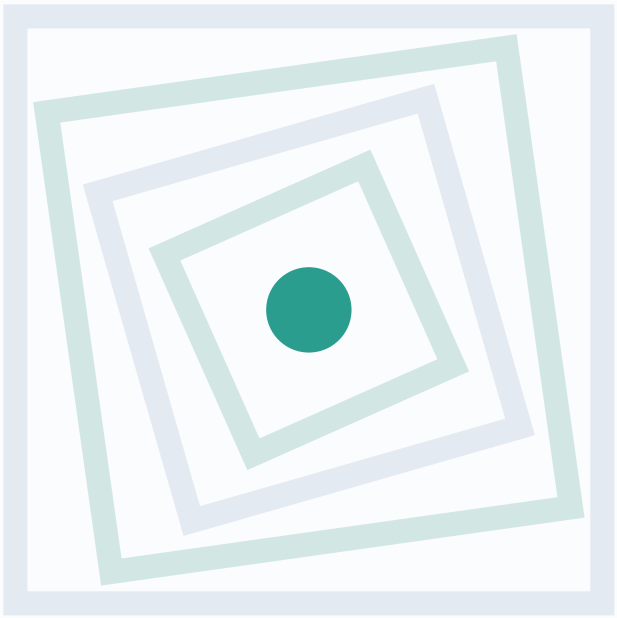


A VISUAL SUMMARY

Reframing

in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

How changing the frame around an experience changes its meaning — and with it, how we feel and what we do.
Context and content reframes, six-step reframing and Sleight of Mouth.

Origins | Context & content | Six-step | Sleight of Mouth | Evidence | Practice

CONTENTS

Table of Contents

01 What Is Reframing? . . . 3

02 The Map Is Not the Territory . . . 4

03 Origins & History . . . 5

04 How Meaning Is Made . . . 6

05 Presuppositions Behind Reframing . . . 7

06 Context Reframing . . . 8

07 Content (Meaning) Reframing . . . 9

08 Context or Content? Choosing a Reframe . . . 10

09 Positive Intention . . . 11

10 Six-Step Reframing . . . 12

11 Six-Step Reframing: An Example . . . 13

12 The Outcome Frame . . . 14

13 Other Useful Frames . . . 15

14 Chunking and Reframing . . . 16

15 Sleight of Mouth: An Overview . . . 17

16 Sleight of Mouth: Patterns 1–7 . . . 18

17 Sleight of Mouth: Patterns 8–14 . . . 19

18 Small Words, Big Reframes . . . 20

19 A Reframing Question Toolkit . . . 21

20 Reframing in Coaching & Therapy . . . 22

21 Reframing in Leadership & Business . . . 23

22 Reframing in Relationships & Parenting . . . 24

23 Self-Reframing: A Daily Practice . . . 25

24 Stories and Humour as Reframes . . . 26

25 Pitfalls: When Reframing Goes Wrong . . . 27

26 Related Ideas in Psychology . . . 28

27 Evidence, Criticism & Ethics . . . 29

28 Practice Exercises . . . 30

29 Cheat Sheet, Glossary & Further Reading . . . 31

SECTION 01

What Is Reframing?

Reframing means changing the frame through which an experience is understood, so that its meaning changes. When the meaning changes, feelings and behaviour usually change too.

A **frame** is the context, viewpoint or set of assumptions surrounding an event. Just as a picture looks different in a different frame, the same situation can feel completely different when it is seen from another angle, over a longer time span, or in light of a different purpose.

Reframing does not deny what happened. It changes **what it means**. A delay becomes a chance to prepare; a critic becomes someone who cares about quality; a mistake becomes feedback. In NLP, reframing is both a family of techniques and a general attitude: there is usually more than one way to see things.

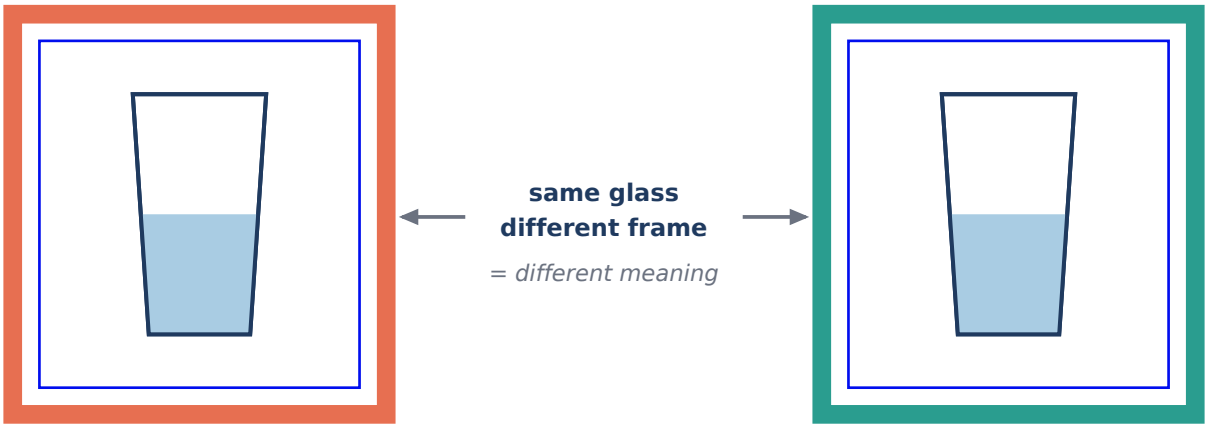


Figure 1. The classic reframe: identical content, different frame, different meaning.

Frame
The context or viewpoint around an event

Meaning
What we take the event to say

Response
The feelings and actions that follow

Choice
More frames = more options

Definition

Reframing is the process of changing the context or meaning of an experience so that it can be responded to in a more resourceful way.

SECTION 02

The Map Is Not the Territory

Reframing rests on a central NLP presupposition, borrowed from Alfred Korzybski: we respond not to reality itself, but to our internal map of it.

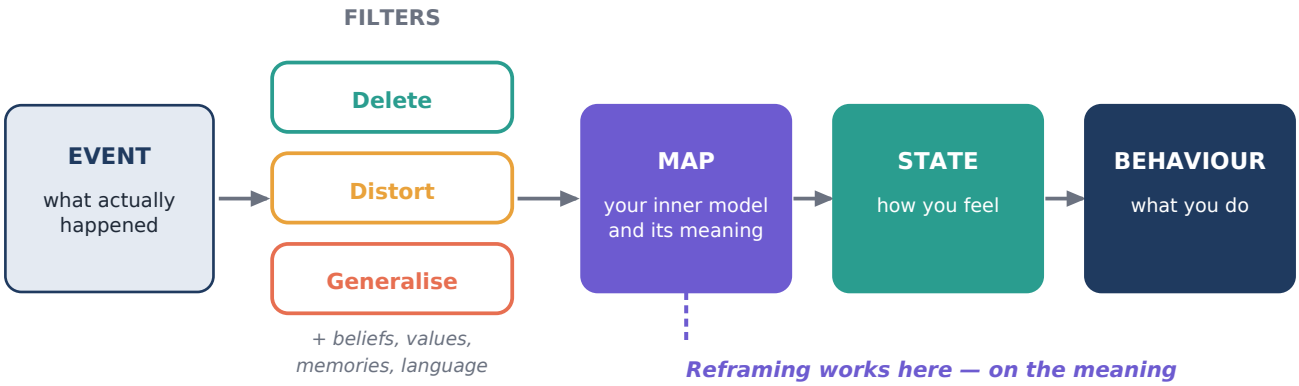


Figure 2. Events pass through our filters to create a map; the map — not the event — drives state and behaviour.

