

the
anxiety, worry
& depression
workbook

65 exercises, worksheets & tips to improve mood and feel better

Jennifer L. Abel, PhD

“This workbook is a valuable resource for managing anxiety, worry and depression. If you are personally looking for help or are a professional who treats people with these conditions, you have here a treasure trove of ideas. Dr. Abel’s worksheets will guide you through the process to shake off depressing anxiety and worry, and then walk you into a more positive life.”

-Margaret Wehrenberg, PsyD,
Author of *The 10 Best-Ever Anxiety Management Techniques* and
Anxiety + Depression: Effective Treatment of the Big Two Co-Occurring Disorders

“Anxiety and depression often go hand in hand, and worry is common experience across both problems. This is the first book that I know of to focus on the role of worry in both anxiety and depression. The book is filled with practical strategies that are quick and straightforward. The easy-to-use worksheets and bonus downloadable recordings make this especially useful for anyone struggling with anxiety and depression, as well as their therapists!”

-Martin M. Antony, PhD,
Professor of Psychology, Ryerson University
Author of the *Shyness and Social Anxiety Workbook* and *The Anti-Anxiety Workbook*

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Introduction

As a clinical psychologist, I have specialized in treating anxiety since my graduate school practicum at Chestnut Ridge Hospital in 1989. During my post-doctoral work at Penn State's Stress and Anxiety Disorders Institute, under the direction of T.D. Borkovec, I focused my expertise on generalized anxiety disorder (GAD); and after almost 10 years of research, I started a private practice. As a scientist-practitioner, I always consider, and use, strategies for anxiety and depression that have been proven to work in scientific, clinical studies. However, there is also an art to being a great clinician. Taking into consideration both art and science, I have created several unique strategies, and modified mainstream approaches, to effectively help thousands of individuals struggling with anxiety, worry, and depression through my direct clinical work, and also by teaching thousands of clinicians through my seminars, my book, and my therapy cards. Because of the uniqueness of my strategies, many of the ones found in these exercises and worksheets are not found in any other self-help books or workbooks.

WHY THIS BOOK IS UNIQUE

There are countless books on the topics of depression, worry, and anxiety. However, this is the first book that addresses the relationship between worry and depression, as well as the anxiety caused by worry. I chose a workbook format and included recordings because we learn better when we experience information in a variety of ways. This workbook will help you change your habits through reading, writing, listening, and engaging in several experiments. I've also included self-monitoring forms, because when you keep track of the concepts in the book, it increases the likelihood you will continue to use these strategies on a daily basis, which in turn greatly increases the likelihood of success.

Worry is typically thought to cause anxiety; however, it causes a significant amount of depression (Andrews & Borkovec, 1988). In fact, people with GAD are more likely to develop depression or dysthymia (a chronic low-level depression) than those whose worry and anxiety is healthy. We also know that when we treat worry, even with only relaxation and mindfulness strategies, depression lifts (Borkovec, Abel, & Newman, 1995). Likewise, early in my career I treated many people whose primary concern was depression, only to learn that worry was driving a significant amount of their depression. Typically, these individuals didn't mention that they worried a lot, as they had grown almost accustomed to their worry and often considered it a trait that they couldn't change. Once we addressed the worry, the depression lifted.

Not only is the relationship between worry and depression not known to the public, it's not common knowledge amongst mental health care professionals. Furthermore, most health care professionals aren't experienced in using the strategies most effective for worry. Therefore, the second half of the workbook is a guide specifically for therapists. If you're currently working with a therapist, they can use this section to better inform and complement the exercises in the first half of the workbook. If you don't see a therapist, you might consider seeing one who specializes in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or dialectical-behavioral therapy (DBT).

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Many books are read, but not consumed. You can get more out of one self-help book that you apply to your life than by reading a dozen.

This book has two parts, a self-help workbook for those dealing with depression, worry and anxiety, as well as a therapists' guide at the end. The workbook format of this book provides encouragement to make it easier for you to process the information and apply the strategies. For the best results, read one chapter at a time and apply the strategies in that chapter for a week, perhaps longer, before moving on to the next chapter. It is important not to

rush through things; it is only as you take time to apply these strategies that you will receive the most benefit from them. Be sure to also engage in the experiments and to listen to the recordings. Keep in mind that some strategies and experiments will work better for you than others—one of the reasons that multiple techniques are provided.

