

ANDREW SEWELL

**FIRST 40
PAGES
FREE**

THE OVER THINKER'S GUIDE TO LIFE

Make peace with your unruly mind.
Create something you didn't think was possible.

THE OVERTHINKER'S GUIDE TO LIFE

Make peace with your unruly mind.
Create something you didn't think was possible.

ANDREW SEWELL

Text: Andrew Sewell

Design: Andrew Sewell

Independently published in 2023

Copyright ©2023

All rights reserved

Website: overthinkers.co.uk

Email: andrew@overthinkers.co.uk

Disclaimer: This guide is intended to offer information and insights that may be helpful to people experiencing overthinking, stress and anxiety. But it is not a replacement for therapy or treatment from a licensed mental health professional. Always consult with a medical professional if you have any concerns about your mental health.

For Ava, the next generation.

Love, dad x

TABLE OF CONTENTS

7	Preface
14	The Pitch
17	The Promise
21	The Practice
23	Part 1: Head space
	Overthinking goggles?
	Overthinker's bingo
	Unhook from your thoughts
	If in doubt, write it out
	Walk at the speed of your thoughts
	Bonus 1: Don't chase the chicken!
46	Part 2: Body space
	Notice the soles of your feet
	Connect with your body
	Tune into your emotions
	Pause & check in
	Bonus 2: Your thinking mind is a power tool
62	Part 3: Heart space
	The power of appreciation
	Cultivate gratitude
	Do something that moves you
	The voice of cynicism and its antidote, compassion
	Tune into your inner knowing
	Bonus 3: Take a walk on the wild side

80	Part 4: Inner overthinker Notice when you say 'should' Overthinking is a feeling problem Neuroscience's take on overthinking When superpowers become saboteurs Bonus 4: The snow globe
101	Part 5: Authentic self Explore your uniqueness Discover your values Find your flow Trust your intuition Where's the joy? Bonus 5: The seven deadly sins of work
124	Part 6: Home run Create a vibrant intention The voice of fear and its antidote, courage Action stations Open a possibility window Will you take the dare? Bonus 6: Life transformation inspired by The Beatles
159	Afterparty Serving suggestions Work with me Further reading Acknowledgements Appendix

PREFACE



HAS YOUR MIND REACHED FULL CAPACITY?

Do you have a tendency to overthink things?

Right now, are the demands of your work and home life making you feel like your mind is at full capacity?

In simpler terms, is your brain always on? Are you struggling to find the head space to think clearly?

Believe me, you're not the only one. In my coaching work with leaders, business owners and knowledge workers, this is something I see again and again.

People are struggling to create clear boundaries between their work and family lives.

Their minds are full to the brim. And if some space does become available, it's filled by empty byte-size content. They're caught in the tractor beam of social media doom-scrolling.

I'm definitely not immune to this stuff. I know how fast my mind can tip from focused, productive mode to scatter-gun overthinking mode. I also know how easy it is to get sucked in by my phone.

What I'm describing seems to be one of the defining challenges of our time.

This is why I created *The Overthinker's Guide to Life*.

WHAT IS OVERTHINKING?

The standard definition of overthinking is either ruminating about the past or worrying about the future.

Its defining feature is the repetitive thought loop that negatively impacts the quality of your life.

Put simply, overthinking is when you keep going over and over something in your mind. You might think you're solving the issue, but in truth you're going round in circles.

Everyone overthinks at times. Who hasn't worried about conversations with a partner, friend or boss? Or stressed out about impending deadlines, health concerns, or family matters?

Overthinking is also much more likely in lives that are dominated by thought-intensive work.

The problem is overthinking costs you, big-time. It saps your energy, kills your focus, harms your productivity, and decreases your overall sense of well-being.

It becomes even more serious when you're analysing, ruminating and worrying to the point where it affects your mental health. Your peace of mind is destroyed and you don't know how to stop.

