Common Mind Traps

The goal here isn't to judge yourself for how many circles you end up with, but rather to build awareness of patterns of thinking that may be keeping you stuck. With awareness comes the opportunity to change your perspective or to sap these thoughts of their power by viewing them as mental events as opposed to facts.

1. **All-or-nothing thinking** - Thinking of things in absolute terms, like "always", "every" or "never". Few aspects of human behavior are so absolute.

   "If I don't ace this test, I'll never get into graduate school"
   "If I'm not perfect, then I'm worthless."

2. **Overgeneralization** - Taking isolated cases and using them to make wide generalizations. Assuming a single negative event or bad experience will keep repeating itself in similar situations.

   "That person didn't want to go out with me, so no one will."

3. **Mental filter** - Focusing exclusively on certain, usually negative or upsetting, aspects of something while ignoring the rest. Selectively paying attention to the negative & discount the positive.

   You give a class presentation that gets good reviews, but one person makes a critical comment and you focus your attention on that and feel like inadequate.

4. **Disqualifying the positive** - Continually "shooting down" positive experiences for arbitrary, ad hoc reasons.

   "Even though my friends tell me I'm funny and likeable, they're just saying that because they have to."

5. **Jumping to conclusions** - Assuming some negative outcome when there is no evidence to support it. Two specific subtypes are also identified:

   - ***Mind reading*** - Assuming the intentions or the thoughts of others without checking out your assumptions.

     You pass a friend at the Student Center who doesn't say hello and you think he/she doesn't like you.

   - ***Fortune telling*** - Predicting how things will turn before they happen and believe your prediction is a fact.

     "You think your professor thinks poorly of you without asking for feedback."

6. **Magnification** and **minimization** - Inappropriately understating or exaggerating some things (like problems, mistakes, fears or shortcomings) or inappropriately downplay other things (like talents, strengths, and desirable qualities).There is one subtype of magnification:

   You make a mistake in class and think, "I've ruined my reputation!"
   "I only got an A because the professor feels sorry for me."

7. ***Catastrophizing*** - Focusing on the worst possible outcome, however unlikely, or thinking that a situation is unbearable or impossible when it is really just uncomfortable.

   "If I don't check my homework 10 times before handing it in, I'll fail the assignment and flunk out of school."

8. **Emotional reasoning** - Mistaking feelings for facts. Assuming that what you feel about yourself, others, or life is factual and true.

   "I feel nervous so I must be incompetent and not know what I'm doing."

9. Making **should statements** - Concentrating on what you think "should" or ought to be rather than the actual situation you are faced with. Having rigid **rules** which you think should always apply no matter what the circumstances are. If you break your rules for yourself, guilt often arises because you haven't lived up to your own expectations.

   "I should feel comfortable giving a speech in front of strangers."

10. **Labeling** - Rather than describing the specific behavior, you assign a label to someone or yourself that puts them in absolute and unalterable terms.

    Instead of thinking "I made a mistake," you think "I'm a loser."
    If a roommate doesn't do a chore, you think, "(S)he's lazy."

11. **Personalization** - Assuming you or others directly caused things when that may not have been the case. Blame yourself for things you're not entirely responsible for or over which you have little or no control.

    "If I hadn't asked that stupid question then my friends never would have got in that fight and stopped speaking. I'm such an idiot."

12. **Self-defeating comparison -** Comparing yourself selectively with other people so you end up feeling badly about yourself.

Another student makes an interesting comment in class and you think, "I'm not as smart as (s)he is, so I'm not going to say anything in this class."