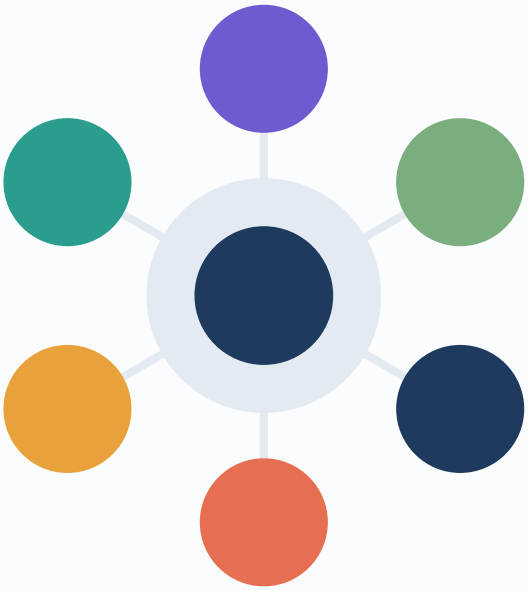


A VISUAL SUMMARY

Core NLP Techniques & Interventions

in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

Step-by-step guides to the Swish, Parts Integration, Timeline work and the Fast Phobia Cure — plus Mapping Across, Change Personal History, the Meta-Mirror, the Disney Strategy and more, with evidence and safety notes.

Swish | Parts | Timeline | Fast phobia | Disney | Evidence

CONTENTS

Table of Contents

01 Overview: The NLP Change Toolkit . . . 3

02 Common Building Blocks . . . 4

03 Submodalities: The Raw Material . . . 5

04 The Swish Pattern: Concept . . . 6

05 The Swish: Steps, Variations & Example . . . 7

06 Mapping Across & Like-to-Dislike . . . 8

07 Parts Integration (Visual Squash): Concept . . . 9

08 Parts Integration: Steps & Example . . . 10

09 Six-Step Reframing (Recap) . . . 11

10 Timelines: In Time vs. Through Time . . . 12

11 Timeline Techniques . . . 13

12 Change Personal History . . . 14

13 The Fast Phobia Cure: Concept . . . 15

14 Fast Phobia Cure: Steps, Research & Safety . . . 16

15 The Meta-Mirror & Perceptual Positions . . . 17

16 The Disney Creativity Strategy . . . 18

17 New Behaviour Generator & Well-Formed Outcomes . . . 19

18 Choosing a Technique & What the Evidence Says . . . 20

19 Practice, Cheat Sheet & Further Reading . . . 21

SECTION 01

Overview: The NLP Change Toolkit

NLP offers a set of structured techniques for changing habits, feelings, internal conflicts and perspectives. Most combine a few building blocks: imagery, dissociation, anchoring, perspective-taking and future pacing.

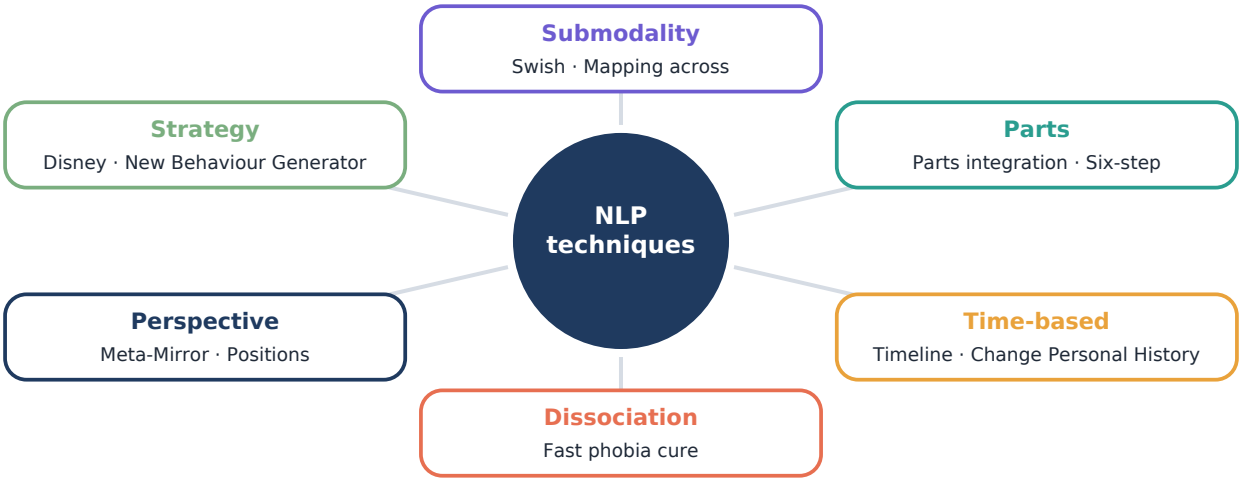


Figure 1. Six families of NLP techniques covered in this guide.

Technique	Main use	Origin	§
Swish pattern	Breaking habits and automatic responses	Bandler (1980s)	4–5
Mapping across	Changing how strongly an experience is felt	Bandler	6
Parts integration	Resolving inner conflict (“part of me…”)	Bandler & Grinder	7–8
Six-step reframing	Changing unwanted behaviour while keeping its purpose	Bandler & Grinder	9
Timeline work	Working with past experiences and future goals	James & Woodsmall (1988) and others	10–11
Change Personal History	Bringing resources to past experiences	Bandler & Grinder	12
Fast phobia cure	Reducing phobic and fear responses	Bandler	13–14
Meta-Mirror	Understanding difficult relationships	Dilts	15
Disney strategy	Creative planning	Dilts	16
New Behaviour Generator	Rehearsing new behaviour	Grinder, Dilts and others	17

SECTION 02

Common Building Blocks

Almost every NLP technique follows the same basic structure. Learning this frame makes each individual technique easier to understand and use safely.