It is recommended that you use this book with your therapist, who will ideally own this book as well. They can help to guide you through the chapters that will be most beneficial for you, and may change the order to best help you. However, due to constraints like time, money, travel or living in a remote area, you may also choose to try the workbook on your own.

If you are anxious, or you are depressed and worry, Chapters 1-17 address these topics and will likely be beneficial for you. Chapters 18-23 address issues that people with depression or anxiety may or may not deal with. There are questions at the beginning of each of these last chapters to help you determine if the issue applies to you. Feel free to skip any of these chapters that are not relevant to you.

Utilize the free recordings recommended in this workbook by going to AnxietyStLouisPsychologist.com/free.

On this website, you will see two black boxes reading **Free Mindfulness Recordings** and **Free Walking Mindfulness Recording**. Click on these to download the first five recordings referenced in this workbook. Track 4 in the free recordings, entitled “General Mindfulness,” can be used for quiet relaxation; additional quiet relaxation recordings are available for purchase for only \$4.99. These optional recordings may be purchased from the same page. The guide to these recordings is available online; however, for your convenience, a description of all the recordings is listed below along with the accompanying chapter:

1. Observing Emotion (Chapter 3) – This track is to be used when experiencing uncomfortable emotions. Remember while using this track that some emotions are healthy. The goal is to accept emotions without adding to their discomfort by trying to fight them. When successful, unhealthy emotions subside.
2. Observing Thoughts (Chapter 4) – This track should be used when worrying. When mindful and accepting of thoughts, unhealthy thoughts tend to decrease or subside completely.
3. Labeling Thoughts (Chapter 4) – When observing and accepting thoughts doesn’t work, we often feel the futility of our thoughts in a whole new way by simply attaching labels to them.
4. General Mindfulness (Chapter 7) – This track can be used while sitting quietly, lying down with your eyes closed, or while doing any activity.
5. Walking Mindfulness (Chapter 7) – Use this recording with one earbud out, while on a walk or a run.

There are two types of quiet relaxation tracks. The first three involve imagery to use when you are having difficulty getting rid of troublesome thoughts or worries. The second set is true quiet relaxation that may be used after the imagery tracks or alone.

Imagery to help quiet the mind:

1. Balloons (Chapter 12) – This track is most useful when you have many things “on your plate” and you’re having difficulty concentrating on a task or are unable to enjoy leisurely activity.
2. Sink (Chapter 12) – This track can be used whether you have one thing on your mind or many things on your mind.
3. Record Player (Chapter 12) – This track is the most helpful when your thoughts are spinning out of control.

Quiet relaxation:

4. Ocean (Chapter 12) –If you're using earbuds or headphones, keep one earbud out.
5. Sponge (Chapter 12) – This track is most useful when you're experiencing muscle tension.
6. Clouds (Chapter 12) – This track is also helpful for reducing muscle tension. However, it is generally very relaxing, even if you have no issues with muscle tension.
7. Breathing (Chapter 12) – This track offers a variety of ideas to use in conjunction with focusing on your breathing.
8. All Senses Mindfulness (Chapter 7) – Before listening to this track, gather the following things: a) candles, incense, or both; b) a beverage – preferably a warm aromatic beverage or a small amount of wine; c) a piece of chocolate (other finger foods will suffice, but avoid anything crunchy or chewy). Light the incense and/or candles and consider placing them in front of a window, pleasant art work, or a blank wall across from somewhere that you can sit comfortably.
9. All Senses Less Sound (Chapter 7) – This is the same track as the previous track, with the volume of the nature sounds reduced.
10. Nature Sounds Alone (Chapter 7) – This track has only the nature sounds, should you wish to guide yourself on the remaining senses.

If you do not wish to access these recordings, there are scripts in the chapters that you may use instead.

HOW THERAPISTS CAN USE THIS WORKBOOK

It is recommended that you read the client portion of the workbook along with the accompanying chapter of the therapists' guide before using this workbook with clients. Consider using the workbook portion for yourself, particularly if the chapter applies to you—even if only to a subclinical extent. Remember, however, that responses to the strategies vary, so if something works for you, don't necessarily assume it will work for your client; and if a strategy doesn't help you, it may still be very effective with your client.

Except in rare cases, even clients whose primary complaint is depression will benefit from the chapters addressing worry and anxiety, since worry often contributes significantly to depression. In addition, many of the chapters directly address both depression and anxiety.

Likewise, all the chapters that address depression are likely to be helpful for those who don't suffer from depression, except Chapter 17: Getting Motivated to Manage Depression. Motivated clients who suffer from depression will not need this chapter.

