# The Anxiety Forecast vs Reality

ANXIETY & BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENTS

*Your mind predicts what might happen. What actually happens may be different.*

Anxiety works like a forecaster who always expects storms. This worksheet helps you write down the forecast before a situation, check it against what actually happens, and build a record of real experience over time. Unlike a thought record, the aim isn't to argue with the thought; it's to gather evidence from life.

## 01 Forecast and reality

*one worked example*

### THE ANXIETY FORECAST



**85%**

*chance my voice shakes and everyone thinks I don't know what I'm doing*

**EXPECTED DISTRESS**
8 out of 10, hard to bear

**I WON'T COPE WITH**
the silence after I speak

**THE CONSEQUENCE**
they'll lose respect for me

→ *the experiment*

asking one question in the team meeting

### WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED



**20%**

*match: my voice wobbled at first, then steadied; two people nodded*

**ACTUAL DIFFICULTY**
5 out of 10, uncomfortable but okay

**WHAT I MANAGED**
I finished the question anyway

**WHAT I LEARNED**
nobody mentioned it afterwards

1. **Write the forecast** *before the situation* →
2. **Run the experiment** *with fewer safety behaviours* →
3. **Compare and record** *straight afterwards* →
4. **Repeat** *and watch the pattern*

## 02 Your forecasting record

*the pattern matters more than any single day*

**Speak up in a meeting**

**85%** forecast
came true: **partly**
*better than forecast*

**Phone the GP surgery**

**70%** forecast
came true: **no**
*it was fine*

**Eat lunch in the café**

**60%** forecast
came true: **no**
*nobody stared*

**Say no to extra work**

**80%** forecast
came true: **yes**
*it rained, and I coped*

**Leave the house without checking**

**90%** forecast
came true: **no**
*nothing happened*

**Ask a question in class**

**75%** forecast
came true: **partly**
*a little awkward*

*An example record. Most anxious forecasts were stormier than the day turned out. One did come true, and the person still coped; that is useful evidence too.*

## 03 Why test the forecast?

*what the research suggests*

### Anxious forecasts can lean stormy

In one small study, 29 people with generalised anxiety disorder recorded their worries and then tracked what happened. 91.4% of their worry predictions did not come true (LaFreniere & Newman, 2020). This is a finding from a single small study, not a general rule about anxiety.

### Surprise is where learning happens

Fear may shift most when what happens differs from what you expected, so it helps to write the forecast down clearly first (Craske et al., 2014).

### An experiment, not a test of you

Behavioural experiments are about gathering information, whatever the result (Bennett-Levy et al., 2004). A forecast that comes true is still worth learning from.

### CHOOSING A GOOD EXPERIMENT

- ○ Pick a situation that feels anxious but is **not genuinely dangerous**.
- ○ **Gradually reduce selected safety behaviours**, such as over-preparing or avoiding eye contact, one or two at a time, so you can see what really happens.
- ○ Start small, and build up step by step.
- ○ If you are unsure whether an experiment is suitable, plan it with a health professional.

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## 04 My experiment

*copy this page for each experiment*

**The situation I'll test**

**When and where**

**Safety behaviours I'll gradually reduce** · *one or two*

**How will I know whether my prediction came true?** *what will I look or listen for?*

## 05 Forecast vs reality

*fill the left side before, the right side after*

**BEFORE THE SITUATION** *the anxiety forecast*

**AFTER THE SITUATION** *what actually happened*

### What do I predict will happen?
*be specific: what, who, how*

### What actually happened?
*the facts, as a camera would see them*

### How likely do I think it is?
*0% = no chance · 100% = certain*

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### How closely did reality match my prediction?
*0% = not at all · 100% = exactly*

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### How distressing do I expect it to be?
*0 = not at all · 10 = unbearable*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

### How difficult was it in practice?
*0 = easy · 10 = extremely hard*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

### What do I think I will be unable to cope with?
*the part I dread most*

### What did I manage, even if it was difficult?
*small things count*

### What do I expect the consequences to be?
*later today, tomorrow, next week*

### What did I learn about the consequences?
*what really followed*

## 06 Reading the result

*tick the closest*

Overall, the forecast was

- ○ much stormier than reality
- ○ a bit stormier
- ○ about right
- ○ milder than reality

**The most surprising part was**

Next time, my forecast might be

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## 07 When the forecast came true

*sometimes it does rain, and that is useful evidence too*



*Some predictions will happen, at least partly. This is not failure; it is a chance to see how you actually respond when things go wrong.*

**What happened that I had predicted?**

**How did I respond, and how did I cope?**

**What helped, and what would I do next time?**

**Compared with my forecast, it was**

- ○ better than expected
- ○ about as expected
- ○ worse than expected

**How long did the impact last?**

- ○ minutes
- ○ hours
- ○ a day
- ○ longer

**What did I learn about my ability to cope?**

## 08 My forecasting record over time

*one line per experiment*

| DATE | MY FORECAST | HOW LIKELY | DID IT COME TRUE? | WHAT I LEARNED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |
| | | | ○ no ○ partly ○ yes | |

## 09 Looking back

*what is my evidence telling me?*

**Patterns I notice in my forecasts**

### My next experiment

*a little further than last time*


**SOURCES**

Bennett-Levy, J., Butler, G., Fennell, M., Hackmann, A., Mueller, M., & Westbrook, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Oxford guide to behavioural experiments in cognitive therapy.* Oxford University Press.

Craske, M. G., Treanor, M., Conway, C. C., Zbozinek, T., & Vervliet, B. (2014). Maximizing exposure therapy: An inhibitory learning approach. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 58*, 10–23.

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