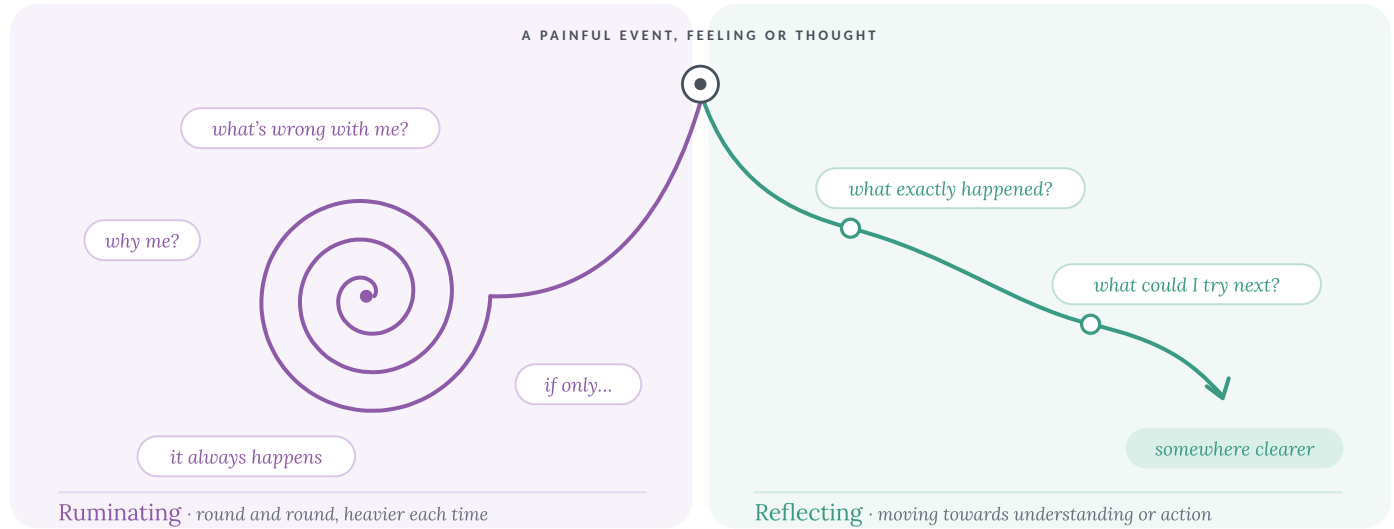


Reflecting or Ruminating?

Noticing whether your thinking is helping you move forward

Going over difficult things is natural, and it can help us understand and recover. But thinking can also get stuck: circling, getting nowhere, and leaving us feeling worse. Research suggests the difference is often less about *what* we think about than *how* we think about it.



01 How to tell the difference

the same topic, two different ways

	Ruminating also called brooding	Reflecting constructive processing
Questions	"Why me?" "Why does this always happen?" Big, abstract questions with no clear answer	"What happened, exactly?" "How could I handle this next time?" Specific and concrete
Focus	Judging, comparing, what's wrong with me or the situation	Details, options and small next steps
Viewpoint	Reliving it through my own eyes, again and again	Stepping back, as if watching from a little distance
Where it goes	Back to the same place	Towards understanding, a decision or acceptance
How long	Goes on and on, often late at night	Has a natural end, or a set time
Afterwards	Heavier, more stuck, more tired	Perhaps still sad, but clearer or calmer

02 A quick check

when you notice you're going over something

	Yes	No
Am I getting closer to understanding, a decision or a next step?	☐	☐
Am I thinking about specifics, rather than verdicts about myself?	☐	☐
Do I feel clearer, or at least no worse, than ten minutes ago?	☐	☐
Is there something here I can actually act on?	☐	☐
Is this new thinking, not the same loop as before?	☐	☐

Reading your *answers*

Mostly **yes**: you're probably reflecting. Keep going for a while, then give it a natural stop.

Mostly **no**: you may be ruminating. That's very human, and not a failing. Try one of the shifts overleaf.

Both can happen in the same hour. The aim is noticing, not getting it right.

03 Why it's so easy to get stuck

understanding the pull

It feels *useful*

Rumination often feels like problem-solving, so it can seem wrong to stop, even when nothing new is emerging.

It promises *control*

Going over things can feel like a way to prevent it happening again, or to finally make sense of it.

It becomes a *habit*

Over time, certain times, places or moods can trigger the loop almost automatically.

Shifting Out of the Loop

Five gentle shifts, and a place to notice your patterns

You can't simply stop a thought, and trying hard to push it away can backfire. These shifts change *how* you engage with it instead. Try one at a time.

04 Five shifts

choose the one that fits the moment

1 From *why* to *how*

Swap "Why did this happen to me?" for "How did it unfold, step by step?" or "How could I take one small step?"

2 Step *back*

Think it through as if advising a friend, or use your own name: "What does Sam need right now?" Distance can bring perspective.

3 Solve, or *set down*

Ask: is there a problem I can act on? If yes, choose one next step. If not, practise letting the thought be there without chasing it.

4 Re-engage with *life*

Turn your attention to something absorbing that needs you: a task, a conversation, movement. This isn't avoidance; it's getting back into your life.

5 Give it a *time and place*

If it keeps returning, set aside a short, regular time to think it through, ideally with pen and paper, then close it.

Pairs with Worry Time

A note on *writing*

Writing can help, but open-ended writing about feelings may keep some people circling, especially after a loss or separation. Short, guided prompts with a time limit tend to be safer.

05 My early warning signs

when does the loop tend to start?

☐ Late at night

☐ Lying awake

☐ Alone and tired

☐ After conflict

☐ Scrolling social media

☐ Replaying conversations

☐ Comparing myself

☐ "If only..." thoughts

☐ Anniversaries or reminders

06 My loop log

a few entries this week is plenty

When & where	What I was going over	Why or how?	Shift I tried	After 0–10
		☐ Why ☐ How		/10
		☐ Why ☐ How		/10
		☐ Why ☐ How		/10
		☐ Why ☐ How		/10
		☐ Why ☐ How		/10

When it's more than a loop

Rumination often travels with low mood and anxiety. If it's becoming hard to manage, it may help to talk it through with your psychologist.

To bring to my next session

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