While I encourage you to skip around the book, matching the chapters with clients' symptoms and presentation, it is best to start by reading the first two chapters. Chapters 18-23 certainly will not apply to everyone, and it is unlikely that all five of these chapters will apply to any one individual.

For best results:

1. If possible, engage clients in the experiments before they read the content in the chapters.
2. Encourage your client to share and discuss their worksheets with you. Make blank copies for them; it will improve adherence.

3. Ask your clients to practice the strategies in each chapter for at least a few days—preferably a week or more—before moving on to the next concept.
4. Encourage your clients to use the self-monitoring forms. Compliance is more likely if you provide copies and ask them to bring the completed forms each session. Reviewing and discussing them at each session will improve adherence.
5. Either encourage your clients to download the recordings, or make the recordings for them yourself. (See Chapter 12 of the Therapists' Guide, p. 149.)

Best wishes for increasing your own well-being and to more relaxed and happier clients!

Part 1

Anxiety, Worry, & Depression Workbook

1 Chapter

Worry: The Root of Anxiety and Depression

Nearly everyone worries at least occasionally. About one in four people believe that they worry too much. While worry is usually thought to cause anxiety, it often leads to depression too. Whether we're worried or not, negative thinking usually leads to anxiety, depression, and sometimes other uncomfortable emotions such as embarrassment, guilt, and frustration. When anxiety interferes with the enjoyment of life, it can cause depression too. There are a number of other issues that can lead to depression and anxiety, such as hormone imbalances, genetics, side-effects of medication, and disease. While there appears to be a small genetic influence, worry is primarily a habit that is learned. People tend to "get used to" their worry habits and often don't realize how much those habits are affecting their mental and physical health.

Worry can be defined as thoughts or images that lead to anxiety or prevent relaxation and that are not productive. Planning and problem-solving involve productive thinking that may include some level of pressure or anxiety, but it's not necessary. Worries are typically useless thoughts that tend to be repetitive. Not only is it not productive, but worry has also been proven to interfere with problem-solving.

People who worry excessively and meet criteria for a disorder known as generalized anxiety disorder not only experience more anxiety and depression than others but are also more prone to many medical problems, including heart disease, headaches, and irritable bowel syndrome. Worry also puts you at risk for major depressive disorder, dysthymia (mild chronic depression), and other anxiety disorders that are often more severe, such as panic disorder, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

When we experience threat, our bodies gear us up to fight and run, so we can protect ourselves from harm. Sometimes anxiety is healthy in that it may help us to literally run or fight to survive. Other times, the anxiety may motivate us to get out of a bad situation, such as an unhealthy relationship or a toxic job. However, worry and anxiety that do not motivate us to protect ourselves are false alarms to the body. Our bodies react the same way to worry as they do to actual threat, but with nothing to fight and nowhere to run. This explains the connection between worry and medical problems as well as some of the uncomfortable symptoms that accompany worry, such as muscle tension.

Unfortunately, modern medicine often treats the symptoms of a problem rather than the cause. In this case, worried habits, negative thinking, and several other unhealthy habits are usually the cause of anxiety, depression, and medical problems, and patients are often medicated instead of being encouraged to change their habits. Worry, as the seed of so many mental health and medical problems, is usually overlooked, and seldom do physicians recommend to their patients that they see a cognitive-behavioral therapist to treat their worry.

Do You Have Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

1. Do you believe that your worry is uncontrollable? _____

2. Check the symptoms below that you experience at least sometimes:

Difficulty concentrating

Fatigue

Insomnia

Irritability

Muscle tension

Feeling keyed up, on edge, or nervous

Now circle the symptoms above that you experience more days than not.



Did you check at least three symptoms, circle at least two, and say yes to the first question?

If so, and if you have been bothered by these symptoms for at least six months, you probably have generalized anxiety disorder. If all the symptoms applied but you have had them for less than six months, you are probably just going through an adjustment period that could either resolve with time or lead to generalized anxiety disorder.

