Change Negative Thinking

Use the ideas below to change negative thoughts that are upsetting and determine whether the way you are thinking about something is really true or not. With time and practice, you will find that your thoughts are more positive and realistic. Not all of these will work for everyone, find what works and use it!

1) **Identify the distortion:** Cognitive distortions (also found on this website) are patterns of thinking that result in negative emotions. When you identify the type of distortion happening in your thinking, it helps you to change the pattern and have a more realistic perspective.
2) **Substitution:** Substitute a more positive and realistic thought. If you regularly find yourself thinking the same negative thought, think of a positive and realistic thought to replace it with. Actively and consciously substitute the positive thought when you catch yourself thinking the negative one.
3) **Double Standard:** If you are thinking negative thoughts about yourself, act as if you are talking to a good friend who is thinking that way, and talk to yourself in the same compassionate way.
4) **Definitions:** Examine what you mean when you define yourself or someone else in a certain way or with a certain label. You will likely find that labels such as "loser" define behaviors, not the whole person, an important difference.
5) **Be Specific:** Stick with what you know to be true, not your judgments about reality. If all you really know is that it seemed like a person gave you an angry look, your conclusion that she is mad at you is not based in fact.
6) **Reattribution:** Instead of blaming yourself or someone else entirely for a problem or situation, think of all the other factors that may have contributed to it.
7) **The Semantic Method:** Substitute language that is less emotionally loaded for "should" statements or labels.
8) **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** List as many advantages and disadvantages of a negative belief, thought, feeling, or behavior. When you look at both advantages and disadvantages sometimes you gain insights about yourself from the benefits you have as a result of the negative thing.
9) **The Survey Method:** Ask several others that you trust about a troubling thought or attitude to help you decide whether it is realistic or not.
10) **Examine the Evidence:** Rather than assume a negative thought is true, look at actual evidence to determine whether it is true or not. If you are typically think of yourself as a failure, when you identify several situations when you were successful, you are using evidence to challenge a negative thought. Taking a close look at an experience can also help you understand a basis for how you are thinking about it.
11) **Experimental Method:** Do an experiment to test the accuracy of your negative thought.
12) **Pleasure-Predicting Method:** Predict how satisfying an experience will be, from 0% to 100%. Record how satisfying it turned out to be. Over time, if your actual satisfaction in your experiences is better than you thought it was going to be, you can begin to challenge the expectation ahead of time.
13) **Vertical Arrow Technique:** Draw a vertical arrow under your negative thought and ask why it would be upsetting if it was true.   This is a good journaling technique if you keep a journal.
14) **Thinking in Shades of Gray:** Instead of thinking about problems in black and white categories, evaluate things in shades of gray.
15) **The Acceptance Paradox:** Instead of defending yourself against your own self-criticisms, find truth in them and accept them.