MY OVERTHINKING BACKSTORY

Seven years ago, I was in overthinking hell. I was an overachieving, and chronically stressed, advertising creative. My heart wasn't in it anymore, but I didn't think I could leave. I felt stuck.

Every day my mind raced, as I struggled to keep all the balls in the air.

I did my best to meet my project deadlines, keep my team happy, and be there for my family outside of work. And, at the same time, I secretly tried to figure out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

I used a lot of energy pretending everything was fine when it really wasn't.

Soon, the sleepless nights came thick and fast. I was always exhausted, and often irritable. I didn't like the person I was becoming.

After much soul searching, and an honest conversation with my partner, I found the courage to leave.

This was the catalyst for me to do a lot of inner work. I learned how to dial down my overthinking and get out of my own way. I discovered my unique gifts and how to express them authentically.

This guide distils the most useful tools, insights and techniques I've learned over the last seven years.

If you're where I was back then – or you just have a tendency to overthink things – this is for you.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The aim of this guide is to help you shift from your overthinking mind to your authentic self. If you're used to living mostly in your head, this can be transformative.

Your authentic self comes alive when you integrate your thinking mind with your awareness, emotions, and intuition. Together, they enable you to show up as your 'best self'. You feel better, make wiser choices, and live in a more joyful, fulfilling way.

The inherent qualities of your authentic self are the seven C's:

- **CALM**
- **CURIOUS**
- **CONNECTED**
- **COMPASSIONATE**
- **CONFIDENT**
- **COURAGEOUS**
- **CLEAR**

To help you cultivate these qualities, I've put together a collection of practices. Together, they'll help you get more head space, connect with the power of your emotions and tune into your intuition. You'll also see where your tendency to overthink things comes from, and explore the values, strengths and dreams of your authentic self.

At the start of each section of the practice, I've highlighted the authentic-self qualities that are most relevant for that part.

You'll also notice, as I go through, that I recommend trying different things on different days. That's how you'll get the most value from the book - putting the ideas into action.

But you'll probably want to read the whole guide first to get your head around my main message.

So, what I'm suggesting is that this guide is meant to be read twice. One quick read through to see the whole picture, then a slower, more deliberate read through to put the ideas into practice and think about the big stuff that matters to you.

Try to approach this guide with a sense of playful curiosity. When you're stuck in overthinking mode, your life feels heavy. There's a lot of tension and a lack of joy.

Framing this as a game will help open your mind to new ideas and perspectives. You'll be more likely to try something new, and less likely to overthink it.

**READY
PLAYER
ONE?**

LET'S DIVE IN

“

**MY LIFE SEEMS
LIKE ONE LONG
OBSTACLE RACE
WITH ME AS THE
CHIEF OBSTACLE.**

Jack Paar

THE PRACTICE



CHANGE YOUR WAYS IN 28 DAYS

The practice is a collection of powerful insights, tools and techniques to help you overcome overthinking and cultivate the qualities of your authentic self.

It's organised into six parts across 28 days, and at the end of each section, there's a bonus just for fun.

At the start of each part, I've highlighted the qualities of the authentic self that are most relevant.

You might like to have a journal or notebook on hand to reflect on the questions and exercises that most interest you.

**IN THIS FREE
PREVIEW, I'VE
INCLUDED PART 1
OF THE PRACTICE**

PART 1

HEAD SPACE

Authentic-self qualities: Curiosity and calm

In this section, you'll learn how to recognise the difference between useful thinking and unhelpful overthinking patterns. I'll also show you some of the techniques I use to reduce my anxiety and create more peace of mind.



DAY 01

**OVERTHINKING
GOGGLES?**



DAY 01

OVERTHINKING GOGGLES?

When you're wearing your overthinking goggles, you experience the world through an anxiety filter. This creates what are called in the psychological lingo, 'cognitive distortions'.

Allow me to illustrate by way of me checking the weather forecast on the morning of a family picnic.

When I'm wearing my overthinking goggles:

There's a 27% chance of rain. Best cancel the picnic.

