

Getting Started with Cumulative Self-Talk (CST)

A beginner's guide to audio, video, and text entries

Cumulative Self-Talk (CST) is, at heart, you talking with yourself over time – and keeping hold of it.

You speak, you write, you occasionally sit in front of a microphone or a camera. You build an archive. Entry by entry, you start to notice patterns: how you think, what keeps returning, where you get stuck, and what quietly keeps you going.

This guide is for people beginning CST, and for practitioners who want something concrete and down-to-earth to share with the people they work with.

You do not need specialist gear, a studio voice, or a literary style. You need a device you already own, a bit of curiosity, and a willingness to keep showing up in small ways.

1. What CST actually is

CST is:

- A non-clinical, DIY practice of talking with yourself over time
- Multimodal: audio, video, and text all have a place
- Slow and cumulative, not a quick-fix or 'life hack'
- A way of treating identity as liquid – something you compose and recombine, not a fixed label handed to you

You are not aiming to produce a masterpiece every time. You are building a working archive that gradually reveals:

- What is genuinely life-affirming for you
- Where your habits of mind help or hinder
- How you relate to your surroundings, other people, and your devices

You can think of your CST diary as rehearsal room, workshop, sketchbook, and lab notebook rolled into one. It is a space to try things out, keep the traces, and look back later with a different pair of eyes.

2. Why use audio, video, and text?

Each medium nudges your thinking and feeling in different ways.

Text slows you down.

It helps you organise, define, and refine. You can pin things to the page, play with wording, and return later.

Audio restores warmth and presence.

You hear tone, pace, pauses, hesitations, and the bits you rush past. There is texture in your voice that never shows up on the page.

Video intensifies the sense of 'being there'.

You see posture, micro-expressions, and how you occupy space. You notice how you show up when you are tired, energised, stressed, or quietly okay.

Different formats suit different moods and purposes:

- When your thoughts are tangled and intricate, text often helps
- When you want intimacy without over-structuring, audio works well
- When you want to practise being seen and staying present, video earns its keep

Part of CST is learning to match mode to mood: choosing the medium that fits where you are and what you are trying to do that day.

Over time, that choice itself becomes a skill.

3. What people develop through CST

With regular entries, people tend to develop clusters of skills. These are not abstract self-improvement goals; they show up in how you move through everyday life.

3.1 Attentional skills

- Noticing what you usually skim past
- Picking up subtle shifts in mood, energy, and context
- Becoming more alert to how situations, spaces, and technologies shape your state

3.2 Emotional literacy

- Naming feelings instead of drowning in them
- Spotting recurring emotional themes and triggers
- Developing a more nuanced, less 'all-or-nothing' vocabulary for your inner life

3.3 Narrative sense-making

- Connecting today with yesterday, and both with longer-term concerns
- Re-framing old stories that no longer fit how you see yourself now
- Seeing how the same event looks different in hindsight, across entries

3.4 Media craft

- Basic recording skills with audio and video
- A clearer, more grounded writing voice
- Confidence using devices deliberately, not just scrolling or reacting

3.5 Critical distance

- Seeing your own habits of thought at arm's length
- Questioning unhelpful patterns instead of automatically believing them
- Recognising when your self-talk has picked up the voice of an institution, a past relationship, or a wider culture

3.6 Technologies-of-the-self skills

- Using everyday devices in deliberate, life-supporting ways
- Turning your phone into a tool for composure, reflection, and craft – not only distraction

Short-term, CST helps you get things out of your head, feel less overwhelmed, and see your situation with slightly more clarity.

Long-term, the archive shows change: a more observant, grounded, and flexible way of thinking about yourself and your life, plus a set of media skills that transfer into work, relationships, and creative projects.

4. Before you begin: some ground rules

These are points practitioners can emphasise when introducing CST.

4.1 Lower the bar

Aim for ‘done’, not ‘perfect’. A rough two-minute audio entry is far better than no entry at all. The practice lives in repetition, not polish.

4.2 Frequency beats length

Little and often is enough. A short daily or near-daily entry builds more than a rare, intense burst.

4.3 Private by default

Treat entries as private material. You can always decide later what, if anything, you want to share. Privacy gives you more room for honesty.

4.4 Curiosity over judgement

When you listen back or re-read, adopt a curious stance:

- ‘What is this telling me?’
rather than
- ‘What is wrong with me?’

You are observing, not putting yourself on trial.

4.5 Safety matters

CST is not an emergency service. If there is immediate risk of harm to yourself or others, or a serious deterioration in mental or physical health, urgent medical or crisis support takes priority.

CST works best alongside other supports, not instead of them.

5. Audio entries: talking to the microphone

5.1 Why audio?

Audio is often the easiest way in. You pick up your phone, open a recording app, and talk.

When people hear themselves back, they start to notice:

- How they actually sound to others
- Where they speed up, slow down, or fall silent
- Topics they circle back to, even when the entry is ‘about’ something else

Over time, audio helps you experiment with tone and stance: more compassionate, more matter-of-fact, more exploratory.

5.2 How to start an audio entry

1. Open a basic voice recorder app
2. Hit record
3. Use a simple starter phrase, such as:
4. ‘Right, here is where I am today...’
5. ‘What is hanging around in my mind right now is...’
6. Talk for 2–10 minutes
7. Stop, give it a brief title (for example: ‘Sunday – worn out but hopeful’), and save

5.3 Simple prompts for audio

Practitioners can suggest prompts such as:

- ‘What stood out to me today?’
- ‘What am I avoiding thinking about?’
- ‘What am I pleased with from today, however small?’
- ‘If I spoke to a friend the way I speak to myself, what would they say back?’

