

Learning from the Course

Let's review to help you get ready.

You Have a Challenger



I described OCD as a pickpocket. What do you think it might've stolen from you?

Let's recognize what your challenger is trying to accomplish, so you know what you're up against. We know that it threatens you about at least one specific theme, and then it often triggers distressing doubt regarding that theme. Take a moment to see how it might be doing that with you.

Do you have a sense of what your obsessive theme or themes are? List them in the left column below. In the right column, jot down what kind of doubts it provokes regarding each theme. To

help you get started, I've listed some major themes below the table and some common doubts for each theme. [If one of your obsessions doesn't fit any of these categories, then feel free to create your own.]

Your theme(s)	Your specific doubts within that theme
<i>Ex. Harm while driving</i>	<i>Did I just hit someone? Did I cause an accident when I merged?</i>

Examples of Major Themes & Associated Doubts

Germs and contamination

- Fear of contamination or sickness
- Fear of spreading contamination or sickness

Harm

- Fear of making a harmful mistake
- Fear that you might impulsively harm yourself or someone else, or want to harm someone, or have already harmed someone
- Fear of losing something or having already lost something of value
- Need for certainty around decision making
- Finding ways to prevent harm by engaging in certain actions or thoughts



Safety

- Need for certainty regarding your home (windows and doors are locked, appliances are off, etc.)
- Need for certainty regarding your family's safety (e.g. checking that children are still safe in the middle of the night)
- Fear that you may cause or may have caused an accident while driving

Memory

- Fear regarding trusting your memory
- Concerns that you may not be able to recall events of the past

Scrupulosity

- Fear of sinning against God
- Fear of going against the principles of your faith

Relationships and sexuality

- Concerns about whether you truly love a specific person, or whether they are the "right" person for you
- Uncertainty regarding your sexual orientation

Unacceptable thoughts

- Unpleasant or even abhorrent thoughts that pop into your mind
- Violent images that pop into your mind
- Perverse sexual thoughts or images that pop into your mind
- Concerns about what those thoughts or images might mean about you

Symmetry, completeness, or perfectionism

- Need for things to be "just right" before you can move on (including unneeded counting or restating messages)

- Fear of unknowingly throwing away something of value
- Posing existential questions that must be answered
- Assigning “good” and “bad” numbers

Bodily sensations

- Fixation on specific bodily functions or patterns

Your challenger trains you to respond to those doubts and fears. The disorder wants you to react in specific ways. For instance, it gives you an urge to get rid of the problem “right NOW!” Think about your different obsessive worries, doubts, or questions. Jot down all the ways you try to get rid of the problem. Then describe the outcome of those efforts.

<i>Ways you try to get rid of your worries, doubts, or questions</i>	<i>Typical outcomes</i>
<i>Ex. Ask family members for reassurance</i>	<i>Their reassurance doesn't last. Have to ask again. They get annoyed.</i>

It also trains you to try to avoid anything that would trigger your obsessions. What do you avoid – what thoughts, actions, places, people, etc. – to keep yourself from starting to obsess? Jot down all the ways you can think of. When you avoid in that way, what does it cost you? What do you miss out on?



What do you avoid to keep from obsessing?	What does it cost you?
<i>Ex. Stopped playing my guitar so I won't have those blasphemous thoughts.</i>	<i>I miss the joy of playing music and I don't improve my playing skills.</i>

Think about your specific obsessions within each of your themes and divide them into two categories: Which ones do you still think are signals, and which ones are you ready to treat as noise? List them below.

Specific obsessions	
I think these are still signals*	I'm ready to treat these as noise
<i>Ex. The pots and pans are still "dirty" after my partner cleans them.</i>	<i>Ex. I may have offended someone in past conversations.</i>

**In this course we are not addressing obsessions that are signals. Figure out what questions you need to answer before you are willing to treat them as noise instead of signals, and then answer those questions as best you can. But remember: This is a disorder of uncertainty. You may never "know" the right answer because the disorder will not allow you to. That's how it controls you.*



I described the disorder as presenting itself as the Wizard of Oz. What lies do you think OCD might be telling you as a way to intimidate and control you?