Every person filters experience. We **delete** most of what we could notice, **distort** what we do notice by interpreting it, and **generalise** from single experiences to rules. The resulting map is useful but never complete. Because the meaning lives in the map, it can be revised without changing the event.

Filter	What it does	Example	Reframe opportunity
Deletion	Leaves information out	Remembering only the one critical comment	“What else was said?”
Distortion	Changes the meaning of what's noticed	“She didn't reply — she must be angry.”	“What else could her silence mean?”
Generalisation	Turns one case into a rule	“I always mess up interviews.”	“Has there ever been one that went well?”

The key insight

If two people can experience the same event differently, then the meaning is not in the event. That gap between event and meaning is the space where reframing works.

SECTION 03

Origins & History

Reframing was not invented by NLP. Bandler and Grinder modelled it from therapists who used it intuitively, and gave it a name and a structure.

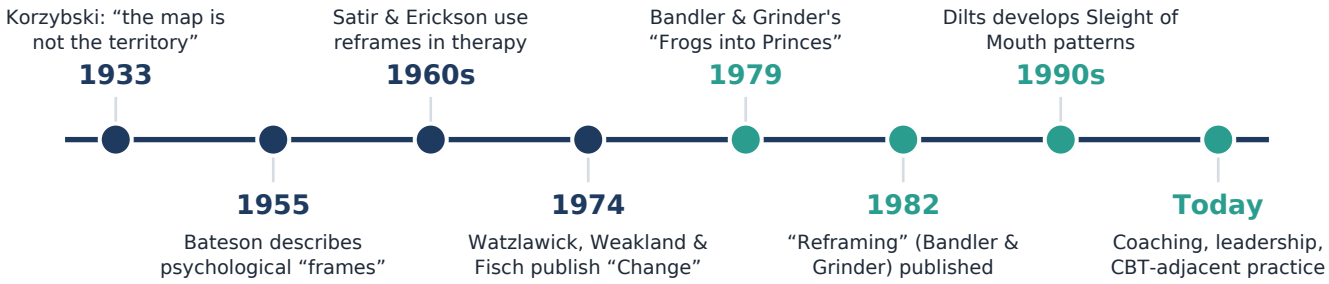


Figure 3. Key influences on reframing in NLP (spacing not to scale).

Influence	Contribution
Alfred Korzybski	General semantics: our maps of reality are not reality itself.
Gregory Bateson	The idea of psychological frames that tell us how to interpret messages (e.g. “this is play”).
Virginia Satir	Family therapist known for finding the positive value in behaviour others saw as a problem.
Milton H. Erickson	Hypnotherapist who routinely accepted and redefined clients' symptoms and resistance.
Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch	Their 1974 book *Change* defined reframing as placing facts in a different frame that fits them equally well.
Bandler & Grinder	*Reframing* (1982): context, content and six-step reframing as teachable patterns.
Robert Dilts	Sleight of Mouth: verbal reframing patterns for shifting beliefs in conversation.

SECTION 04

How Meaning Is Made

To reframe something, it helps to see meaning as the product of two parts: the event and the frame applied to it.

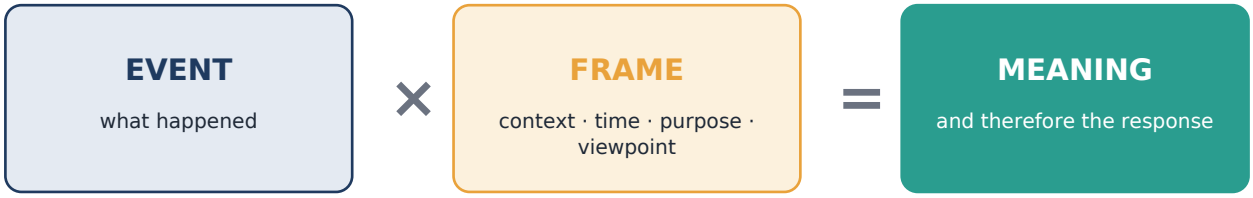


Figure 4. Change the frame and the meaning changes, even when the event stays the same.

Frames you can change

Frame dimension	Question to shift it	Example: “I lost my job.”
Time	How will this look in five years?	“The start of the career I actually wanted.”
Context	Where would this be useful?	“My frankness didn't fit that culture — it would elsewhere.”
Purpose	What could this be for?	“Time to retrain in something I care about.”
Perspective	How would someone I admire see it?	“My mentor would call it a chance to reset.”
Scale	What's the bigger picture?	“Part of an industry-wide change, not a verdict on me.”
Learning	What can I learn?	“I know which skills to build next.”

Test of a good reframe

A useful reframe must **fit the facts** as well as the old frame did. A new meaning that ignores reality isn't a reframe; it's denial.

SECTION 05

Presuppositions Behind Reframing

NLP's working assumptions — its “presuppositions” — explain why reframing is expected to work. They are treated as useful beliefs to act as if true, not as proven facts.

Presupposition	Why it matters for reframing
The map is not the territory.	Meaning is constructed, so it can be reconstructed.
Every behaviour has a positive intention.	Problem behaviour can be reframed by its purpose; better ways to meet that purpose can be found.
There is no failure, only feedback.	Setbacks become information about what to do next.
Every behaviour is useful in some context.	The basis of context reframing.
The meaning of communication is the response you get.	If a frame isn't working for the listener, change it.
People have the resources they need.	Reframes help people notice resources they already have.
Having choice is better than having no choice.	Reframing adds options rather than removing old ones.

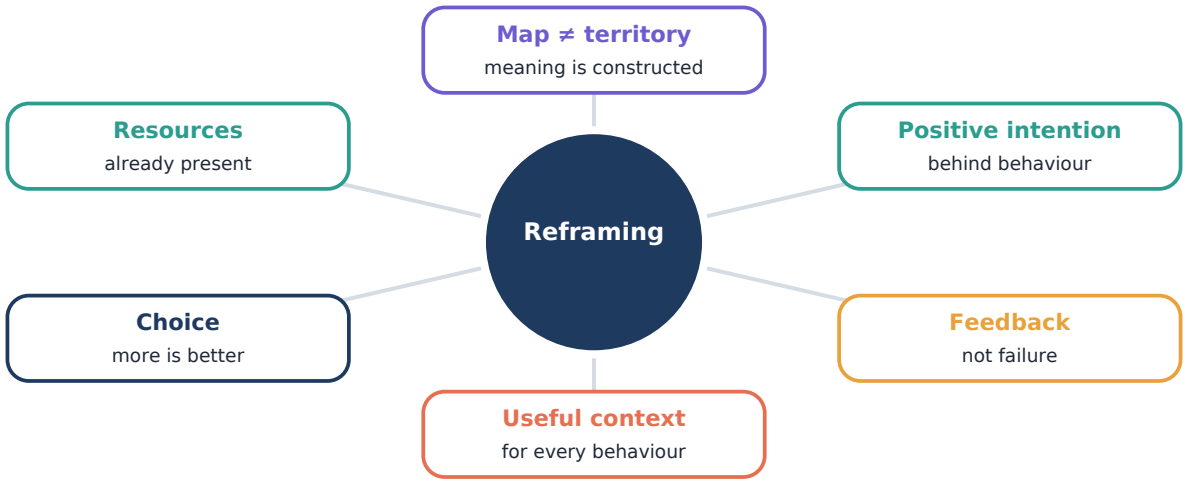


Figure 5. Six presuppositions that underpin reframing.