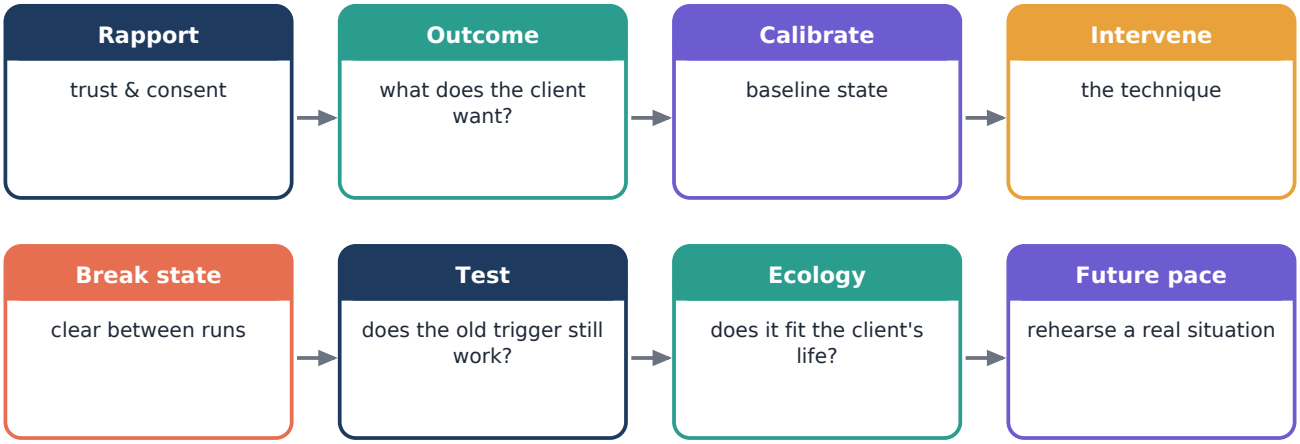


Figure 2. The general structure behind most NLP interventions.

Building block	What it means	Used in
Association	Experiencing something from inside, through your own eyes	Resource states, swish (cue), new behaviour
Dissociation	Watching yourself from the outside	Fast phobia cure, swish (desired self), timeline
Submodalities	The qualities of inner images and sounds (size, brightness, distance)	Swish, mapping across, belief change
Anchoring	Linking a state to a trigger	Change Personal History, Circle of Excellence
Perceptual positions	Self, other and observer viewpoints	Meta-Mirror, Disney strategy
Ecology check	Checking the change fits the whole person	All techniques

> **Outcome first**
> A technique is only as good as the outcome it serves. Before choosing a technique, agree what the client wants — then pick the tool, not the other way around.

SECTION 03

Submodalities: The Raw Material

Many NLP techniques work by changing submodalities — the finer qualities of how we represent experience internally. NLP proposes that changing these qualities changes how strongly we respond.

Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic
Size, brightness, colour vs. black & white	Volume, pitch, tempo	Temperature, pressure, weight
Distance, location, framed vs. panoramic	Location of sound, distance	Location in the body
Still vs. moving, focus, contrast	Tone, rhythm, clarity	Movement, intensity, texture
Associated vs. dissociated	Inner voice: whose, how loud	Size and shape of the sensation

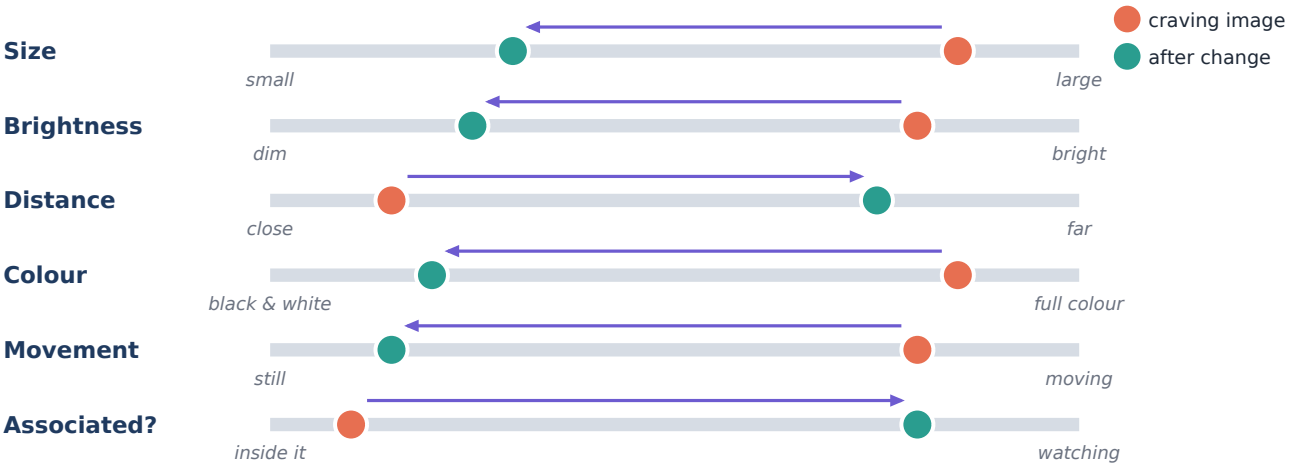


Figure 3. An illustrative example: changing the submodalities of a craving image to weaken its pull.