My mind then employs the technique of 'catastrophic thinking' (a common cognitive distortion) to provide a vivid narrative of how things will go if I ignore this advice.

We get drenched.

The food is ruined.

My partner's parents are cranky.

The kids have a meltdown.

Me and my partner argue about whose stupid idea it was to have a picnic when we KNEW it was going to rain.

One of the kids comes home with a sniffle. By the next morning, it's a full-blown cold. They need to stay off school.

We argue about who has more free time to look after said kid. It becomes a who-has-the-busier-day competition.

I win, but spend the day feeling guilty and stewing.

My partner looks after our child. She misses an important call and loses a big work contract.

A few months later, her business goes bankrupt.

In the stress of it all, we break up.

She stays in our family home.

I end up on the streets.

“Yes”, reiterates my overthinking mind, “it's definitely best to cancel the picnic!”

(I exaggerate, but only slightly.)

In contrast, here's me in the same scenario when I've taken off my overthinking goggles and am perceiving through the calm awareness of my authentic self.

27% chance of rain? That means there's a 73% chance it won't rain.

And if there is a shower, we'll just move the blanket under a tree and open another bottle of Prosecco.

The picnic happens, and everyone has a nice time.

Your turn:

As a starter for ten, reflect on how often your mind goes into catastrophising mode. In simple terms, it's when you make a mountain out of a molehill, often leading to a series of 'What if' questions.

Note: If this happens, there's no need to try to change your thoughts, or beat yourself up about them. Just notice what's going on.

Imagine you're David Attenborough and you've just come across an overly excited chimpanzee in the jungle. You're watching with interest, but you're not getting too close.

REMEMBER

**DON'T
OVERTHINK
PICNICS**

A thick, textured orange brushstroke that starts from the right edge and extends diagonally towards the bottom left, crossing under the word 'PICNICS'.

DAY 02

**OVERTHINKER'S
BINGO**



OVERTHINKER’S BINGO

Here’s a game you can play to help you spot some other common ways we overthink. It’s called Overthinker’s Bingo.

When you become aware you’re engaging in any of these cognitive distortions, say “Bingo” to yourself. By doing this, you’ve successfully become aware you’re wearing your overthinking goggles. Awareness itself can be curative. And it’s the first step to setting yourself free.

Overgeneralising	Fortune-telling
Black & White	Always being right
Emotional reasoning	'I can't stand it!'

OVERTHINKER'S BINGO

Here's a game you can play to help you spot some common ways we overthink. It's called Overthinker's Bingo.

When you become aware you're engaging in any of these habitual thinking patterns, say "Bingo" to yourself. By doing this, you've successfully become aware you're wearing your overthinking goggles. Awareness itself can be curative. And it's the first step to setting yourself free.

Overgeneralising	Fortune-telling
Black & White	Always being right
Emotional reasoning	'I can't stand it!'

Here's a summary of what each of these common ways of overthinking looks like:

Overgeneralising

You take something specific, and create a general pattern out of it. For example, "I failed my interview. Now, I'll never get a job."

Black & white thinking

All-or-nothing thinking: you use words like always/never, nobody/everybody, everything/nothing. No shades of grey are permitted.

Emotional reasoning

You believe that if you feel something is true that makes it a fact. Tip: there's relief in the insight that you're feeling your thinking, not reality. This can be what fuels the thought loop in the first place!

Fortune-telling

You make predictions or jump to conclusions with incomplete evidence. For example, "The doctor is going to tell me I have a life-threatening illness."

Always being right

This is often seen in perfectionists and people who experience Imposter Syndrome. It's not possible to 'agree to disagree'. Any difference of opinion is seen as an intellectual fight for survival. You have to be right.

'I can't stand it!'

When you convince yourself that you can't stand another minute of this and believe it to be categorically true.