SECTION 06

Context Reframing

A context reframe answers the question: “Where or when would this behaviour be useful?” The behaviour stays the same; the setting changes how it is valued.

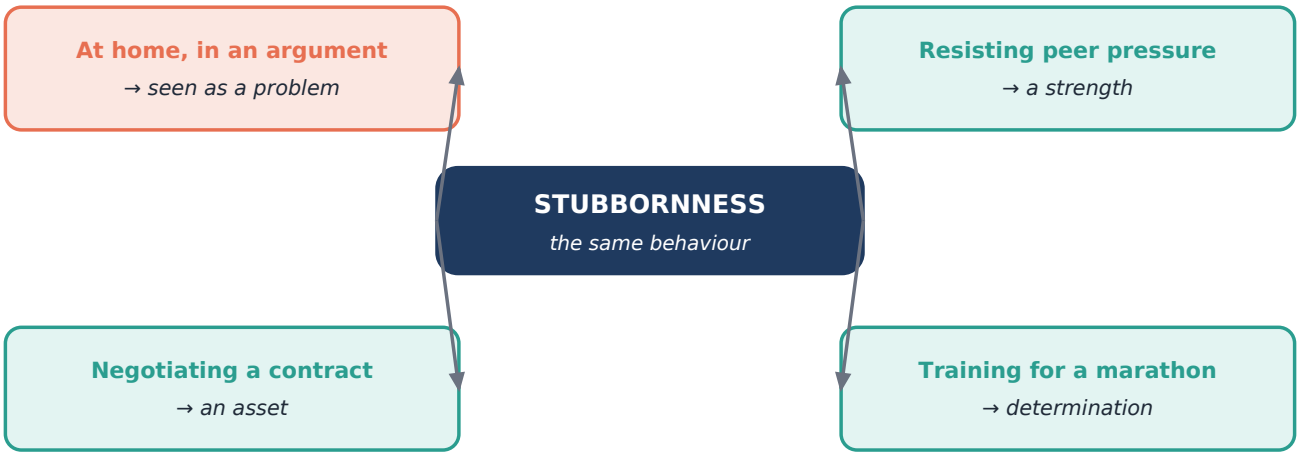


Figure 6. One behaviour, four contexts. Most behaviours that are a problem somewhere are an asset somewhere else.

Context reframes suit **comparative** complaints — “I'm too…”, “He's so…”. They work by recognising that the quality is not bad in itself, only mismatched to the situation.

Complaint	Context reframe
“I'm too cautious.”	“That caution would make you an excellent safety inspector or editor.”
“My son never sits still.”	“That energy will be wonderful on a sports field or a stage.”
“I'm too sensitive.”	“Sensitivity is exactly what makes a good counsellor or artist.”
“She asks too many questions.”	“In research or auditing, that's the most valuable trait there is.”
“I worry about everything.”	“In planning a project, that's how risks get spotted early.”

Beyond insight

A context reframe also points to a practical solution: *keep* the behaviour where it helps, and develop other choices where it doesn't.

SECTION 07

Content (Meaning) Reframing

A content reframe answers the question: “What else could this mean?” The situation stays the same; its meaning changes.



Figure 7. A content reframe offers a different but equally valid meaning for the same event.

Content reframes suit complaints with the structure **“When X happens, it means Y”** or **“X makes me feel Y”**. The aim is to find another meaning that fits the facts and leads to a more useful response.

Situation and old meaning	Content reframe
“My boss is always correcting my work — she doesn't trust me.”	“She's investing time in you; managers rarely do that for people they've given up on.”
“My teenager argues with everything I say.”	“He's practising independent thinking with the person he feels safest with.”
“I failed the driving test.”	“Now you know exactly what the examiner looks for.”
“Customers complain a lot.”	“They care enough to tell you, rather than quietly leaving.”
“I'm nervous before speaking.”	“That's your body getting ready to perform — energy you can use.”

How you know it worked

Watch for a visible shift: a change of breathing, a laugh, a pause, a “hmm”. A reframe that lands is felt, not just understood.

SECTION 08

Context or Content? Choosing a Reframe

Both types change meaning, but they suit different kinds of statements. Listening to the structure of a complaint tells you which to use.

	Context reframe	Content reframe
Core question	Where/when would this be useful?	What else could this mean?
Changes	The setting in which behaviour is judged	The meaning given to an event
Typical complaint	“I'm too…”, “He's so…”	“X means Y”, “X makes me feel Y”
Example	“Too stubborn” → useful in negotiations	“Criticism” → evidence she cares
Leads to	Keeping the behaviour where it fits	A new emotional response to the event

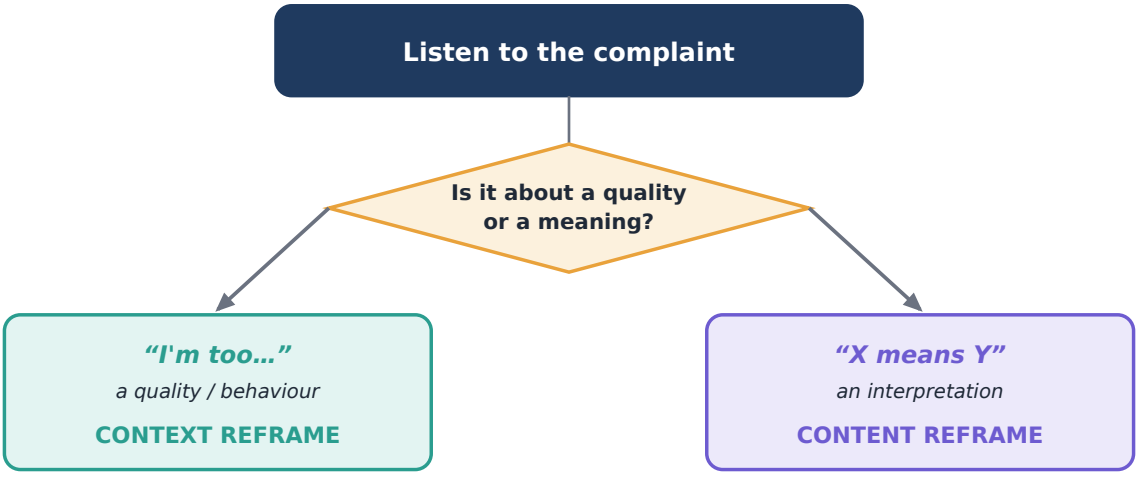


Figure 8. A simple decision guide for choosing the type of reframe.

