SENTIO UNIVERSITY

Behavioral Experiment Worksheet

Part 1. The belief I want to test

Item	Entry
Name	
Date	

The situation

Include: when and where this belief shows up, who is there and what I usually do.

The thought or belief I will test

Include: the thought in my own words, such as "If I make a mistake at work, my manager will stop trusting me."

How strongly I believe it now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

Another way of seeing it

Include: a different explanation I could test, if I have one.

How strongly I believe the other view now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

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Part 2. My experiment

My prediction

Include: exactly what I expect to happen and how I will know if it did.

What I will do

Include: what I will do, where, when and with whom.

Safety behaviors I will drop

Include: the things I usually do to feel safe or to stop what I fear from happening, such as rehearsing every word, avoiding eye contact or staying near the door.

What could get in the way, and my plan

Include: problems I can foresee and what I will do about each one.

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Part 3. What happened and what I learned

What happened

Include: what I did, what I noticed in myself and in other people, and whether my prediction came true.

What I learned

Include: what the result means about me, about other people and about the future.

How strongly I believe the original thought now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

How strongly I believe the other view now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

My next experiment

Include: a next step that tests the belief in a new situation or takes the challenge a little further.

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Clinician guide: planning a behavioral experiment

- **When it fits.** Use the worksheet when a client's thought or belief makes a prediction that experience can test. Beck (2021) writes that an experience that disconfirms a prediction may change the client's thinking more effectively than discussion, and that behavioral experiments suit almost every client.
- **Make the prediction specific.** Write the target thought and the predicted outcome precisely, and agree on how the client will know whether it happened. Rouf et al. (2004) rate belief in the thought, the prediction and any alternative from 0 to 100% before the experiment. On this worksheet, a rating of 7 equals 70%.
- **Plan which safety behaviors to drop.** Safety behaviors keep the old belief in place, so the experiment tests the prediction with them dropped (Bennett-Levy et al., 2004). First check that a behavior is a safety behavior and that it does not protect the client from a genuine risk (Rouf et al., 2004).
- **Set it up so any result teaches something.** Choose a level of challenge that is demanding and manageable, plan for problems, and arrange any medical check the experiment needs. A prediction that comes true is useful information and can lead to problem solving (Rouf et al., 2004).
- **Review the result together.** Ask what the client learned and what the result means about the client, other people and the future (Beck, 2021). Rate belief again right after the experiment, and use the change to plan the next one (Rouf et al., 2004).

Adapted from the record sheet for behavioral experiments in Rouf et al. (2004) and the descriptions of behavioral experiments in Bennett-Levy et al. (2004) and Beck (2021). The layout and wording are original.

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Completed example: Tomás (a fictional client)

Tomás, 29, is a software tester in outpatient CBT for social anxiety. He planned this experiment with his therapist, R.N., at his fifth session, on November 18, 2026, and carried it out at work two days later. Tomás, his therapist and every detail of the case are invented.

Part 1. The belief I want to test

Item	Entry
Name	Tomás
Date	November 18, 2026

The situation

Team meetings at work, with eight people, twice a week. I stay quiet even when I know the answer, and I send my updates by email afterward.

The thought or belief I will test

If I speak up in the meeting, my mind will go blank and people will think I'm incompetent.

How strongly I believe it now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**8**	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

Another way of seeing it

I might pause or stumble a little, and people will mostly pay attention to what I say about the work.

How strongly I believe the other view now

0	1	**2**	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

Part 2. My experiment

My prediction

I'll freeze for at least 10 seconds and my face will turn red. At least two people will look away or smirk, and nobody will respond to what I say.

What I will do

Give a two-minute testing update at the Friday 10 a.m. team meeting and ask one question. I'll look at people while I talk.

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Safety behaviors I will drop

Memorizing a script word for word, looking at my laptop the whole time and talking fast to get it over with.

What could get in the way, and my plan

If the meeting is canceled, I'll speak up at Monday's meeting. If my mind goes blank, I'll pause, take a breath and say, "Let me think about that for a second."

Part 3. What happened and what I learned

What happened

I paused once for about two seconds, and my face felt hot. Two people nodded, one asked a follow-up question, and my manager thanked me for the update on the release.

What I learned

People listened to my update and asked about the work. Nobody commented on the pause or on my face. I can give an update without a script.

How strongly I believe the original thought now

0	1	2	3	**4**	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

How strongly I believe the other view now

0	1	2	3	4	5	**6**	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

My next experiment

Ask a question at the monthly department meeting, with about 30 people, and keep looking at people while I talk.

R.N. and Tomás role-played the update in session first, once with his usual script and once without it. At the next session they compared his prediction with what happened, and his belief in the original thought had dropped from 8 to 4. R.N. asked what the remaining 4 was made of. Tomás said he still expected a larger meeting to go badly, so they planned the next experiment around it.

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References and further reading

Books for clinicians

Beck, J. S. (2021). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-4419-6.

Bennett-Levy, J., Westbrook, D., Fennell, M., Cooper, M., Rouf, K., & Hackmann, A. (2004). Behavioural experiments: Historical and conceptual underpinnings. In J. Bennett-Levy, G. Butler, M. Fennell, A. Hackmann, M. Mueller, & D. Westbrook (Eds.), *Oxford guide to behavioural experiments in cognitive therapy* (pp. 1–20). Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-852916-3.

Rouf, K., Fennell, M., Westbrook, D., Cooper, M., & Bennett-Levy, J. (2004). Devising effective behavioural experiments. In J. Bennett-Levy, G. Butler, M. Fennell, A. Hackmann, M. Mueller, & D. Westbrook (Eds.), *Oxford guide to behavioural experiments in cognitive therapy* (pp. 21–58). Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-852916-3.

Research

McManus, F., Van Doorn, K., & Yiend, J. (2012). Examining the effects of thought records and behavioral experiments in instigating belief change. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, 43*(1), 540–547.

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