Driver submodalities

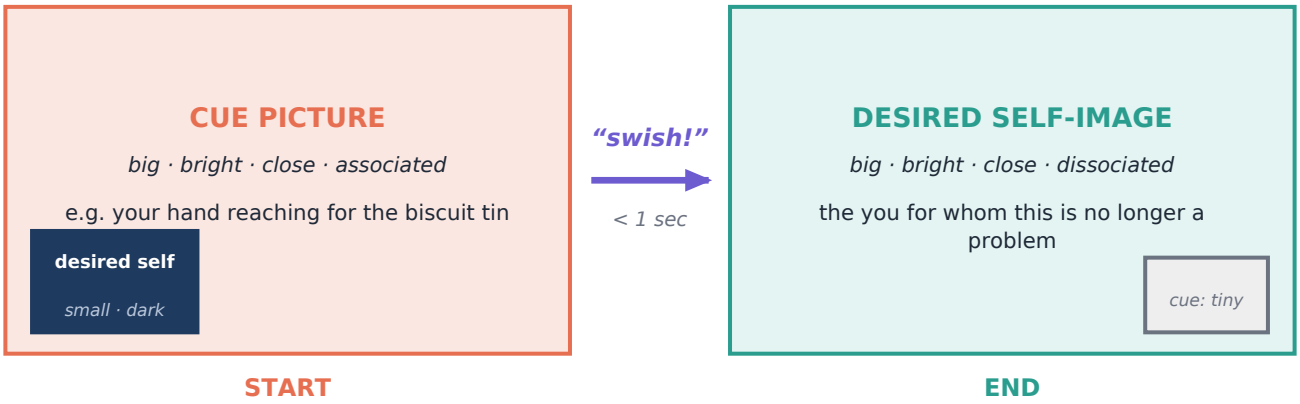
Driver submodalities are the one or two qualities that, when changed, shift everything else. For many people, distance, size or association/dissociation have the strongest effect — but it varies from person to person.

Note: research has shown that imagery and psychological distance can affect emotion, but NLP's specific submodality techniques have rarely been tested directly.

SECTION 04

The Swish Pattern: Concept

The swish pattern, developed by Richard Bandler, is designed to redirect an automatic response. It links the cue that triggers an unwanted habit to a compelling image of the person you'd rather be.



The two images trade places: one shrinks and darkens as the other grows and brightens

Figure 4. The swish: the cue picture is replaced by an image of the desired self.

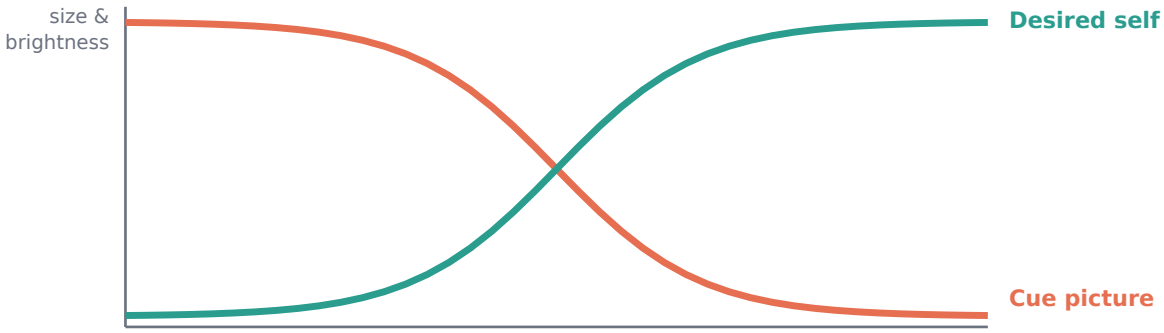


Figure 5. Within each swish, the cue picture shrinks and dims as the desired self-image grows and brightens.

Key element	Why it matters
The cue picture	What you see just before the habit starts — the actual trigger, seen through your own eyes (associated)
The desired self-image	Not a behaviour, but *you* as someone for whom the problem doesn't exist — seen from outside (dissociated) to create attraction
Speed	The switch is very fast; repetition builds an automatic link
Break state	Clear the screen between each swish so the link runs in one direction only

SECTION 05

The Swish: Steps, Variations & Example

The classic visual swish takes about ten minutes. It is most often used for habits such as nail-biting, snacking, checking the phone or reacting with irritation.

TECHNIQUE

The visual swish

Before starting: agree the habit to change and check the client wants to change it.

1	**Identify the cue**	“What do you see just before you start?” Make it an associated picture
2	**Build the desired self**	Picture the you who no longer has this problem — dissociated, attractive, realistic
3	**Ecology check**	“Is there any part of you that objects to becoming this?”
4	**Set up**	Make the cue big and bright; place a small, dark desired-self image in a corner
5	**Swish**	Fast: the cue shrinks and darkens as the desired self grows and brightens. Say “swish!”
6	**Clear & repeat**	Blank the screen or open your eyes. Repeat 5–7 times, faster each time
7	**Test**	Try to bring up the cue picture. What happens now?

Variation	How it differs	Useful when
Distance swish	The cue shoots far away while the desired self rushes close	Size changes have little effect
Auditory swish	A critical inner voice fades as a supportive voice grows	The trigger is a sound or self-talk
Kinesthetic swish	A feeling is replaced by a resourceful feeling, using movement	The trigger is a body sensation

Example (illustrative)

Ana bites her nails when reading emails. Cue: her hand rising towards her mouth. Desired self: a calm, confident Ana with healthy nails, focused on her work. After six swishes, raising her hand brings the desired image to mind instead — and she reports less urge to bite.

SECTION 06

Mapping Across & Like-to-Dislike

Mapping across transfers the submodalities of one experience onto another. It's a simple way to change how a person feels about something by changing how they represent it.



Figure 6. The mapping-across process.

Use	Map FROM	Map TO	Aim
Like to dislike	A food you crave	A food you dislike	Reduce a craving
Confusion to understanding	Something you're confused about	Something you understand	Gain clarity
Doubt to certainty	A limiting belief	Something you doubt	Loosen a belief
Procrastination to motivation	A task you avoid	A task you do eagerly	Get started



Figure 7. Like-to-dislike: the craved food takes on the qualities of a food the person dislikes.

SECTION 07

Parts Integration (Visual Squash): Concept

When someone says “part of me wants to, but another part of me doesn't”, NLP treats each side as a “part” with its own positive intention. Parts integration helps the two find common ground.