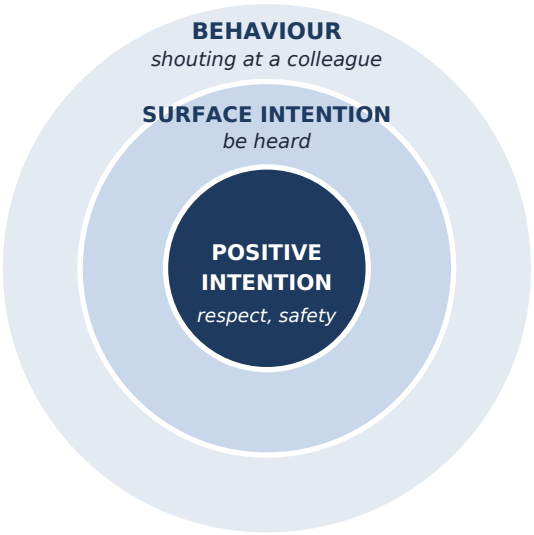
Using both

Many complaints contain both. “I'm too quiet, so people think I'm boring” invites a context reframe (“quiet is an asset when listening matters”) *and* a content reframe (“people may see you as thoughtful, not boring”).

SECTION 09

Positive Intention

One of the most powerful reframes separates what a person does from why they do it. NLP assumes that even unhelpful behaviour serves some positive purpose for the person.



Reframe = separate the person's intention from their behaviour

1. **Find it:** *"What does this do for you?"*
2. **Honour it:** *"Respect matters to you."*
3. **Offer choice:** *"What else could get you respect?"*

Figure 9. Behaviour sits on the surface; underneath is an intention that is usually positive for the person.

Behaviour	Possible positive intention	Alternative ways to meet it
Procrastination	Avoiding failure; protecting self-esteem	Breaking work into small, safe first steps
Smoking	Relaxation; a break; social connection	Short walks, breathing breaks, social rituals
Over-working	Security; being valued	Clear goals; asking for feedback
Criticising others	Maintaining standards; safety	Specific, constructive requests
Avoiding conflict	Preserving relationships	Assertive, respectful conversations

Intention ≠ permission

Accepting the intention is not the same as accepting the behaviour. The reframe makes change possible by removing the need to defend oneself.

SECTION 10

Six-Step Reframing

The best-known structured reframing technique, presented by Bandler and Grinder. It treats an unwanted behaviour as the work of an unconscious “part” with a positive intention, and finds new behaviours that serve the same intention.

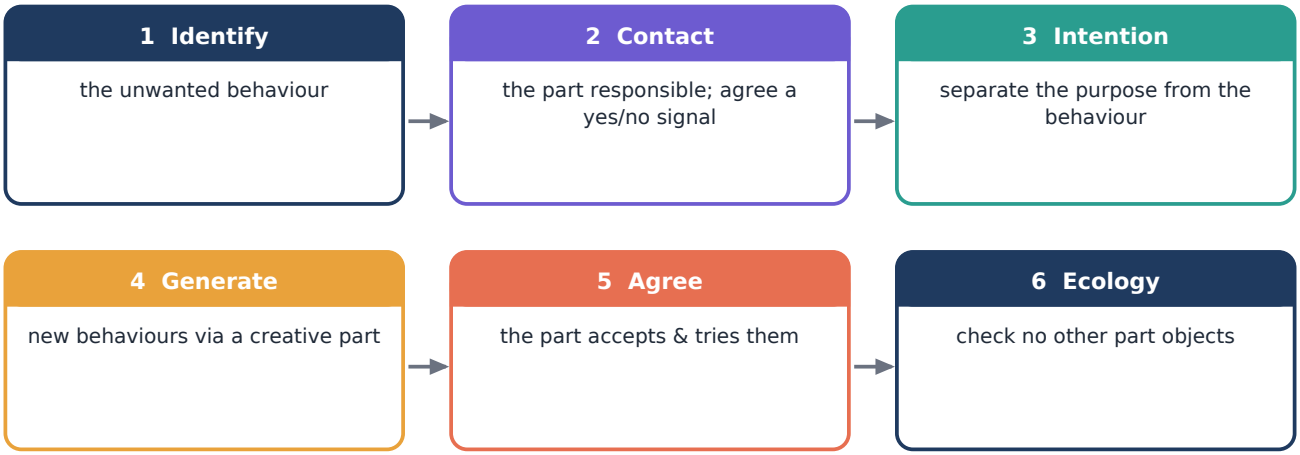


Figure 10. The six steps of six-step reframing.

TECHNIQUE

Six-step reframing

Used for habits or responses that feel involuntary — “part of me just does it”.

1	**Identify the pattern**	“I want to stop X but I keep doing it.”
2	**Establish communication**	Go inside and ask the part responsible whether it will communicate; notice any signal (a feeling, image or sound)
3	**Separate intention**	Ask the part what positive thing it is trying to achieve; thank it
4	**Access creativity**	Ask your creative part to generate at least three new ways to meet the same intention
5	**Take responsibility**	Ask the original part to choose the new options and use them in the right context
6	**Ecology check**	Ask: “Does any other part of me object?” If so, recycle through the steps

SECTION 11

Six-Step Reframing: An Example

Sam snacks late at night even though he wants to stop. The dialogue is illustrative and condensed.

Step	Dialogue	Note
1 Identify	Coach: “What would you like to change?” Sam: “Eating snacks at 11 pm.”	Clear, specific behaviour
2 Contact	“Ask the part of you that does this if it's willing to communicate… notice what happens.” Sam: “A warm feeling in my chest.”	That feeling becomes the “yes” signal
3 Intention	“Ask that part what it wants for you.” Sam: “To relax and feel I've earned a reward.”	Intention is positive
4 Generate	Sam's creative part suggests a hot bath, ten minutes of reading, a short call with a friend.	At least three options
5 Agree	“Will the part take responsibility for trying these over the next week?” Warm feeling: yes.	Part takes ownership
6 Ecology	“Does any other part object?” Sam: “A part worries I'll lose my wind-down time.” Reading is kept as part of a wind-down routine.	Objection handled

Same intention, more choices

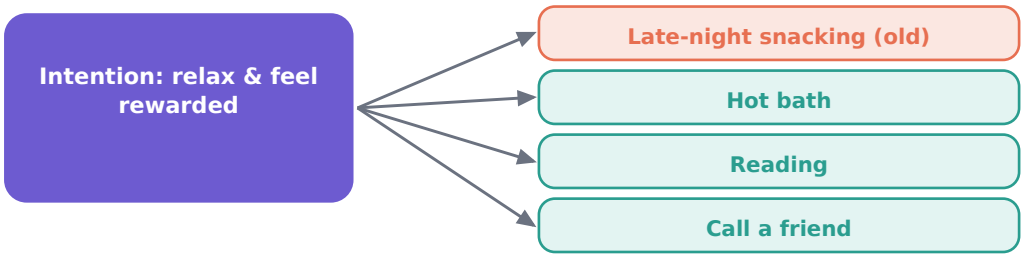


Figure 11. The intention stays; the behaviour options multiply.

Note

Six-step reframing uses the language of “parts” as a metaphor. It should not be used to work with dissociative conditions or serious mental health problems.

SECTION 12

The Outcome Frame

Some reframes change the whole frame of a conversation rather than a single meaning. The most common is moving from a problem (or blame) frame to an outcome frame.