Often people develop generalized anxiety disorder in childhood or adolescence. However, it can start with a major life event, such as going to graduate school, having children, divorce, losing a loved one, or retirement. The good news is that treatment for generalized anxiety disorder is usually very effective without using medication (e.g., Borkovec, Newman, Pincus, & Lytle, 2002). Furthermore, when worry lifts, mood and health improve as well. There are two very important things to understand about the nature of worry and anxiety to begin to heal and form more relaxing and healthy habits. The first is that anxiety occurs in a spiral of interactions between thoughts, images, physical sensations, behaviors, and emotions. Waiting too long to intervene with coping strategies will usually render those strategies useless. The second important aspect of the nature of worry is that fighting it fuels it. **Many of the exercises and worksheets to come include ways to circumvent and even do the opposite of fighting it: surrender to or accept it.**

It is recommended that you work with a therapist who is well-trained in using cognitive-behavioral therapy and either mindfulness or dialectic behavioral therapy. However, using this workbook without the help of a therapist can be very helpful. One option is to use the workbook and, if you aren't happy with the results, see a therapist later.

Self-monitoring is a useful tool, as it has been proven to improve results. Some of the worksheets include self-monitoring, to help increase the likelihood that you will follow through on the advice. It will also help you to track your progress. I suggest that you use the simple monitoring form found on the next page at the end of each day.



Daily Self-Monitoring

Rate each emotion on a 0–10 scale with a 10 being the most anxious, depressed, or irritable you have ever been and 0 being completely relaxed, very happy, and not at all irritated. If one or two of the emotions aren't problematic, feel free to skip rating them. For "Applying Strategies," you can give yourself a grade (e.g., B+), or rate yourself on a 0–10.

Date	Anxiety	Depression	Irritability	Applying Strategies?
11/1	7	2	5	C

2 Chapter

Fighting Worry and Anxiety Fuels It

EXERCISE

Blue Monkeys

Think about blue monkeys. Now stop thinking about blue monkeys. Put the book down for about 30 seconds.

What have you been thinking about? If you are like most people, you thought about blue monkeys. In the space below, write down what you've been worried about.

Now, stop worrying about that. Put it out of your mind. Again, put down the book for about 30 seconds.

If you're like most people, you are now worrying about the topic I asked you to put out of your mind and the intensity of your thoughts is greater than with the monkeys. Daniel Wegner (1989) showed people a picture of a white bear and told half of them not to think about the white bear. People told not to think about the bear were much more likely to be thinking about the bear 10 minutes later. After the white bear research, Wegner did a similar experiment with worries. When people were told not to worry about something they had been worrying about, of course, they worried about it more than those who were simply asked what they worried about. Furthermore, the effect with the worry was much greater than with the neutral white bear. And what is it that others tell us when we're worried? What is it that we tell ourselves when we are worried? "Don't think about it," or "Put it out of your mind."

If trying to put it out of your mind doesn't work, what does? Fortunately, there are several coping strategies that are helpful. For example, the opposite of trying to put it out of your mind is helpful. This means accepting the worry and accepting the physical sensation of anxiety, sadness, and anger. However, keep in mind that some emotion is healthy, such as crying when your pet dies or feeling anxious when there is actual threat. When emotions are healthy, it's best to do the same thing—accept them—but expect that when they are healthy, you'll continue to feel them (for more on healthy emotion, see Chapter 11). Other things to do instead of fighting anxiety include using process words, moving toward relaxation rather than fighting anxiety, problem-solving, cognitive therapy, and postponing worry. All of these concepts will be introduced in later chapters of this book.

3 Chapter

Mindfulness of Physical Sensation and Emotion

In Chapter 2, you experienced that fighting unwanted thoughts fuels them. The same is true of emotions. When we fight unwanted emotions, it typically makes us feel worse. Just observing our emotions often actually lessens them.



Observing Feelings

If you are feeling anxious, depressed, frustrated, or other uncomfortable emotions, read the following script. (If you aren't feeling uncomfortable now, fold down the corner of this page or put a page marker here so you can come back to it when you are anxious or otherwise distressed):

Observing where you feel discomfort. Noticing where it is located in your body [pause]. Noticing how it feels [pause]. Observing how much space it takes up [pause]. Thinking about what color it would be if you could see it [pause]. What texture would it be if you could feel it? Visualizing your discomfort with color and texture.

Reread this script and then simulate what you remember with your eyes closed.

What did you notice from doing this exercise?

Were you able to just observe your emotion? Or did you find yourself trying to fight the discomfort?

