- Tags: -----
- Thread: -----

Visibility

- private
- later decision
- publish (where?): -----

What you get from using this worksheet over time

If you keep returning to this structured pass — even irregularly, even imperfectly — you are likely to:

- feel less at the mercy of your thoughts and moods

- notice earlier when old patterns are starting to repeat
- build a small archive of audio, video, and text that actually reflects your lived experience
- discover themes and threads in your life that are worth following
- gain confidence in using everyday technology as part of a reflective, life-affirming practice

Keep it short. Keep it regular. Let accumulation do the heavy lifting.