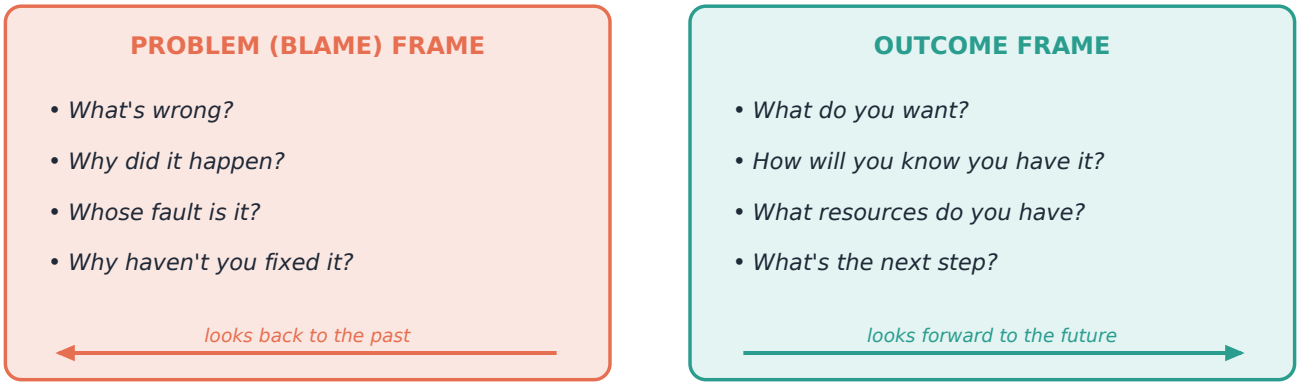


Figure 12. Problem-frame questions look back for causes and fault; outcome-frame questions look forward to goals and resources.

Problem frame says…	Outcome frame says…
“Why is the project late?”	“What do we need to deliver by Friday?”
“Who caused this?”	“What would a good outcome look like?”
“Why do I always feel anxious?”	“How would you like to feel instead?”
“What's wrong with our team?”	“What does our team do well that we can build on?”

Balance

Understanding causes still matters for learning. The outcome frame keeps that analysis pointed at the future: *“What does this tell us about what to do next?”*

SECTION 13

Other Useful Frames

NLP describes several conversational frames that can be set deliberately to guide how a discussion is interpreted.

Frame	Purpose	Example language
As-if frame	Explore possibilities by pretending they're already true	“If you already knew the answer, what would it be?”
Ecology frame	Check consequences for the wider system	“How would this change affect your family and work?”
Evidence frame	Define how success will be recognised	“What will you see and hear when it's working?”
Agreement frame	Find common ground before differences	“We both want the launch to succeed…”
Backtrack frame	Summarise to confirm understanding	“So far, we've agreed on… Is that right?”
Contrast frame	Clarify by comparison	“What's the difference between a good day and a bad one?”
Learning frame	Treat events as information	“What did this teach us?”
Relevancy frame	Bring a drifting conversation back on track	“How does this relate to our goal for today?”

As-if
unlocks imagination

Ecology
protects the system

Evidence
makes goals testable

Learning
removes blame

Pre-framing

Setting a frame **at the start** of a meeting (“Today is about solutions, not blame”) is often easier than reframing after a conversation has already gone wrong.

SECTION 14

Chunking and Reframing

Moving up or down levels of abstraction is one of the simplest ways to change a frame. Chunking up finds shared purposes; chunking down finds exceptions and details.



Figure 13. Chunking up from one behaviour to the values behind it — and down to specific instances.

Move	Question	Effect on the frame
Chunk up	"What is that for? What's important about that?"	Reveals values and intentions people may share
Chunk down	"Specifically, when? What exactly happened?"	Breaks a large generalisation into manageable detail
Chunk sideways	"What's another example of the same kind of thing?"	Opens up analogies and alternatives

Example

Two partners argue about a holiday. Chunk up: both want *security* and *a good life together*. From that shared frame, a cheaper holiday becomes a solution rather than a defeat.

SECTION 15

Sleight of Mouth: An Overview

Robert Dilts organised many verbal reframes into the “Sleight of Mouth” patterns: fourteen ways of responding to a belief that open it up to new meanings.



Figure 14. The fourteen Sleight of Mouth patterns arranged around a single limiting belief.

Most limiting beliefs take the form of a **cause–effect** (“X causes Y”) or a **complex equivalence** (“X means Y”). Each Sleight of Mouth pattern targets a different part of that structure — the intention behind it, the words used, the consequences, the criteria, or the frame size.

> **Purpose**
> The patterns are not meant to win arguments. Used well, they help someone discover that a belief is a *map* they can update — not a fact about the world.

SECTION 16

Sleight of Mouth: Patterns 1–7

Each example responds to the same belief: *“I'm too old to learn new technology.”*

#	Pattern	What it does	Example response
1	Intention	Addresses the positive purpose of the belief	“It sounds like you want to avoid wasting time on something that won't pay off.”
2	Redefine	Swaps a key word for one with a different implication	“Maybe it's not that you're too old — you just haven't found a teacher who explains it your way.”
3	Consequence	Points to the effects of holding the belief	“Believing that could keep you from video calls with your grandchildren.”
4	Chunk down	Examines a specific part of the belief	“Which part, exactly — the buttons, the passwords, or the jargon?”
5	Chunk up	Generalises to show the belief's limits	“So is anyone over 60 unable to learn anything new at all?”
6	Counter-example	Finds an exception to the rule	“Didn't you learn to use your new car's navigation system last year?”
7	Analogy	Uses a metaphor that changes the meaning	“Some of the oldest trees in a forest still put out new branches every spring.”

Tone matters

Notice how different the responses feel. Intention and redefine are gentle; consequence and counter-example are more challenging. Choose according to rapport and readiness.

SECTION 17

Sleight of Mouth: Patterns 8–14

The same belief, continued: *“I'm too old to learn new technology.”*

#	Pattern	What it does	Example response
8	Apply to self	Applies the belief to itself	“And how long have you been learning to believe that?”
9	Another outcome	Shifts attention to a different goal	“Maybe the point isn't mastering technology, but staying connected with people you love.”
10	Hierarchy of criteria	Appeals to a more important value	“Isn't staying independent more important than feeling awkward for a few weeks?”
11	Change frame size	Widens or narrows the time frame or the number of people	“In ten years, you'll still be using whatever you choose to learn this year.”
12	Meta frame	Comments on the belief itself — where it came from	“Perhaps you believe that because no one has shown you patiently before.”
13	Model of the world	Highlights that it is one view among many	“Plenty of people in their seventies see it as a fun challenge.”
14	Reality strategy	Questions how the belief is known to be true	“How do you know you're too old? What tells you that?”

Grouping the fourteen patterns

Group	Patterns	Targets
Meaning & words	Intention, Redefine, Analogy	What the belief is about
Effects & goals	Consequence, Another outcome	Where the belief leads
Scope	Chunk up, Chunk down, Change frame size	How far the belief extends
Evidence	Counter-example, Reality strategy, Apply to self	Whether the belief holds
Values & perspective	Hierarchy of criteria, Meta frame, Model of the world	Who holds it, and why

SECTION 18

Small Words, Big Reframes

Some of the simplest reframes involve changing a single word. These micro-reframes are easy to practise in everyday speech.

