

# Cultivate: Thinking 3

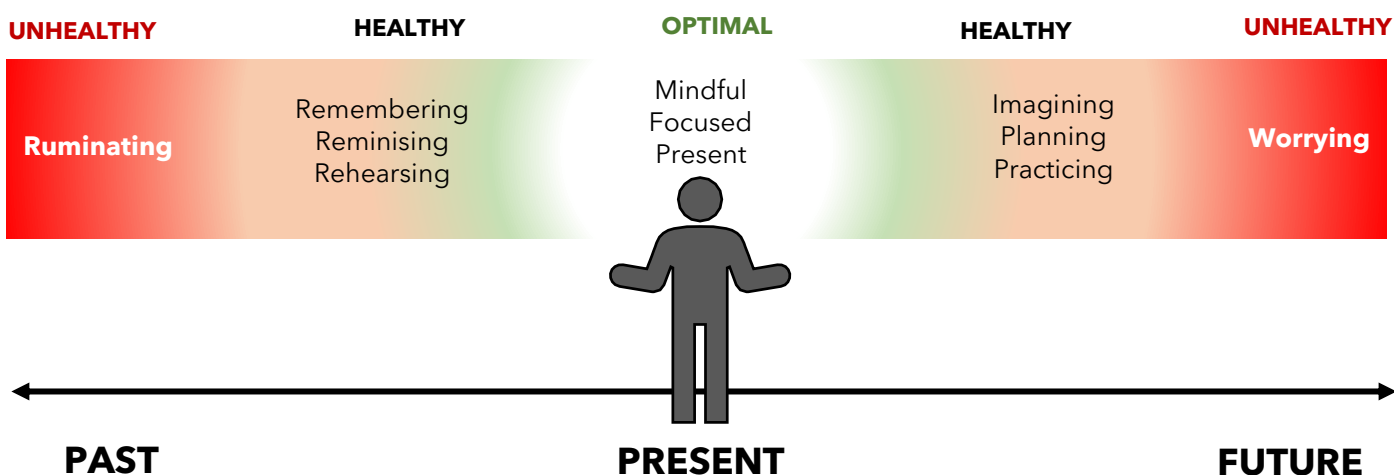
Thoughts or thinking can be understood as a type of activity that takes place in the mind.

Our minds are extremely powerful. They can create not real situations which can be helpful for planning and learning. They also hold our memories (past) and can simulate the potential events (future).

## Virtual Reality Time Machine

Being able to create ideas, stories, fantasies that do not exist in shared reality is helpful for learning and communication. This ability has incredible survival value. In addition to this we can cast our minds back and forwards in time. These mental abilities are extremely helpful for making decisions.

However this is a double-edged sword. Psychologists often talk about the "tricky brain". This is the idea that our mental simulations and imagery can activate very real emotions. When these are related to the past we talk about "rumination" and when it is linked to potential futures we talk about "worry". Get stuck in these types of thinking can lead to experiences like depression and anxiety.



## What am I thinking - Paying attention to the VRTM

You can use those same skills (thought diary and assumption checking) to pay attention to what is going through your mind in real time. It takes some practice but it can become easier over time.

By being curious about your thoughts you can begin to pay attention to when your mind has got stuck in the past or caught up in the future. Being able to notice when this has happened or happening and bring yourself back to the present moment will allow you have more mastery over thoughts which might be causing you sadness because you are ruminating on the past or anxiety because you are worrying about the future.

When practicing this it is important that if you do notice your mind has gone to the past or run ahead to the future you do not judge or criticise yourself for this - it is natural!

Bring your attention to your breath, or use your senses to anchor yourself in the present moment. Remind yourself that your thoughts are not facts and they like everything else will pass.