5.4 What skills audio builds

- Vocal confidence and familiarity with your own sound
- Ability to externalise and hear inner dialogue
- Tolerance of your own voice and presence, even when you feel awkward
- The capacity to talk through difficult material without having to look at anyone

In the short term, audio gives you a quick outlet. In the long term, it becomes a record of how your voice, stance, and confidence shift over time.

6. Video entries: showing up on camera

6.1 Why video?

Video can feel uncomfortable, but it is powerful. You see:

- How you carry yourself when you are tired, stressed, or energised
- Micro-expressions, gestures, and habits of posture
- The gap between how you imagine you look and how you actually show up

For some people, video becomes a rehearsal space for future interactions: job interviews, difficult conversations, creative work, or simply being more at ease in front of others.

6.2 How to start a video entry

1. Prop your phone somewhere stable at roughly eye level
2. Use the front-facing camera if you like, or record 'blind' and watch later
3. Hit record and imagine you are talking to a future version of yourself
4. Speak for 3–10 minutes
5. Give the clip a simple title and store it in a clearly labelled album or folder

6.3 Simple prompts for video

- 'If someone could see me as I am today, what would they notice?'
- 'Show and tell: what nearby object says something about how life is going?'
- 'How do I move and speak when I am being honest rather than performing?'

6.4 What skills video builds

- Presence and self-presentation without needing to perform perfection
- Awareness of non-verbal communication: posture, gestures, facial cues
- Practice at being seen and staying grounded
- A more realistic sense of how others might experience you

Short-term, video may simply show you how tired, tense, or animated you are. Long-term, you can watch shifts in how you inhabit your body and space.

7. Text entries: writing it down

7.1 Why text?

Text slows the pace and gives you structure.

It lets you:

- Untangle complicated thoughts
- Capture specific wording, references, and details
- Edit, cross-out, and re-phrase

On difficult days, writing can feel safer than talking. On more reflective days, it offers clarity and a sense of shape.

7.2 How to start a text entry

1. Open your notes app, writing app, or a paper notebook
2. Date the entry
3. Start with one of the following:
4. 'Today I keep returning to...'
5. 'What I am not saying out loud is...'
6. 'If I summarised this week in three words, they would be...'
7. Write for 5–15 minutes without over-editing as you go
8. Add a short title and save

7.3 Simple prompts for text

- 'What felt most demanding today? How did I respond?'
- 'Where did I surprise myself?'
- 'What small thing could I repeat tomorrow that would make life 1% better?'

7.4 What skills text builds

- Clarity of thought and sharper language
- Ability to name experiences in concrete, everyday terms
- Pattern recognition: spotting recurring themes across entries
- Gentle self-editing: learning when to be precise and when to let things flow

In the short term, writing can help you sort things out on the page. In the long term, it becomes a written record of how your thinking matures.

8. Building an archive: the cumulative part

CST is not about isolated one-off entries. It is about accumulation and return.

8.1 Keep more than you delete

As far as is safe and practical, keep early, awkward, or ‘boring’ entries. They are often the ones that reveal change over time.

8.2 Label entries simply but consistently

For example:

- 2025-11-14 – Tired but clearer – audio
- 2025-11-20 – Small wins – text

Use whatever system works for you, as long as you can find things again.

8.3 Return to older material

Once a month or so:

- Pick one old audio entry
- One video entry
- One text entry

Revisit them with today’s eyes. Notice:

- Shifts in tone and confidence
- Changes in how you talk about certain people, places, or topics
- Growing skill with language, pacing, and emotional nuance

The archive becomes a mirror – not a single frozen image, but a moving sequence showing how you have been composing yourself over time.

9. What people get out of the process

Over weeks and months, regular CST entries can help people:

- Feel less at the mercy of sudden moods and thoughts
- Build a more forgiving and understanding relationship with their past
- Develop a grounded sense of where they are now
- Clarify directions for the future, even if only in rough outline
- Use their devices in more deliberate, life-supporting ways
- Become better conversationalists with others, because they have practised with themselves

Short-term benefits often include:

- A bit more head-room
- A clearer sense of ‘what is actually going on today’
- Relief at having somewhere regular to put things

Long-term benefits often include:

- A more flexible sense of identity and possibility
- Greater trust in your own observations and judgement
- A deeper understanding of how your history, culture, and environment shape you – and where you still have room to manoeuvre

Importantly, CST is not about becoming relentlessly ‘positive’. It is about becoming more honest, less rigid, and more equipped to work with whatever shows up.

10. Notes for practitioners using this guide

Practitioners of CST can use this material to:

- Introduce the idea that self-talk can be crafted, not just endured
- Normalise the awkwardness many people feel when recording themselves
- Frame media skills as life skills rather than niche technical expertise
- Emphasise pacing: CST is long-term, with small, steady gains
- Invite people, if they wish, to bring observations from their entries into conversation

You are not analysing yourself as a ‘case’. You are noticing how you compose yourself across different media, at different times, in different states.

The work lies in helping you see and use what you are already producing.

11. Advisory

CST is a personal, self-directed practice. It can sit alongside other supports – including therapy, peer support, and medical care – but it does not replace them.

If there is:

- Risk of harm to self or others, or
- Serious deterioration in mental or physical health

then appropriate professional, medical, or crisis support comes first.

CST works best as part of a broader commitment to safety, care, and a life that is gradually more liveable and worth building.