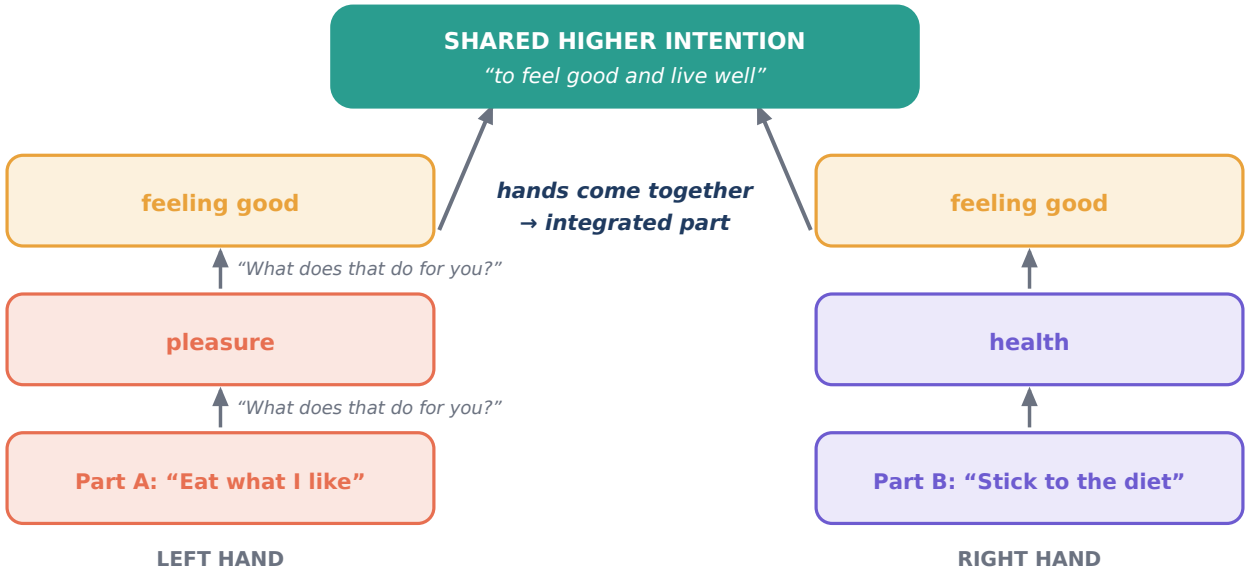


Figure 8. Each part is chunked up to its higher intention until both share the same purpose — then the hands come together.

Typical conflict	Part A wants…	Part B wants…	Possible shared intention
Career change	Adventure, growth	Security, stability	A fulfilling, secure life
Diet	Pleasure from food	Health and appearance	Feeling good
Speaking up	To be heard	To stay safe and liked	Belonging and respect
Work vs. rest	Achievement	Recovery	Long-term wellbeing

Keep it in perspective

“Parts” is a metaphor for different motivations, not a claim that a person has separate personalities. Parts work should not be used with dissociative conditions; similar ideas appear in other therapies (e.g. Internal Family Systems) delivered by trained clinicians.

SECTION 08

Parts Integration: Steps & Example

The visual squash is a short, physical process. The client holds each part in a hand and works up to a shared intention before integrating them.

TECHNIQUE

Parts integration (visual squash)

Takes 15–30 minutes. Go slowly and let the client lead the descriptions.

1	**Identify the conflict**	“Part of me… and part of me…”
2	**Place the parts**	Imagine one part in each hand. What does each look, sound and feel like?
3	**Ask each part's intention**	“What do you want for me? And what does that give me?” Repeat for each hand
4	**Chunk up to a match**	Continue until both parts share the same higher intention
5	**Acknowledge**	Each part notices the other wants the same thing and has useful resources
6	**Integrate**	Let the hands come together at their own pace; bring the integrated part into the body
7	**Test & future pace**	Imagine a future situation: what's different?

Step	Client (Jo — considering self-employment)
Left hand	“The part that wants to go freelance — it looks bright, restless.” Intention: freedom → creativity → feeling alive
Right hand	“The part that wants to stay employed — heavy, solid.” Intention: security → looking after family → feeling alive and safe
Shared	Both want Jo to “feel alive and secure”
Outcome	Jo plans to build freelance work alongside her job for six months, with a savings target

SECTION 09

Six-Step Reframing (Recap)

A related parts technique: instead of integrating two parts, six-step reframing asks one part to find new behaviours that serve its positive intention. (See the Reframing guide for more detail.)



Figure 9. Six-step reframing.

	Parts integration	Six-step reframing
Conflict type	Two parts pulling in different directions	One part producing an unwanted behaviour
Core move	Find a shared higher intention; merge	Keep the intention; replace the behaviour
Physical element	Hands; parts brought together	Usually internal signals only
Best for	Indecision, ambivalence, self-sabotage	Habits that “just happen”

Connection to mainstream practice

Both techniques rest on the NLP presupposition that every behaviour has a positive intention. This idea also underpins motivational interviewing's emphasis on understanding ambivalence — an approach with a solid evidence base.

SECTION 10

Timelines: In Time vs. Through Time

NLP proposes that people organise time spatially — past in one direction, future in another. Tad James and Wyatt Woodsmall described two main patterns in *Time Line Therapy and the Basis of Personality* (1988).