Change	Before	After	Effect
Add “yet”	“I can't do this.”	“I can't do this **yet**.”	Turns a fixed limit into a stage of learning
“But” → “and”	“Good work, but the report is late.”	“Good work, **and** next time let's aim for Friday.”	Keeps the praise from being cancelled
“Problem” → “challenge”	“We have a problem.”	“We have a **challenge** to solve.”	Invites action rather than worry
“Should” → “could”	“I should exercise.”	“I **could** exercise.”	Moves from obligation to choice
“Always” → “sometimes”	“I always get it wrong.”	“I **sometimes** get it wrong.”	Breaks a generalisation
“Failure” → “feedback”	“That was a failure.”	“That was **useful feedback**.”	Frames the event as information
“Have to” → “get to”	“I have to visit my parents.”	“I **get to** visit my parents.”	Highlights privilege rather than duty

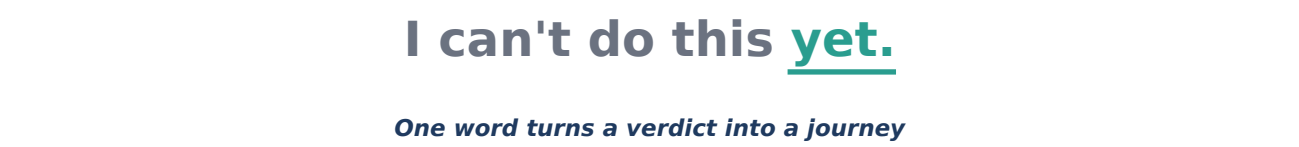


Figure 15. The “yet” reframe.

> **Words and tone**
> Changing words won't help if the tone contradicts them. The words work best when they reflect a real shift in how you see the situation.

SECTION 19

A Reframing Question Toolkit

Good questions let people find their own reframes, which tend to be more convincing than reframes offered by someone else.

Purpose	Questions
Find other meanings	What else could this mean? · How might someone else see it? · What's the most generous interpretation?
Find useful contexts	Where would this be useful? · When has this quality helped you?
Find intentions	What is this behaviour trying to achieve for you? · What's important about that?
Change time frame	How will this matter in a year? · What would your future self say about it?
Find resources	When have you handled something similar? · What strengths can you bring?
Find learning	What is this teaching you? · What would you do differently next time?
Find opportunity	What does this make possible that wasn't possible before?
Check ecology	If you saw it this way, what would change? Is that okay with you?



Figure 16. A five-step conversational reframing sequence.

SECTION 20

Reframing in Coaching & Therapy

Reframing is used across many helping professions — not only NLP. Family therapy, brief therapy and cognitive therapies all rely on changing meaning.

> **A classic family-therapy reframe (paraphrased)**
> A father complains that his daughter is stubborn. The therapist suggests that this same stubbornness may one day protect her — when someone tries to pressure her into something harmful, she'll be able to say no. The father's frustration turns into something closer to pride.

Situation	Reframe	Approach
Client feels stuck after a breakup	“A chance to rediscover what you want in a partner.”	Content reframe, outcome frame
Client criticises themselves for crying	“Your tears show how much this mattered.”	Positive intention
Client calls themselves “lazy”	“You're very good at conserving energy for what truly matters to you.”	Context reframe
Couple fights about chores	“You both care about fairness.”	Chunking up to shared values
Client relapses in a habit	“This shows exactly which situations need a new plan.”	Feedback frame

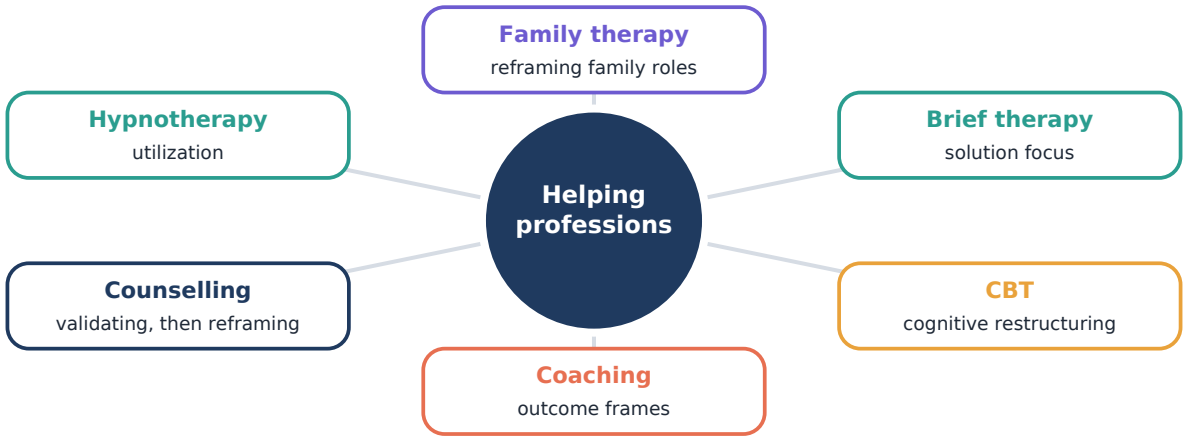


Figure 17. Fields that use reframing, often under different names.

SECTION 21

Reframing in Leadership & Business

Leaders constantly set frames: how a setback is described, what a change means, what success looks like. The frame often matters as much as the decision.

Situation	Unhelpful frame	Reframe
Missed target	“We failed.”	“We learned which assumptions were wrong.”
Restructuring	“We're losing people and budget.”	“We're focusing on what we do best.”
Customer complaint	“They're attacking us.”	“They're giving us a free consultancy.”
New regulation	“More red tape.”	“A chance to build trust our competitors haven't.”
Team conflict	“They can't work together.”	“They care strongly about different priorities.”
Price objection	“It's too expensive.”	“Let's compare it with the cost of the problem it solves.”

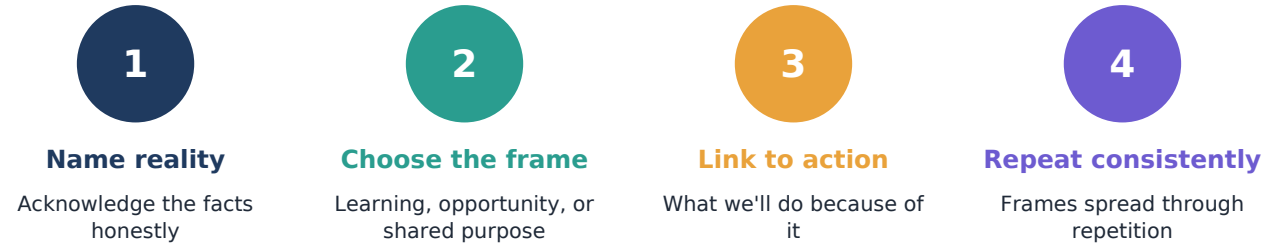


Figure 18. Four steps for framing change as a leader.

Reframing is not spin

Spin is a reframe that doesn't fit the facts. People notice. A credible leadership reframe always names the difficulty first.

SECTION 22

Reframing in Relationships & Parenting

In close relationships, the meaning we give to each other's behaviour often causes more conflict than the behaviour itself.

Behaviour	Frustrated frame	Generous reframe
Partner checks in often	“They don't trust me.”	“They like feeling connected to me.”
Child has a tantrum	“She's being manipulative.”	“She's overwhelmed and needs help calming down.”
Teen wants privacy	“He's shutting me out.”	“He's developing his own identity — a healthy step.”
Friend cancels plans	“I'm not a priority.”	“She may be exhausted; I'll check she's okay.”
Parent gives advice	“They think I can't cope.”	“It's how they show they care.”
Partner is quiet	“They're angry with me.”	“They might just be tired or thinking.”