Sometimes just observing how we feel is helpful. Noticing how the discomfort feels instead of fighting it will often relieve it. Sometimes observing feelings is easier than thinking of accepting them. However, the ultimate goal in the treatment of worry, anxiety, frustration, and all emotion is to accept the feelings. Part of this is surrendering by avoiding fighting the anxiety. In the next exercise, you can listen to the free recording "Observing Emotion." The recording combines observation of physical sensations from the previous script with acceptance from the Accepting Emotions exercise in the script below. Alternatively, read the following script now or at a time in the future when you are struggling with unhealthy emotions:

EXERCISE

Accepting Emotions

Observing your emotion. Noticing where it's located in your body and how it feels. Letting go of any efforts to try to change it, but if it changes allowing it to change [pause]. If it increases, allowing it to increase [pause]. If it decreases, allowing it to decrease [pause]. Doing the opposite of trying to change it [pause]. Don't try to push it away and don't try to make it stay. Giving up any struggle. Just observing it as if you're an outsider looking in. Even though it's uncomfortable, accepting it.

What did you notice? Did this help more or less than the previous script? Or did the recording help more than the scripts?

Did you find yourself resisting your anxiety (or whatever your targeted emotion was)?

If these scripts and recording were not helpful for you, you may find metaphors resonate in a way that will help the concept "click" for you. In all the following metaphors, like with emotions, the more you fight the problem, the more you fuel it. Your therapist may have more metaphors, but here are some favorites:

Devil's Snare from Harry Potter

Whether you're a fan of the Harry Potter franchise or not, the devil's snare plant in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (film released in 2001) is a great metaphor for acceptance. The young wizards get caught up in a root system in which the more they struggle to get free, the tighter the roots wrap around them. The roots can squeeze so tightly that they can even kill you! Hermione urges the boys to stop fighting and relax. When she and Harry surrender, they are quickly released as the roots loosen. Ron desperately struggles to free himself, causing the roots to squeeze him more tightly. Not familiar with it? Search for "devil's snare" on YouTube.

Antagonistic Sibling

Your brother is antagonizing you. If you tell him to stop it, whine, or tell your mom, it will only fuel him. The more he sees that he's upsetting you, the more he is fueled to keep doing it. If you pretend that what he's doing doesn't bother you, he will probably stop. Even consider taking it a step further: tell him to keep doing it, tell him you like it, or agree with his taunting (e.g., "You're right, I am a dork"). Then he will stop.

Bees

Swat at bees and they will be more likely to swarm and sting. Surrender and they will be likely to settle and less likely to sting.

These are all metaphors for illustrating the phenomenon that fighting anxiety fuels it. Like the devil's snare, antagonistic siblings, and bees, anxiety gets worse when you fight it and eases—sometimes even stops—when you stop fighting and accept it.

Finally, we can take this one step further: paradoxical intent. **Sometimes going a step *beyond* acceptance helps us more than just acceptance.** The idea here is to think of being brave and facing the uncomfortable symptoms head on. Usually when you're faced with a bully, if you put your hands behind your back and tell them to go ahead and take their best shot, they walk away. Anxiety is often the same way. If your heart is racing, tell it to speed up and go faster. If your chest is tight, tell it to get even tighter. If you feel shaky, think "shake harder." This can also work for crying, particularly if you feel your crying is an overreaction. If you cry about the fact that you're crying and give yourself permission to cry by trying to cry harder, the crying usually decreases or stops!

However, remember that crying is often a healthy response to sad life events or excessive frustration. See Chapter 11 for more on this.

If, after observing your anxiety and being guided to accept your anxiety, you are still fighting the anxiety, revisit the recordings or scripts, or look again at the metaphors if you felt they were helpful.

4 Chapter

Mindfulness of Thought

Our thoughts are often the source of our uncomfortable feelings. When troublesome thoughts decrease, our bodies relax and we feel less anxious and less depressed. Also, as in the previous chapter, when our bodies relax, our thoughts can relax too. In addition, we problem-solve better and are more likely to believe positive thoughts. Like our emotions, we can both observe and accept our thoughts, instead of fighting them. More than likely you have heard about the positive qualities of mindfulness. It is a mental state in which you are aware of thoughts, senses, actions, or motivations. Without always recognizing it, you probably engage in mindful activities every day even if only for a few seconds. While mindfulness has been a way of life for many centuries in Eastern culture and essential to the path of enlightenment, it has only recently become commonplace in the Western world. Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) is often credited with integrating Mindfulness into Western society.



Observing Thoughts

Read the following script or listen to the second free recording, "Observing Thoughts."

