

UNLOCKING CREATIVITY

Investigating Habitual Thoughts



Once you start paying attention, you can begin to notice a "usual suspects" list of thoughts you hear over and over.

Giving one a name makes it easier to catch next time. It lets you say: *Ah – I know this one. This is my "unworthiness" story. This is my "I'm always behind schedule" story.*

These stories aren't random, and they aren't a sign something's wrong with you. Each one started as protection – Survival Brain building it from real material to keep you ahead of a danger that was real at the time. The trouble is that they keep running long after the moment that built them.

Checking in

Two ways to catch them.

- **Proactively** – Add this to your Wise Brain Rep. When you pause to get present, take it one step further and ask:

What am I thinking about right now?
And how am I thinking about it – loosely and freely, or tight and looping?
- **Responsively** – When something triggers emotional reactivity, once the heat has dropped, ask what story was running underneath.

Write down whatever you catch.



Common tells

You'll often catch one by its shape:

- **Absolutes** – always, never, everyone, nothing.
- **Summary** – *I'm the kind of person who... They're the kind of person who...*
- **Reaction** – bigger than the moment calls for.

Two kinds worth noticing

- **Old stories** run constantly, across situations, often for years.
- **Fresh loops** are episodic – yesterday's meeting, replaying tonight.

Both are Survival Brain: one predicting trouble, one rehearsing it. Responsive pauses catch the loud ones, old or new. Proactive pauses catch the quiet ones that never spike.

Over the next two weeks

Keep a running record of your own "usual suspects." Phone note, journal, or on the next page.

Many people find this goes better at the end of the day, alongside your Evening Reflection, once the day has settled.

MY USUAL SUSPECTS

Write them as you catch them. Rough is fine.

OLD STORIES – MY TOP TEN

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

FRESH LOOPS – WHAT I REPLAYED THESE TWO WEEKS

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

WORKING WITH ONE

On the page, you have more room than you do in the moment. You don't need ten – pick one and work with it. That's where the change happens.

1. **Name the story.** Not a fact. A story, and it's protection. Give it a name (*my "____" story*) and say what it's protecting you from. Saying it out loud takes a surprising amount of its authority away.
2. **Ask what it's trying to tell you.** Sometimes there's something worth hearing – a real deadline, a conversation you've been avoiding. If there's something to do, do it. Then it can rest.
3. **Widen it.** What is this story leaving out? Not what's more positive – what else is *also true*, that it has no room for.

When the story is accurate – or when you've widened it and it keeps running anyway – the question changes. Not is it true, but what matters here, and what would moving toward it look like right now? A story can be accurate, and loud, and still not be the thing that decides your next step.

EXAMPLES

"I'm always behind schedule."

Leaves out: an unusual load right now, three things that shipped this week, no one who's raised a concern.

Also true: I'm managing a lot, and I get to choose what matters most today.

"My spouse never listens to me."

Leaves out: The times they did listen. What I haven't said plainly.

Also true: this conversation isn't working yet, and there's something I haven't asked for clearly.

"I'm such an anxious person."

Leaves out: anxiety isn't running all the time. It spikes around specific things – and there are hours when it isn't here at all.

Also true: I feel anxiety, and I've done hard things while feeling it.

"I'm not as successful as other leaders."

Leaves out: what I'm comparing – their outside to my inside. What I've actually built.

Also true: I'm measuring against a highlight reel, and I have my own work worth naming.

Some patterns loosen fast. Others take years. Seeing it is already the practice.