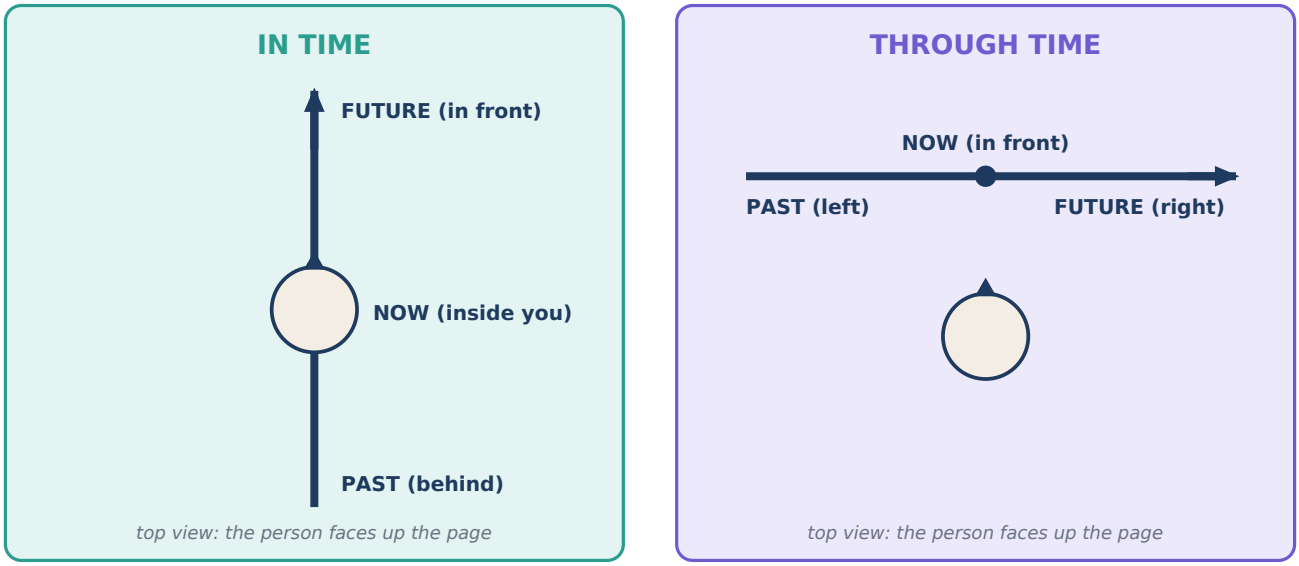


Figure 10. In-time and through-time timelines, seen from above.

	In time	Through time
Timeline	Runs through the body; past behind, future in front	Runs in front, often left to right
Experience of time	Lives in the moment; absorbed	Aware of time passing; sees past, present and future together
Strengths	Spontaneous; present; flexible	Punctual; planning; organised
Challenges	Late for things; planning ahead	Less “in the moment”; may seem detached
Typical culture (claimed)	Often associated with some Mediterranean and Latin cultures	Often associated with Northern European and North American business cultures

Eliciting a timeline: “If you were to point to where your past is… and your future… which direction would you point?” Most people answer quickly, which suggests spatial metaphors for time are natural. The personality claims attached to the two types have not been tested rigorously.

SECTION 11

Timeline Techniques

Timeline work uses the imagined line as a map. Clients “float” above it to review the past from a distance or to place goals in the future.

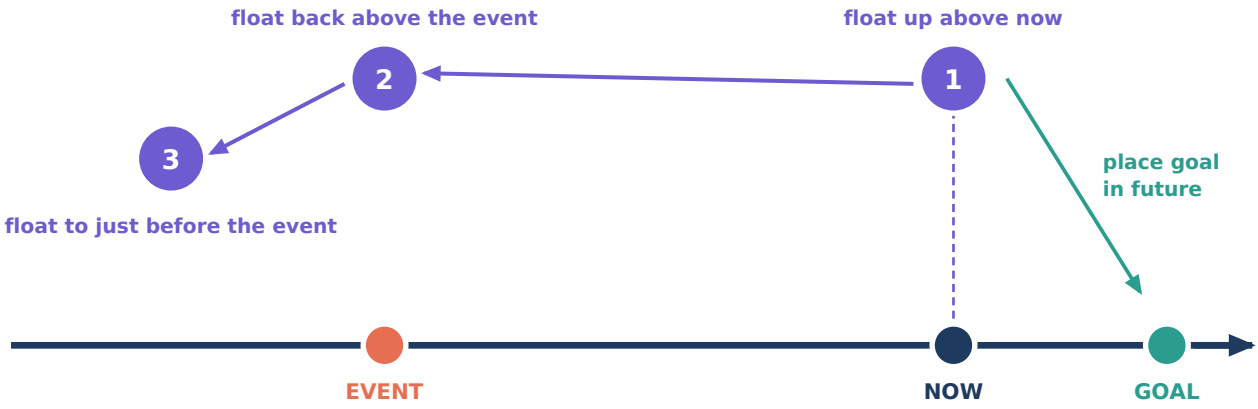


Figure 11. Floating above the timeline: to review a past event from a safe, dissociated position, or to place a goal in the future.

Technique	Process (simplified)	Purpose
Releasing an emotion	Float above the timeline, back to just before the first event linked to the emotion; notice it isn't there yet; preserve the learnings; return to now	Reduce a recurring negative emotion
Limiting decision	Find the moment a limiting decision was made; view it from before it happened; update it	Loosen an early belief
Placing a goal	Float into the future; place a vivid image of the achieved goal on the timeline; notice the events between now and then aligning	Build motivation and a sense of inevitability
Future rehearsal	Walk the timeline forward through upcoming events with resources	Prepare for challenges

Evidence note

“Time Line Therapy®” is a trademarked approach associated with Tad James. Claims that it can release emotions or trauma quickly come mainly from practitioners and have not been tested in controlled research. Goal-imagery components overlap with mental contrasting and implementation-intention research, which is better supported.

SECTION 12

Change Personal History

One of the earliest NLP techniques. It brings present-day resources to past experiences linked to a recurring unhelpful feeling, using anchors and a timeline.

TECHNIQUE

Change Personal History

Described in Bandler & Grinder's *Frogs into Princes* (1979).