DAY 03

**UNHOOK FROM
YOUR THOUGHTS**



DAY 03

UNHOOK FROM YOUR THOUGHTS

The next step is to actively create some space from your thoughts. When you're lost in overthinking, you feel compelled to keep thinking. You think the only way to get some peace of mind is to finally have THE thought that solves the thing you're worrying about.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work like this. Your overthinking is really a sign that your nervous system is revved up. Overthinking isn't a thinking problem, it's a feeling problem. More thinking isn't going to help.

When you notice you're overthinking, what CAN help is to actively put some distance between you and your thought stream. You can do this in a number of ways. One of the simplest is to add a phrase before your thoughts that shows you've moved into a state of awareness.

For example, when you notice a ramped-up thought, try adding "I'm having the thought that..." before it.

So, "I've got so much to do tomorrow. I'll never get everything done." becomes "I'm having the thought that ... I've got so much to do tomorrow. I'll never get everything done."

This simple move from being fused with your thoughts to noticing your thoughts and 'unhooking' from them can be an invaluable step. It allows you to start questioning the truth of your thinking and seeing things from a calmer, more grounded perspective.

DAY 04

**IF IN DOUBT,
WRITE IT OUT**



DAY 04

IF IN DOUBT, WRITE IT OUT

Studies show that getting your thoughts out of your head and onto a piece of paper can help to calm your mind. This could be anything from writing down the three most important things you need to remember to do tomorrow, to stream-of-consciousness journaling where you write down all of your thoughts and feelings as they occur to you.

The act of writing is another way of getting some distance from your thoughts. As you write them out, you're not only thinking your thoughts, you're seeing them appear in front of you. You're training your brain to move into noticing / observer mode, which is the aim of the game here.

It can be helpful to give yourself a time limit on writing. For example, say you're worrying or ruminating about something late at night. Say to yourself, I'll create a window of 10-15 minutes to write out everything I'm thinking. Then when I shut my notebook / journal, the worry window is closed for the day, and I can go to sleep.

It's advisable to use an actual notebook or journal for this, as opposed to something like the Notes app on your phone. There's something about physically moving a pen across a page that helps your mind make sense of things. Also, if you use your phone, the blue light is likely to wake up your brain, which is the opposite of what you're trying to achieve here!

DAY 05

**WALK AT THE SPEED
OF YOUR THOUGHTS**



DAY 05

WALK AT THE SPEED OF YOUR THOUGHTS

Finally, here's a very practical tip. This is brilliant for calming your anxious, busy mind before an important meeting or after a stressful day.

Go for a short walk, and initially walk at the speed of your thoughts. Obviously, if your mind is racing, this will be quite quickly.

Gradually slow down the pace of your walk and observe whether your thoughts follow suit. It's amazing how often they do!

Note: If you can't get out for a walk, you can do this sitting down by tapping the tops of your legs at the speed of your thoughts, and then gradually slowing down the tapping rate.

DON'T CHASE THE CHICKEN!



(Source: Random AI-generated image)

BONUS 1

DON'T CHASE THE CHICKEN!

In Buddhism, they say 'Don't invite your thoughts to tea'. As in, don't indulge your thoughts. Don't encourage them to out-stay their welcome.

Here's a surreal, ideally more memorable, version of this.

It's called 'Don't Chase the Chicken'!

Imagine your mind is like a quiet living room. Suddenly, a chicken walks in. You're understandably a bit startled, but you decide to relax and just let the bird do its thing. It walks around for a bit and then quietly leaves.

The other option in this scenario is to freak out. You chase the chicken around the room, frantically trying to get rid of it. All this does is stress out the chicken. It starts to fly around, knocks things over, feathers everywhere.

The second option is normally how we interact with our uncomfortable thoughts – and this leads to a very busy mind, fast. It's way better to take the first option. Don't chase the chicken. Just observe.

(Source: Check out Anna Debenham's Ted Talk, "Everything we need to thrive already exists within us" to hear this chicken analogy in all its glory. It was where I first came across it.)

END OF FREE PREVIEW

Enjoyed what you've read so far?

Buy the FULL version of The Overthinker's
Guide to Life at overthinkers.co.uk