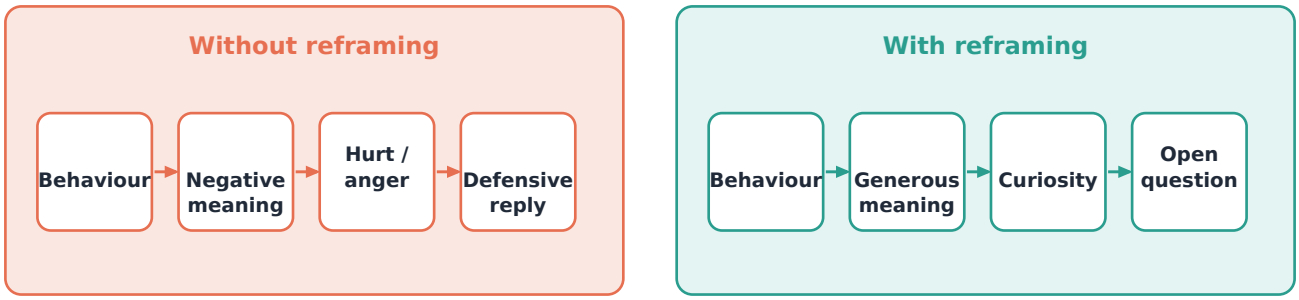


Figure 19. A generous reframe interrupts the escalation cycle.

Check, don't assume

A generous reframe is a **hypothesis**, not a conclusion. Check it: “I noticed you were quiet tonight — is everything okay?”

SECTION 23

Self-Reframing: A Daily Practice

You can reframe your own experiences. Like any skill, it gets easier with regular, structured practice.

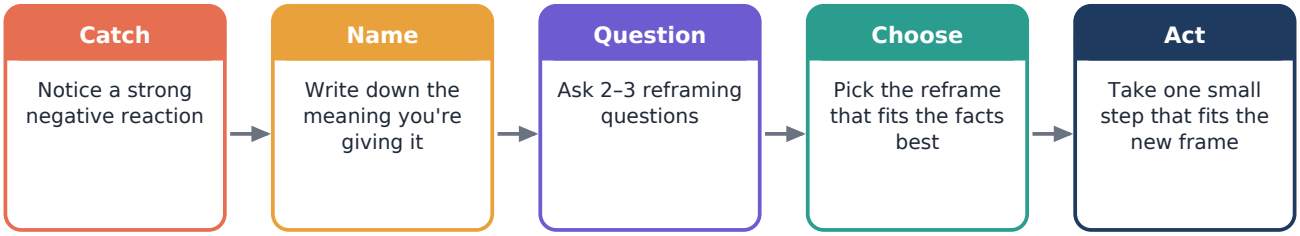


Figure 20. A five-step self-reframing routine.

Reframing journal

Situation	Old meaning	Reframe(s)	Next step
Presentation went badly	“I'm a terrible speaker.”	Feedback on what to practise; my content was still good	Rehearse with a friend

Morning

Set a frame for the day: “Today I'm learning…”

Midday

Reframe one irritation as information

Evening

Write one reframe in your journal

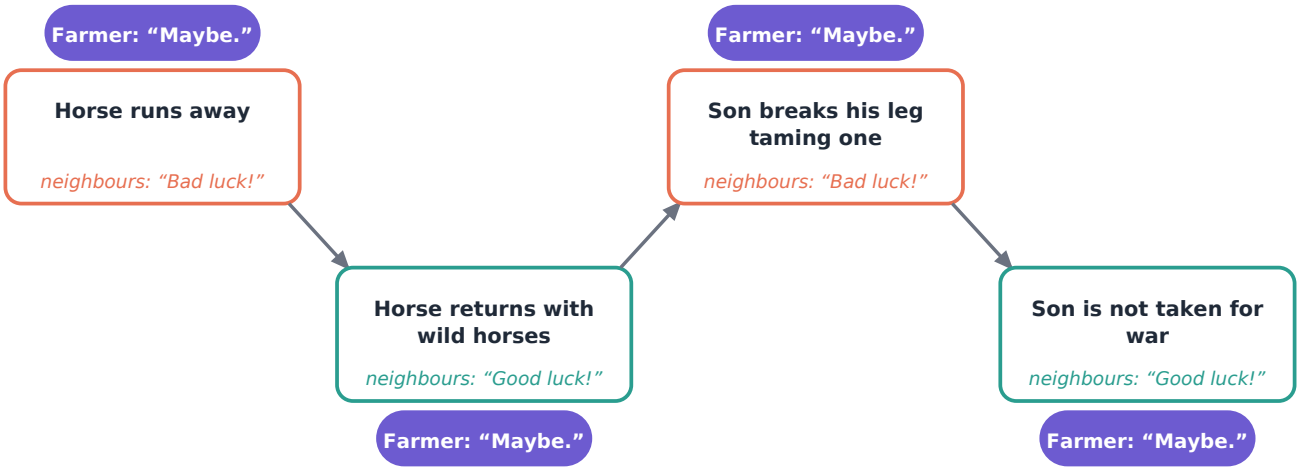
Weekly

Review: which frames helped most?

SECTION 24

Stories and Humour as Reframes

Stories and jokes are natural reframing devices: both work by suddenly showing a familiar situation from an unexpected angle.



Each event's meaning changes as the frame (the time span considered) widens

Figure 21. A traditional Taoist parable. Each “good” or “bad” event is reframed by the next.

In the parable, the farmer refuses to judge each event, because its meaning depends on what happens next. It illustrates the **time-frame reframe**: widen the time span and the meaning of any single event can change.

Device	How it reframes	Example
Metaphor	Maps the situation onto a different domain	“A career is less a ladder than a climbing wall.”
Parable	Shows a pattern in someone else's story	The farmer's “maybe”
Humour	Exaggeration reveals an absurd assumption	“So one typo means the whole report is ruined forever?”
Personal anecdote	Normalises the experience	“When I started, I failed my first three pitches too.”

Why humour works

Laughter is often a sign that a reframe has landed: the listener suddenly sees the situation from outside. Use humour only with good rapport, and never at the person's expense.

SECTION 25

Pitfalls: When Reframing Goes Wrong

A reframe offered too early, too lightly, or without respect can feel dismissive. Good reframing always starts with acknowledgement.

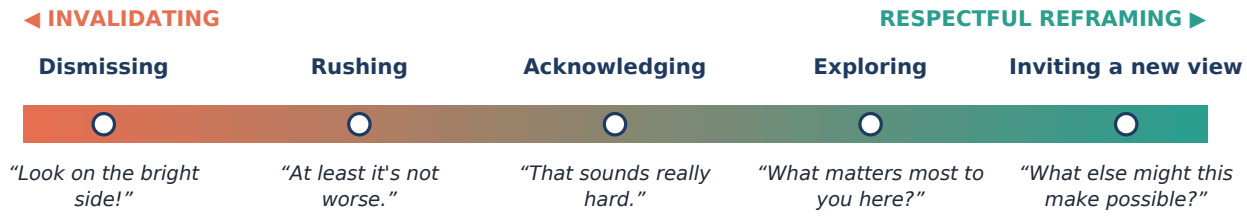


Figure 22. From invalidating "positivity" to respectful reframing.