1	**Anchor the feeling**	Elicit the unwanted feeling mildly and anchor it (e.g. touch on the left knuckle)
2	**Trace back**	Holding the anchor, let the client drift back to earlier times the feeling occurred
3	**Find resources**	For each memory: “What resource would have made a difference then?”
4	**Anchor the resource**	Elicit and anchor that resource (e.g. on the right knuckle)
5	**Revisit**	Fire the resource anchor while recalling each past memory; notice it changing
6	**Test & future pace**	Fire the old anchor alone; imagine future situations

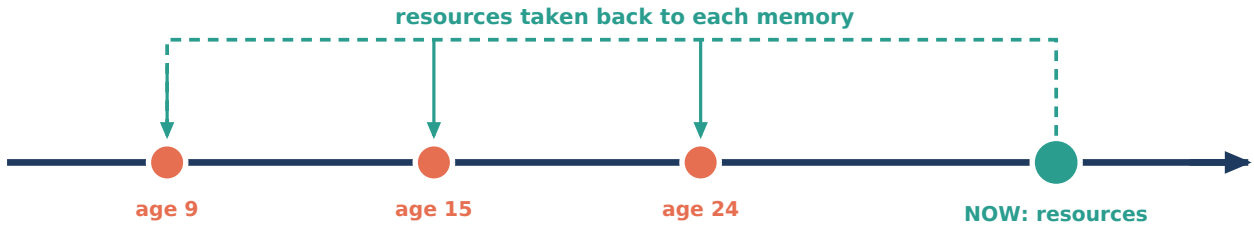


Figure 12. Change Personal History: one resource state revisits several past experiences.

Scope

Change Personal History is for everyday unhelpful feelings (e.g. shyness, irritation). It is not a trauma treatment.

SECTION 13

The Fast Phobia Cure: Concept

Also called the V/K (visual–kinesthetic) dissociation technique, it was popularised by Richard Bandler in *Using Your Brain — for a Change* (1985). It aims to separate the memory of a frightening event from the feeling attached to it.

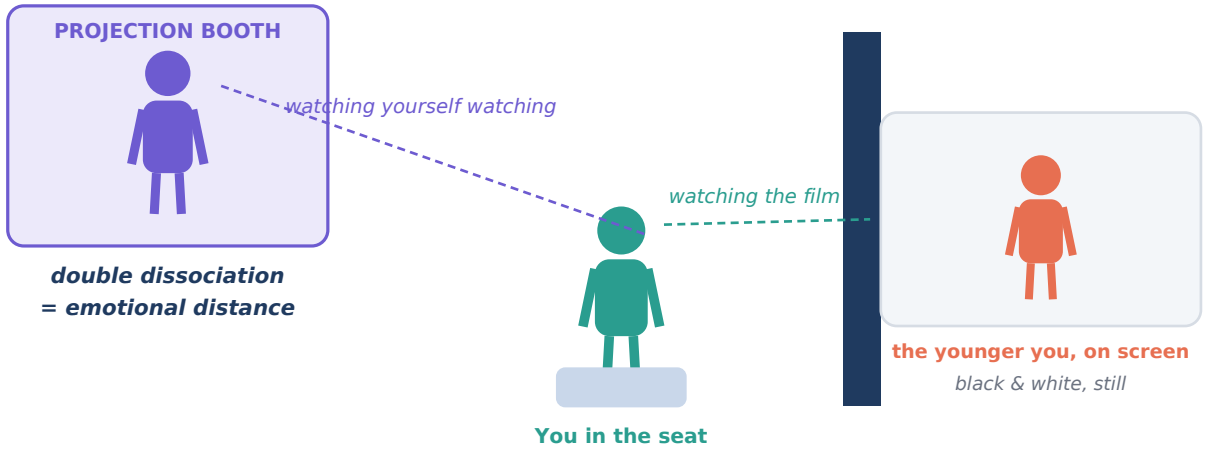


Figure 13. The cinema set-up: the client watches themselves watching a film of the memory — a “double dissociation”.

Element	Purpose (as described in NLP)
Cinema & seat	Creates distance: the memory becomes a film you watch rather than relive
Projection booth	Adds a second layer of distance for strong fear
Black & white, still	Reduces vividness and emotional intensity
Safe start and end	Frames the memory with safety on both sides
Fast rewind in colour	Scrambles the sequence that produces the fear response
Testing	Checks the response to the memory and, carefully, to the real trigger

The rationale

In NLP the fear response is described as a strongly learned, associated response. Dissociating from the memory is meant to let the person process it without being overwhelmed — an idea that overlaps with some mainstream trauma-processing approaches.

SECTION 14

Fast Phobia Cure: Steps, Research & Safety

The process typically takes 20–40 minutes. A structured, research-tested version — the Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories (RTM) protocol — has been developed from it.