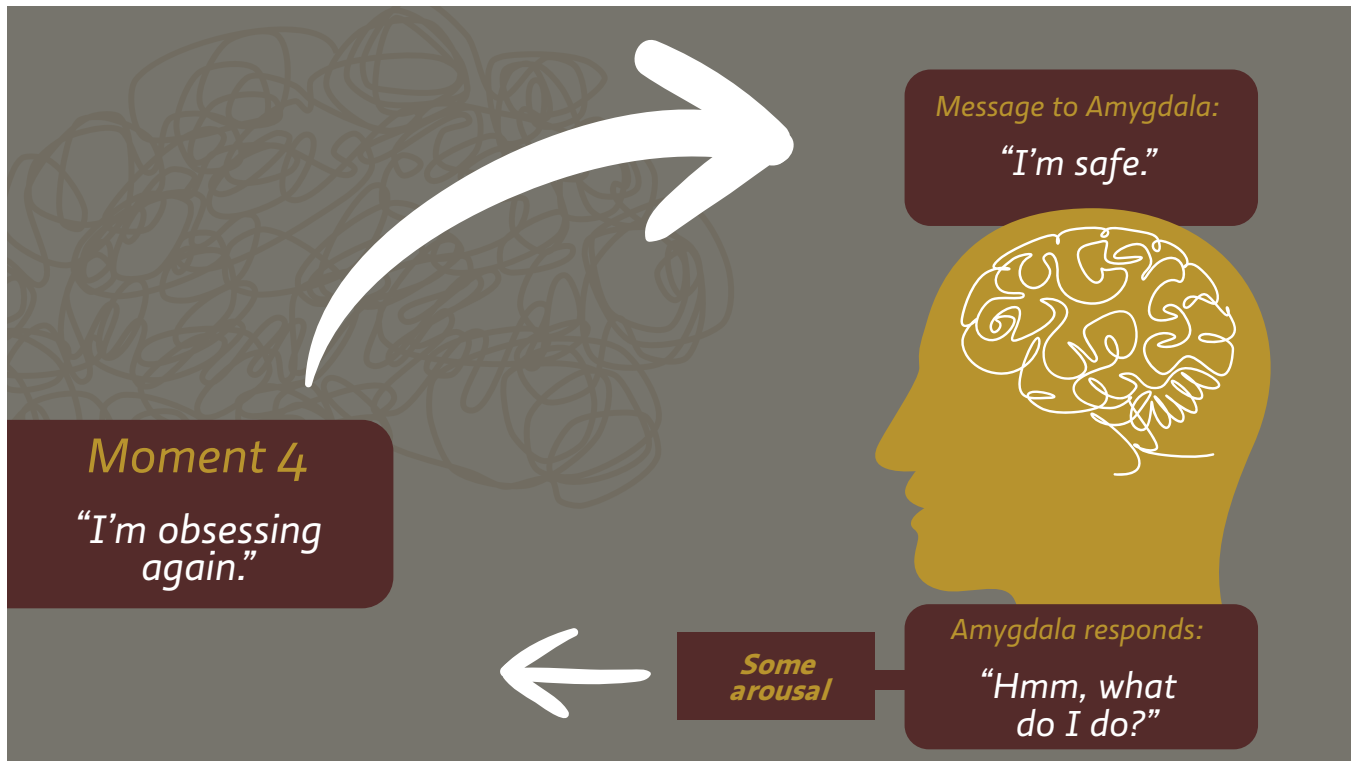
Our Game is Played in 6 Moments

I'm sure that Sonya and Libby can sometimes feel anxious just by walking through their kitchens. Their unconscious mind knows what they're scared of, so it'll signal the amygdala before they have any conscious thought. The same thing might happen with Conrad if he glances at a church without having any conscious thought about a possible wedding with Lee Ann.

Think about the definition of Moment 1, and then look over your first list of themes on page 25. As you reflect on each threatening topic, can you think of any situations (hearing the phone ring, noticing a child walking toward you at the mall, seeing a particular scene on TV, etc.) where you spontaneously feel anxious (as opposed to becoming anxious because a fearful thought, image, or impulse pops in your mind)? List those situations in the table below.

<i>Specific obsession OR theme</i>	<i>Situations where you might feel anxious BEFORE you have conscious thoughts</i>
<i>Ex. Not being able to answer questions, and looking stupid</i>	<i>Every time my smartphone gives a "ding" sound of an incoming email.</i>

Moments 1, 2 and 3 are not within your conscious reach. Moments 4, 5 and 6 are yours to take. That's where you start winning. Before we review how you can begin practicing those skills, let's do a quick warmup...



In Moment 4, what do I mean when I say, “The amygdala is confused”?

Why should you embrace a generic state of distressing uncertainty? Check all the reasons that fit for you.

- Because when I try to become certain, OCD controls me.
- Because I want to take my life back.
- Because as I try to embrace the uncertainty of my specific theme, I don't seem to get any
- stronger.
- Because every other approach I've taken has not helped me enough.
- Because when I fight against uncertainty, my actions help the disorder get stronger.

- Because when I avoid this state of uncertainty, my world gets smaller.
- Because I'm done playing by OCD's rules.
- Because the future is uncertain for all of us, and I want to move into the future.
- Because right now it's more important for me to feel courageous than to feel confident.
- Because I'm ready to experiment with changing up my responses and see how it affects my OCD.
- Because my carefulness is hindering my progress in taking down the disorder.