Pitfall	What it looks like	Better approach
Toxic positivity	Insisting everything is good; no room for pain	Acknowledge the difficulty first
Too early	Reframing before the person feels heard	Listen and reflect before offering any new frame
Doesn't fit the facts	A reframe that ignores reality	Find meanings that fit all the facts
Imposed meaning	"Here's how you should see it."	Ask questions so they find their own reframe
Excusing harm	Reframing abuse or injustice as "growth"	Some situations need action and protection, not reframing
Manipulation	Using frames to push people against their interests	Use reframes only for the other person's benefit

The golden rule

Acknowledge → understand → then reframe. If someone is grieving, frightened or in crisis, empathy and practical support come before any new meaning.

SECTION 26

Related Ideas in Psychology

Reframing overlaps with several well-researched concepts in mainstream psychology, even though they developed independently of NLP.

Concept	Field	Core idea	Research status
Cognitive reappraisal	Emotion regulation	Changing how a situation is interpreted to change its emotional impact	Extensively studied; generally effective
Cognitive restructuring	Cognitive behavioural therapy	Identifying and revising unhelpful automatic thoughts	Core part of an evidence-based therapy
Framing effect	Behavioural economics	Logically equivalent descriptions lead to different choices	Robust and widely replicated
Growth mindset	Educational psychology	Seeing ability as developable (the “yet” reframe)	Mixed; effects often smaller than first claimed
Paradoxical intervention	Brief / strategic therapy	Reframing a symptom so its meaning changes	Limited, older evidence

The framing effect in action

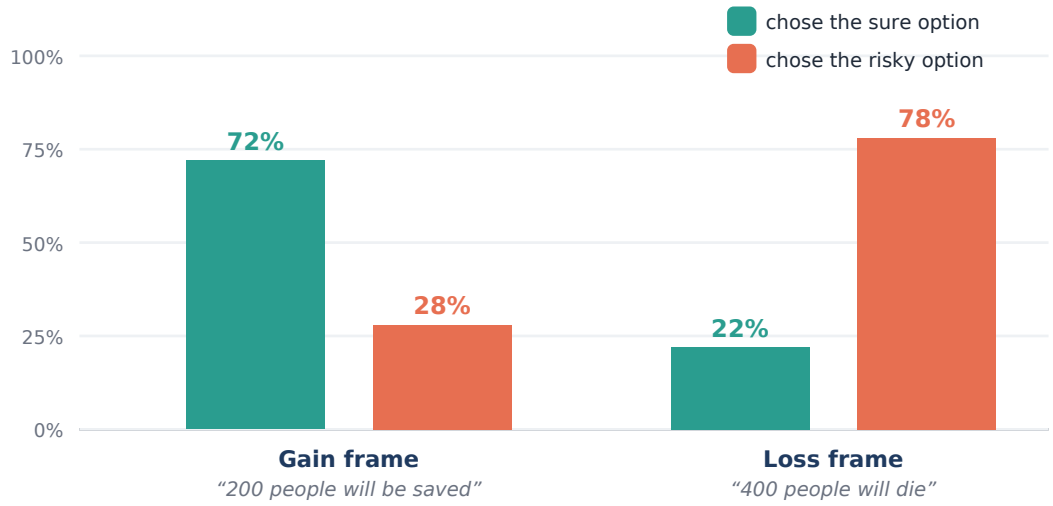


Figure 23. Tversky & Kahneman (1981), “Asian disease” problem: the same outcomes described as lives saved or lives lost reversed most people's choices.

Participants were told about an outbreak expected to kill 600 people. When the sure option was described as “200 people will be saved”, 72% chose it. When the equivalent option was described as “400 people will die”, only 22% did. The facts were identical — only the frame changed.

SECTION 27

Evidence, Criticism & Ethics

The principle behind reframing is well supported. The specific NLP techniques are much less so — and the power of framing brings responsibility.

Claim	Status	Comment
Changing interpretation changes emotion	Well supported	Large body of research on cognitive reappraisal
Wording affects decisions	Well supported	The framing effect is one of the most replicated findings in decision research
Restructuring thoughts helps mental health	Well supported	Central to CBT, which has a strong evidence base
Six-step reframing changes habits	Little direct evidence	Rarely tested in controlled studies
Sleight of Mouth reliably shifts beliefs	Little direct evidence	Mainly supported by practitioner accounts
NLP as a whole	Not supported	Reviews (e.g. Witkowski, 2010; Sturt et al., 2012) found little or insufficient evidence

Ethical guidelines



Figure 24. Four principles for ethical reframing.

A balanced view

Reframing is best seen as a practical skill built on solid psychological principles. The NLP techniques are structured ways to practise it, not scientifically validated treatments.

SECTION 28

Practice Exercises

Try reframing each statement. Use the hint in brackets. Suggested answers are at the bottom of the page.

#	Statement	Your reframe
1	“I'm too impatient.” (context)	
2	“My manager never praises me — she must think I'm useless.” (content)	
3	“I always freeze in exams.” (counter-example)	
4	“I can't learn languages.” (add a word)	
5	“Our team keeps missing deadlines.” (outcome frame)	
6	“My son plays video games all the time.” (positive intention)	
7	“This rainy holiday is ruined.” (another outcome)	
8	“I got rejected again.” (time frame)	

Suggested answers

1 “In an emergency, impatience gets things moving.” · 2 “Maybe she's busy and assumes you know you're doing well — what if you asked?” · 3 “Was there ever a test where you didn't?” · 4 “I can't learn languages *yet*.” · 5 “What would it take to hit the next one?” · 6 “He may be looking for challenge, mastery or friends — where else could he get that?” · 7 “Perfect weather for the museum and that book you've been saving.” · 8 “In five years, which rejection will you even remember?”

SECTION 29

Cheat Sheet, Glossary & Further Reading

Technique	Core question	Best for
Context reframe	Where would this be useful?	“I'm too…” complaints
Content reframe	What else could this mean?	“X means Y” complaints
Positive intention	What is this trying to achieve?	Unwanted behaviour
Six-step reframing	What new behaviours meet the same intention?	Habits that feel involuntary
Outcome frame	What do you want instead?	Blame and problem talk
Chunking	What's this for? / Specifically?	Conflicts and generalisations
Sleight of Mouth	Which of 14 angles loosens this belief?	Limiting beliefs
Micro-reframes	Can one word change this?	Everyday language

Term	Meaning
Frame	The context or viewpoint that shapes meaning.
Reframe	A new frame that gives an event a different meaning.
Ecology	The effect of a change on the person's wider life.
Part	A metaphor for an aspect of a person with its own intention.
Sleight of Mouth	Dilts's fourteen verbal patterns for shifting beliefs.

Further reading

Work	Why read it
Bandler, R. & Grinder, J. (1982). *Reframing*.	The original NLP text on reframing
Watzlawick, P., Weakland, J. & Fisch, R. (1974). *Change*.	Classic account of reframing in brief therapy
Dilts, R. (1999). *Sleight of Mouth*.	The fourteen belief-change patterns
Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. (1981). *Science*, 211.	The framing effect study
Gross, J. J. (1998). *Review of General Psychology*, 2(3).	Foundations of emotion regulation and reappraisal
Witkowski, T. (2010). *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 41(2).	Critical review of NLP research