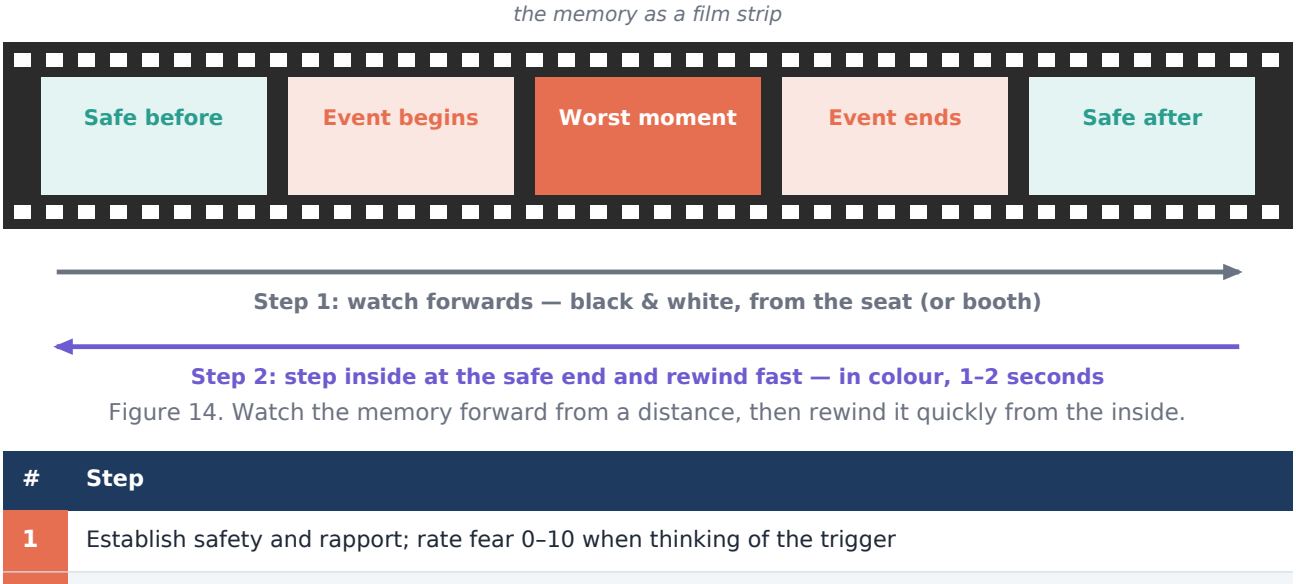


Figure 14. Watch the memory forward from a distance, then rewind it quickly from the inside.

#	Step
1	Establish safety and rapport; rate fear 0–10 when thinking of the trigger
2	Imagine sitting in a cinema; see a still, black-and-white image of yourself before the event, when you were safe
3	Float into the projection booth; watch yourself in the seat watching the screen
4	Run the film forward in black and white until just after the event, when you were safe again. Freeze it
5	Step into that final safe frame, then rewind the whole film in colour, very fast (1–2 seconds)
6	Repeat the rewind several times, faster each time; break state between runs
7	Test: think of the trigger; re-rate the fear. Future pace carefully

Research: the RTM protocol

A series of small randomised trials, mostly run by the protocol's developers (e.g. Gray, Budden-Potts & Bourke, 2019), reported reductions in PTSD symptoms in military veterans using RTM. Larger, independent trials are still needed. The original NLP phobia technique has little controlled research.

Safety and scope

For phobias, **exposure therapy** (a form of CBT) is the best-established treatment. For trauma, use evidence-based therapies delivered by qualified clinicians. NLP coaches without clinical training should refer rather than attempt trauma work.

SECTION 15

The Meta-Mirror & Perceptual Positions

Developed by Robert Dilts, the Meta-Mirror helps a person understand a difficult relationship by viewing it from several positions — and noticing how their own reaction is part of the pattern.

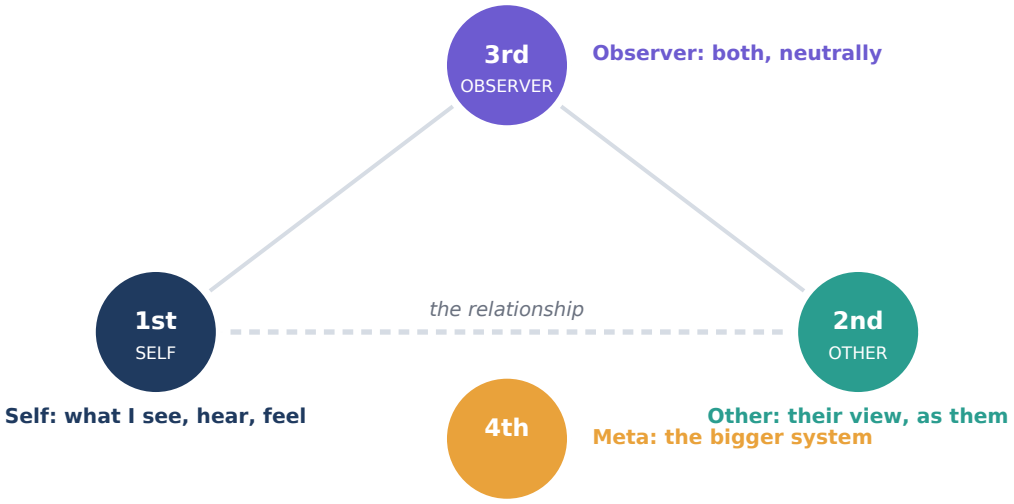


Figure 15. Positions used in the Meta-Mirror.

Step	What the client does	Question
1 Self	Stands in their own position, facing an imagined other person	“What do you see, hear and feel?”
2 Other	Steps into the other person's position	“As them, how does this look?”
3 Observer	Steps out to watch both	“What do you notice about how they interact?”
4 Meta / swap	From the observer, notices how they react to “self”; switches the observer's resources into position 1	“What would you, as observer, bring to yourself?”
5 Return	Re-enters first position with new resources	“What's different now?”

Why it may help

Perspective-taking is well studied in psychology and can reduce conflict and bias in some contexts. The Meta-Mirror is a structured, physical way to practise it.

SECTION 16

The Disney Creativity Strategy

Robert Dilts modelled Walt Disney's creative process in *Strategies of Genius* (1994), describing three distinct roles — Dreamer, Realist and Critic — that Disney was said to move between.

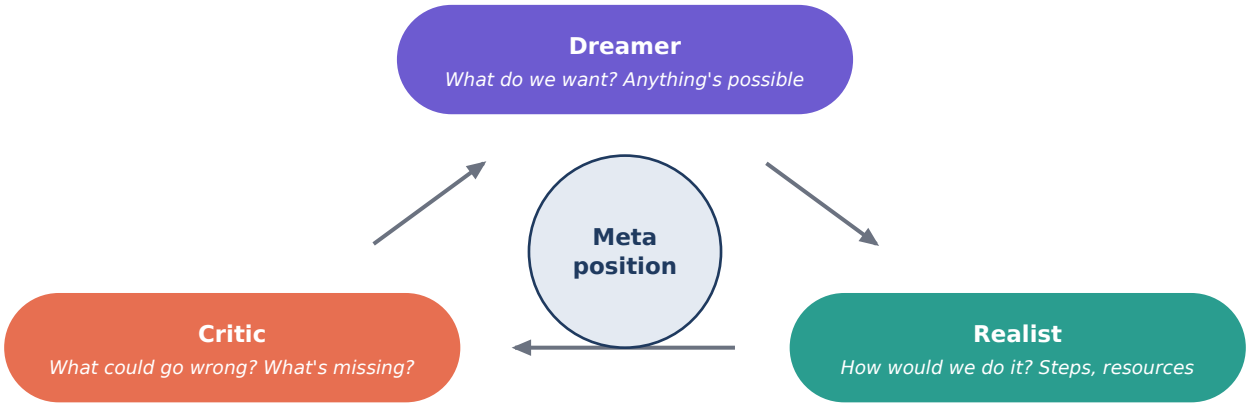


Figure 16. The Disney strategy cycle, with a neutral meta position from which to manage the process.