What have I missed? Add any other reasons that are fitting to you:

Why embrace uncertainty? Because

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In describing what you need to accomplish in Moment 6, I said, "You have to drop those prepositional phrases." What did I mean?

What specific prepositional phrases do you need to drop?




4 Power Tactics That Push You Forward

Want something for YOU! Let's help you identify what you want in your life in the future. Keeping this outcome picture in mind will help motivate you and drive you forward into the work.

To give you some ideas, let's start here: What have you already given up because of the disorder? What have you missed out on?

- Relationships and family ties? Be specific: _____
- Education? Be specific: _____
- Job opportunities? Be specific: _____
- Your general ability to be productive? Be specific: _____
- Concentration? Be specific: _____
- Mental peace? Be specific: _____
- Physical energy? Be specific: _____
- Anything else? Be specific: _____



Here's another way to help you figure out what's important to you in your future: Fill in the blank lines below. Let yourself brainstorm. See how many ideas you can jot down.


If OCD were not such a problem for me, I would:

Now, look over your responses in the last two exercises. Focus on those items that you feel most strongly about, whether they're short-term desires or long-term goals. Identify one or more areas that feel the most important. These are the ones you want to remember as you face the disorder head-on.

I'm taking on OCD because I want this in my future:

Want what you don't want! One thing you have to take on is your resistance. Everyone in the world experiences internal resistance. When we're thinking about your relationship with OCD, what do you tend to resist?

- I don't want my obsessions to pop up.
- I don't want to feel so anxious and scared.
- I don't want to worry about my theme.
- I don't want to feel lost.
- I don't want to feel confused.



Whether you checked one of these or all of the above, it doesn't matter. What matters is that you recognize that you need to push through your resistance in order to take on the disorder. That means you need to work to get to the point where you can say "YES" to this next question.

Can you begin to confront OCD head-on by wanting what you don't want?

- YES! I'm not sure I can do it, but I'm willing to learn how to want what I don't want.
- NO! I'm not doing that. What a stupid idea. Who in their right mind would want what they don't want!

Read through this list. These are all the threatening uncertainties that Conrad expressed as obsessions. And they all are very powerful messages.

- "What if you let them all down? They'll be furious."
- "You need to be 100% sure."
- "You could ruin her life. Forever."
- "Why did I agree to this? It's impossible."
- "She's perfect. What if I lose her? I'll never find someone else like her."
- "But sometimes I look at her face, and I don't... Why would I even think that? If I'm thinking it, it has to mean something."
- "If I go through with this... If we have kids... There's too much at stake."
- "You're still in school. You can't even support her."
- What if you're stuck in an unhappy marriage? That's for life. You'll both be unhappy forever. She deserves someone who's certain."
- "You want your kids to be unhappy too? It's selfish to keep this going. You know it is."

Conrad found a tactic to handle those obsessions right when they popped up. How?



What's it going to take for you to be like Conrad? What shifts do you need to make?

Take actions as though the theme is NOTHING. “Acting as though” is a significant part of our work here. But you absolutely know how to do this. After all, you do it every day. For instance, do you make any of these assumptions?

- When you're driving, do you act as though you will arrive at your destination safely?
- Do you act as though your refrigerator is continuing to keep your items cool enough?
- Do you act as though Wednesday will come after Tuesday?
- Do you act as though your next breath will provide your body with sufficient oxygen?
- Do you act as though a genetically cloned dinosaur is not about to stomp through your neighborhood?

Applying this concept to our work will take conscious effort. But you have the skills to accomplish it.

Push into the disorder's territory. As I've said, this is an aggressive sport. You'll need to push into the territories that are currently controlled by the disorder. In the table below, call out the territories you'll eventually need to take back and how you might push forward into those territories if you want to take your life back (even if you're not 100% ready to do it yet).

Territories to reclaim	How I can push forward
<i>Ex. Checking on the kids at night</i>	<i>Not going into their bedroom in the middle of the night to see if they're still breathing</i>

Why did Sonya decide to take a walk after preparing breakfast? And why did Libby decide to immediately go into the house after shutting the car doors?

When your obsession or an urge to do your ritual pops up, explain why it might be helpful if you first respond with an attitude of, "I'm glad it showed up."

Answers to The Learning Quiz: 1. B; 2. C; 3. B; 4. A; 5. D; 6. A, B, E; 7. A, B, C; 8. C; 9. B; 10. A; 11. B; 12. C; 13. D; 14. E; 15. A; 16. D; 17. A; 18. D; 19. C; 20. A; 21. D; 22. D; 23. H