

User Guide: How to Use the CBT Thought Diary

0. How to Run the Program (Beginner Steps)

Before you can use the diary, you need to run the Python script.

Prerequisites

1. **Install Python:** If you haven't already, download and install the latest version of Python from python.org.
2. **Save the File:** Ensure you have saved the Python code provided (the `cbt_diary.py` script) to a folder on your computer, such as your **Downloads** folder.

Running on macOS

1. Open your **Terminal** (Press `Cmd + Space`, type "Terminal", and hit Enter).
2. Type `cd Downloads` and press **Enter** (this tells the computer to look in your Downloads folder).
3. Type `python3 cbt_diary.py` and press **Enter**.
4. The application window should appear immediately.

Running on Windows

1. Open **Command Prompt** (Press the Windows Key, type "cmd", and hit Enter).
2. Type `cd Downloads` and press **Enter**.
3. Type `python cbt_diary.py` and press **Enter**.
4. The application window should appear immediately.

1. Getting Started

When you open the application, you will see the **Home Screen**.

- **New Entry:** Click this large button (with the + icon) to start recording a new thought.
- **Read Diary:** Click this button (with the book icon) to view your past entries.

2. Creating a New Entry (The 5-Step Wizard)

The application guides you through a structured 5-step process. Here is what to do at each step:

Step 1: Check-in

- **What to do:** Select how you are feeling right now by clicking one of the 5 options (from "Very Happy" to "Very Sad").

- **Why:** This sets a baseline for your mood before you tackle the difficult thought.

Step 2: The Situation

- **What to do:**
 - **Negative Thought:** In the text box, describe what happened or exactly what you are thinking. Be specific.
 - *Example:* "I made a mistake in the meeting and now everyone thinks I'm incompetent."
- **Navigation:** Click `Next >` when you are done.

Step 3: Analysis (Cognitive Distortions)

- **What to do:** Review the list of "Thinking Traps" (Cognitive Distortions). Click the boxes to check any that apply to your thought.
- **Common Traps:**
 - *Catastrophizing:* Assuming the worst will happen.
 - *Mind Reading:* Assuming you know what others are thinking about you.
 - *All-or-Nothing:* Thinking if you aren't perfect, you are a total failure.
- **Note:** You can select multiple distortions or none at all.

Step 4: Reframe

This is the most important step. You will challenge your negative thought.

- **The Challenge:** In the top box, write down evidence *against* your negative thought.
 - *Example:* "I actually answered three other questions correctly. My boss smiled at me afterwards."
- **Balanced Perspective:** In the bottom box, write a new, more realistic thought based on that evidence.
 - *Example:* "I made one small mistake, but that doesn't erase my hard work. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes."

Step 5: Final Check-in

- **What to do:** Select your mood again *now* that you have reframed the thought.
- **Goal:** Hopefully, your mood has improved or feels lighter than when you started at Step 1.
- **Finish:** Click `Save Entry` to save your work.

3. Reading Your Diary

From the Home Screen, click **Read Diary** to see your history.

- **The List:** You will see a list of "Cards" showing the date, your mood change (e.g., ➔), and a preview of your thought.
- **View Details:** Click anywhere on a card to open the full view. You can read your full challenge and balanced perspective here.

- **Delete:** If you want to remove an entry, click the `Trash / Delete` button in the top right corner of the detail view.

4. Saving Your Data

- The application **automatically saves** your entries to a file named `cbt_diary_data.json` on your computer.
- You do not need to press a "Save" button before closing the program; it handles everything for you.