



The ABCs of Self-Talk

Whether we like it or not, chatter in running through our heads as automatic thoughts or as conscious thinking. The person who first said, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." never talked with a performer. Performers can say a lot of mean things to themselves—things that DO hurt. It is important for performers to pay attention to what they say to themselves and then decide whether the thought or statement is helpful or hurtful.

Greek philosopher, Epictetus said: "We are not disturbed by things, but by the views which we take of them." Let's really look at this statement. What if this is true? What if it isn't the memory slip or the audition or performing in front of a huge crowd that is what makes you anxious or fearful? What if it is the thoughts we have **about** these things that is what's really making us feel this way?

I'm here to tell you there's no 'what if' about it. THAT IS what is happening. Let's look:

ABCs of Self-Talk

A = Activating Event

(missing or flubbing the high note)

B = Belief about that Event

(It is extremely AWFUL that I missed that note! Resulting thought: "I'm awful or stupid!")

C = Consequences

(Almost miss next entrance and can't sustain the last note)

Let's think of other examples:

A = Bad acoustics

B = I can't hear myself—therefore, I can't sing or play.

C = Change the WAY you sing or play and don't perform as well

A = 8 AM audition

B = Nobody can sing that early in the morning.

C = Change the WAY you sing and don't perform as well

A = High note coming up

B = I always have trouble here.

C = Get nervous and *have trouble*.

So you can see that it is not necessarily the event, but our belief about that event, that causes us to feel or perform a certain way. The meaning we attach to these events can positively or negatively impact our emotions, behaviors, and ultimately our performances!!

However distorted or ineffective the thought, there is HOPE—these thoughts are learned, so they can be unlearned. First, we must become aware of our thought patterns. Once we are aware, we can practice stopping them and disputing them.

What YOU Can Do:

Detect: Become aware of your unconscious thought patterns. Ask yourself:
What are your common automatic thoughts or inaccurate self-talk?
What makes you anxious about performing? What thoughts do you detect?

Detour: Acknowledge the thought. Relax by breathing in the unwanted thought and exhaling the unwanted thought away.

Dispute: Put your negative thoughts on trial—what's the evidence?
Look for productive ways to view the situation. Look for solutions NOT the same old excuse!

Once you have become aware of the negative thought patterns that contribute to your performance anxiety or that get in the way of your best performing, you can begin to stop these patterns and incorporate more positive and effective ways of thinking.

The following are some examples of the effective thoughts that can turn your performing around:

Positive Affirmations: thoughts that focus on your desirable characteristics & qualities

"I am a quick study."

"I am a good performer."

"I love performing."

Goals: thoughts that keep your mind positively focused on the here and now. They promote high effort & enhance persistence.

"I am committed to this moment."

"What do I hear/feel in *this* phrase, *this* movement today?"

Appraisals: thoughts that determine the degree to which a situation is perceived as threatening (negative) or challenging (positive).

"Although this audition means a lot, all I can do is my best and that's good enough for today!"

Attributions: reasons or explanations for success and failure

"I am a success when I work my hardest and do my best."

"The only way I can fail is if I do not try."

Cue or Trigger Words: quick reminder thoughts used during practice and competition—keep mind positively focused!

"GO for it!"

"Let it go!"

"CALM!"

"BOLD!"

"I CAN!"

Accurate and positive self-talk can be VERY useful and have many useful benefits for performers:

Elevate Motivation: accurate & positive ST can help singers feel competent and in control and can keep them motivated

Enhance Focus/Concentration: ST helps singers focus on their priorities & goals, rather than on distractions

Manage Stress: controlling negative or self-defeating thoughts helps minimize the amount of stress singers can feel

Boost Self-Confidence: persuasive ST can convince singers that they possess the competence & preparation to be successful

Maximize Skill Development and Performance: cues & goals can help athletes remain focused on performance-relevant cues while practicing & performing

With practice and patience you will begin to change your thought patterns and your beliefs about yourself and your performing. Remember, with most changes we need to make, it is your choice to do so. Make the choice to examine your thought patterns and start making the changes you need to make today!

How You Can Shift Your Self-Talk

In the following table, identify situations that trigger negative or unproductive thinking (L Column). In the middle column document the thought you usually think and in the R Column construct a more productive "reaction" and thought. Once complete, cross out all the negative thoughts in the middle column and one by one, relax and imagine yourself in each triggering situation and coping differently by thinking the new, productive thought.

Practice this daily.

Triggering Situation	Original Self-Talk	New Self-Talk

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