Purposefully begin to think about something that you have been worried about and that you have wanted to stop thinking about [pause]. Observing the thoughts that are going on in your mind [pause]. From here on out, don't try to think and don't try to not think. Instead, be a passive observer by just noticing the thoughts that are going on in your mind without judgment [pause]. You may be inclined to try to think or you may be inclined to try to put the thoughts out of your mind. Do neither. Letting go of all effort except to just observe and accept any thoughts that go through your mind. Observing these thoughts almost as if you're an outsider looking in, almost as if you're watching cars pass by or birds flying by.

What was your experience?

Were you trying *not* to think? If so, consider the metaphors in the previous chapter, ask your therapist for more metaphors, or read the therapists' guide for more metaphors. Then reread the script, remember the essence of it, and observe and accept your thoughts accordingly. Give it time. Consider setting a timer for a minute. If this didn't ease your thoughts, the next exercise probably will.

In addition to labeling our thoughts, we can label our emotions. Chapter 11 highlights healthy emotions. When emotions are healthy, we want to accept them. When emotions are not healthy, they are useless and detrimental. Sometimes our emotions are completely healthy, sometimes they are completely unhealthy, and sometimes they are a mix of the two.

Use the following exercise any time you are uncomfortable with your emotions. The hope is that unhealthy emotions will release while healthy emotions persist.

The word "EXERCISE" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font inside a dark, rectangular box with a textured, slightly grainy background.

Labeling Emotion

Next time you feel an unwanted emotion or discomfort in your body, whether it's a pit in your stomach, a lump in your throat, heaviness in your chest, or something else, try labeling that feeling as "useful" or "useless," or instead "helpful" or "not helpful." Labeling it as "wanted" and "unwanted" can also be helpful.

End with a relaxation or mindfulness exercise.

Self-Monitoring of Observation and Acceptance

We tend to use coping strategies and develop habits more consistently when we self-monitor. The following will help you to keep track of mindful observation and acceptance practices more consistently. Complete this simple monitoring form daily. Under “% of Time Worrying,” place your guess of the percentage of time you spent worrying; a range is okay. Under “% of Time Feeling Unhealthy Emotions,” place your guess of the percentage of time you felt uncomfortable when it wasn’t a healthy response to your situation; a range is okay. Under the remaining categories write one of the following:

Y = did most of the time

N = forgot to do or chose not to do

ST = sometimes; did at least once

NA = not needed (no worries or unwanted emotions, or they were fleeting)

Date	% of Time Worrying	% of Time Feeling Unhealthy Emotions	Observed Thoughts	Labeled Thoughts	Observed Emotions	Labeled Emotions
11/1	70-80%	60%	ST	N	ST	Y

Another way of being mindful of thought is by noticing that what we think affects how we feel. The words we use when we attempt to alleviate tension and anxiety are often words that mean we're fighting anxiety; therefore, sometimes they have the opposite of the calming effect we intend. A very simple and small change in the words we use can make a big difference in the way we feel and the effectiveness of the strategies we use.

EXERCISE**Command, Process or State?**

1. Notice where you feel anxiety in your body now. If you don't feel much at the moment, think about where you feel it in your body when you feel anxious or worried.
2. Focus on that place or places now.
3. Remember these three words:
Relax, Relaxing, Relaxed
4. Soon, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes and say each of these three words aloud (or in your mind if you are in a public place). Pause in between each word while noticing how you feel.
5. Then repeat each of the words in reverse order, continuing to notice how you feel.
6. When you're ready, close your eyes and begin.
7. Which word felt the best? _____

If you are like most people, you didn't pick "relax." Has anyone ever told you to relax and you've found you just want to flip 'em off? Or it just makes you less relaxed? That's because "relax" is a command. Commands create tension and even anxiety. When trying hard to relax or let go unsuccessfully time after time, many people feel hopeless and depressed. Like when we try not to think about blue monkeys (see Chapter 2), when we try too hard to resist our anxiety, at best, it isn't helpful and it usually leaves us frustrated or more anxious. Command words make us try harder than process words do.

"Relaxing" is a process word. Unlike commands, process words do not create tension. It's more natural too, because becoming relaxed is not immediate—it *is* a process. Nothing in nature goes from high to low or fast to stop in an instant. Therefore, process words are much more comfortable. Relaxed is a state of being. It is also not a command, so it is more likely to be helpful than "relax." If you picked "relax," it may have only been because it was first in the list, and it may also only have been the most helpful to you because it was first. So choose either "Relaxing" or "Relaxed" for the next exercise.

Note: Throughout this book, you may notice the use of process words even when they are grammatically incorrect.