Role	Physiology (as taught)	Key questions	Common mistake
Dreamer	Head and eyes up; relaxed, expansive	What's the vision? What would be ideal?	Criticising ideas too early
Realist	Head level; leaning forward	Who, what, when? What's the first step?	Skipping straight to action without a vision
Critic	Head down; slightly back	What's missing? Who would object, and why?	Criticising the dreamer, not the plan

Practical value

Separating idea generation from critical evaluation is a long-standing principle in creativity research (for example, in brainstorming guidelines). The Disney strategy gives teams a simple, memorable way to apply it.

SECTION 17

New Behaviour Generator & Well-Formed Outcomes

Two practical tools for building new behaviour: one rehearses it mentally, the other makes sure the goal itself is clear and achievable.

TECHNIQUE

New Behaviour Generator

A mental rehearsal process attributed to early NLP developers including John Grinder and Robert Dilts.

1	**Choose**	A situation where you want to respond differently
2	**Model**	Think of someone who handles it well, or imagine an ideal response
3	**Watch**	See yourself on a mental screen doing the new behaviour (dissociated)
4	**Step in**	Step into the film and experience it from inside (associated). Does it feel right?
5	**Adjust**	If anything feels off, step out, change the film and try again
6	**Future pace**	Link the new behaviour to the real cue

Well-formed outcome conditions

Condition	Question	Example
Stated positively	What do you want (rather than not want)?	“Speak calmly in meetings” not “stop panicking”
Self-initiated	Is it within your control?	“I will ask for feedback” not “my boss will notice me”
Sensory evidence	How will you know you've got it?	“I'll hear my voice steady; I'll see people nodding”
Context	Where, when, with whom?	“In Monday team meetings”
Resources	What do you need?	Preparation, practice, a mentor
Ecology	What might you lose? Is it worth it?	Time, comfort zone
First step	What's the first action?	“Prepare one point for Monday”

SECTION 18

Choosing a Technique & What the Evidence Says

Different problems call for different tools — and some problems call for a referral instead. The evidence base also varies widely between techniques.

Presenting issue	Techniques often used	Consider instead / as well
Unwanted habit (nail-biting, snacking)	Swish, six-step reframing	Habit-reversal training; GP if health-related
Craving	Mapping across, swish	Medical support for addiction
Inner conflict / indecision	Parts integration, values work	Motivational interviewing
Recurring mild unhelpful feeling	Change Personal History, anchoring	CBT techniques
Specific phobia	Fast phobia cure	Exposure therapy (best evidence)
Trauma / PTSD symptoms	— (refer)	Trauma-focused CBT, EMDR; RTM via trained clinicians
Relationship difficulty	Meta-Mirror, perceptual positions	Couples or family therapy if severe
Creative planning	Disney strategy	Brainstorming and design-thinking methods
Goal setting	Well-formed outcomes, timeline goal placement	Implementation intentions; mental contrasting

Technique / idea	Status	Comment
Exposure for phobias (comparison)	Well supported	First-line treatment for specific phobias
Mental rehearsal / imagery	Well supported	Imagery practice can improve performance
RTM protocol (from fast phobia cure)	Emerging	Small RCTs, mostly by the developers' group
Perspective-taking (Meta-Mirror)	Plausible	Principle supported; technique itself untested
Disney strategy	Plausible	Consistent with creativity research; untested
Swish, mapping across, parts integration	Little evidence	Very few controlled studies
Time Line Therapy, Change Personal History	Little evidence	Mainly practitioner reports

SECTION 19

Practice, Cheat Sheet & Further Reading

Technique	Core move in one line
Swish	Cue picture → desired self, fast, 5–7 times
Mapping across	Give a problem the submodalities of a contrasting experience
Parts integration	Chunk both parts up to a shared intention; bring hands together
Six-step reframing	Keep the intention; generate new behaviours
Timeline	Float above the line to review the past or place goals
Change Personal History	Take an anchored resource back to past memories
Fast phobia cure	Watch from the booth in black & white; rewind fast in colour
Meta-Mirror	Self → other → observer → swap resources → self
Disney strategy	Dreamer → Realist → Critic, separately
New Behaviour Generator	Watch it, step in, adjust, future pace

Practice plan

Week 1
Swish one small habit of your own

Week 2
Mapping across with a food you crave

Week 3
Disney strategy for a real project

Week 4
Meta-Mirror on a tricky relationship

Practise on yourself and with fellow trainees before using techniques with clients. Get supervision, and never practise trauma or phobia techniques without proper training.

Further reading

Work	Why read it
Bandler, R. (1985). *Using Your Brain — for a Change*.	Swish, submodalities, phobia technique
Bandler, R. & Grinder, J. (1979). *Frogs into Princes*.	Change Personal History, anchoring
James, T. & Woodsmall, W. (1988). *Time Line Therapy and the Basis of Personality*.	Timelines
Dilts, R. (1994). *Strategies of Genius, Vol. 1*.	The Disney strategy
Gray, R., Budden-Potts, D. & Bourke, F. (2019). *Psychotherapy Research*, 29(5).	RTM protocol trial