Cognitive Errors and Distortions

Over-generalizing: Making wide conclusions based very little information or very few experiences.
Example: "Volvos are bad cars" after having only ridden in one Volvo

All-or-Nothing Thinking or *Black-and-White Thinking*: Thinking of things in the extremes (e.g., nothing, nobody, never, none, always, everyone, every time).
Examples: "Nobody cares about me." "I never get to have any fun." "These things always happen to me."

Labeling: Assigning a label to someone or something, and then interpreting all new information according to that label. Example: "I knew Bill Gates in high school. He was a 'loser' even then. That's why Macs are better than PCs."

Blaming: Immediately focusing on whose fault it is when something negative happens. A person can be prone to blaming themselves or others.
Avoiding own responsibility for something by blaming others.
Examples: "I don't have a job because of all those immigrants." "The tree jumped out in front of my tree."

Mind-reading: Making assumptions about what someone else is thinking.
Examples: "She hates me." "He did it on purpose." "He said he was fine, but I know he was really angry."

Prophesying: Making assumptions about what will happen and often getting upset ahead of time.
Example: "When I try to speak I will get so nervous I can't get anything out, and then they will laugh at me, and I will feel so humiliated that I won't come back to class again."

Emotionalizing: Interpreting the world around you according to your feelings.
Examples: Feeling sad about a fall-out with a friend and then starting to think about everything wrong in life. Feeling overwhelmed and when someone invites you out for a movie you just focus in on all the work involved in going.

Personalizing: Interpreting what happens around you as being specifically about you.
Examples: "The teacher yelled at me" (when the teacher yelled at the whole class). "The hiring manager didn't hire me because of my age/gender/ethnic group/tattoos/etc." (although there were 100 people applying for the job).

Awfulizing: Focusing on the worst possible part or outcome of something and using it to judge the whole situation.
Examples: "The plane could crash. Flying is aweful." "I can't go home for Christmas. My parents will end up asking me about whether I have a boyfriend/girlfriend." "I hate my job because boss yells at me" (on average 2 minutes out of a 480 minute workday that otherwise is good)

Rationalizing: Having made an instinctive or emotional decision, but then coming up with good-sounding arguments to justify it as the right choice to oneself or others
Example: "I decided to punch him because he deserves it and because I wanted to teach him to leave others alone" (although he punched because he felt angry and without thinking about it)

Should-ing: Applying rules about how things "should" be, without a clear reason why they should be that way. Tends to result in a lot of guilt or limited attention to own needs.
Example: "I was in the hospital undergoing surgery when my brother died. I should have been there with him!"

Filtering: Focusing on one side of something, not recognizing important information that does not fit with that side of it.
Example: An employee has a filter that "my boss takes advantage of us." The boss informs the employees that their yearly vacation is cut by a week, but they get a 10% salary increase and may take up to 4 weeks unpaid time off each year. The employee feels taken advantage of because of the loss of a week's vacation.

Can't-ing: Thinking "I can't" when it is really a matter of priorities or effort.
Example: "I can't clean my room. It is too messy!" "I can't eat my green beans." "I can't let myself cry." "I can't do that - the other guys will ask me to hand in my 'man-card.'"

"Have to" – "choose to" confusion: Interpreting things as forced choices when they really are prioritizations or good or obvious choices.
Examples: "I have to go grocery shopping," "I have to go to work now," "I have to go to church on Sunday."

"Want to" – "impulse to" confusion: Taking an impulse to do something as meaning that you want to do something.
Examples: "I want to have a donut (although it is ruining my cholesterol)." "I want a drink" (although trying to stop a significant alcohol habit and a drink being the last thing the person should have)