The Science of Self-Talk

Teacher's Key | Level B2 | EnglishBridges.com

Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. mutter
2. scold
3. commentary
4. detect
5. narrate
6. instructional
7. endurance
8. exhaustion
9. on command
10. rumination
11. backfire
12. clashed
13. believable
14. cue

Word Partners

Part A. 1 f 2 d 3 e 4 a 5 h 6 g 7 c 8 b

Phrases: a running commentary; mutter under your breath; detect a change; an instructional video; test your endurance; collapse from exhaustion; a believable excuse; clash with your beliefs.

Part B. 1 narration 2 detection 3 exhausted 4 instructions 5 commentator 6 believe

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *According to the first paragraph, what three things does self-talk do?*
It comments on what you are doing, plans what comes next, and judges how well it is going.

2. *What physical evidence suggests that inner speech is a kind of real speech?*
Brain areas used for speaking aloud become active, and sensitive equipment can detect tiny movements in the throat muscles.

3. *Where does inner speech come from, according to Lev Vygotsky?*
From the out-loud speech of young children, who narrate their play. Vygotsky argued that this speech slowly becomes silent and turns into the inner voice adults use to plan and control what they do.

4. *What is the difference between instructional and motivational self-talk, and when does each work best?*
Instructional self-talk gives short technical reminders and works best for precise skills, such as putting in golf. Motivational self-talk encourages and helps more with strength and endurance.

5. *What happened in the cycling experiment, and how does the writer explain the result?*
Cyclists who practiced motivational phrases for two weeks rode about 18 percent longer before exhaustion, and the effort felt easier. The writer says two weeks is too short to change fitness much, so the feeling of effort is what changed.

6. *How did people who used "I" compare with people who used their own name or "you" before a speech?*
People who used "I" tended to sound anxious. People who used their name or "you" felt calmer, and judges rated their speeches as better.

7. *Why might saying "I am excited" work better than trying to calm down?*
Fear and excitement feel very similar in the body, and a racing heart is hard to slow on command. Changing the label seems easier than changing the feeling.

8. *Why did repeating "I am a lovable person" make some people feel worse?*
The sentence clashed with what they believed, so it made them more aware of their doubts.

9. *Which of the writer's suggestions would you try first? Explain why.*
   Open answer. A strong answer names one suggestion (noticing your inner voice after mistakes, using your name when stressed, choosing one short cue, or saying "I'm excited") and gives a clear reason linked to the reading or to personal experience.
10. *True, False, or Not Given: "The cyclists in the British experiment were professional athletes." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    Not Given. The reading says the cyclists were in a British experiment but says nothing about whether they were professionals.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes that self-talk techniques are magic." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer says that none of these techniques is magic.
12. *Author's purpose: Why does the writer begin with tennis players? Is it (a) to show a familiar example of self-talk, (b) to prove that tennis is the hardest sport, or (c) to explain the rules of tennis?*
    (a) To show a familiar example of self-talk. Readers can picture players muttering between points before the writer explains what self-talk is.

True or False

1. **T.** Almost everyone does the same thing, usually in silence.
2. **F.** Parts of the brain used for speaking aloud become active during inner speech.
3. **F.** People differ a lot, and perhaps 5 to 10 percent say they have little or no inner voice.
4. **T.** Motivational phrases such as "keep going" help more with strength and endurance.
5. **F.** They practiced for two weeks.
6. **T.** Those who used their own name or "you" felt calmer.
7. **F.** It reduced emotional reactions without requiring extra mental effort.
8. **T.** The reading says they feel very similar in the body.
9. **F.** It can backfire. People with low self-esteem felt worse.
10. **T.** Harsh inner criticism and rumination are closely linked to anxiety and depression.

Language Focus: Reflexive Pronouns (myself, yourself, themselves)

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. When I make a small mistake, I usually tell myself that it is not a big deal.
2. Before an exam or presentation, I remind myself that I have prepared well.
3. One thing I taught myself is how to cook simple pasta dishes.
4. The last time I really enjoyed myself was at my cousin's wedding in the summer.
5. When I am alone, I sometimes talk to myself about my plans for the day.
6. I taught myself to edit videos on my phone.
7. I tell myself to breathe slowly and focus on the first step.
8. I promise myself a short break after one hour of work.
9. I prefer to travel by myself because I can choose what to do.
10. I enjoyed myself most at the beach with my friends.

Accept any correct reflexive pronoun; check that it matches the subject (I … myself, we … ourselves).

Notes on the Evidence

Sport: the review is Hatzigeorgiadis et al. (2011), Perspectives on Psychological Science, a meta-analysis of 32 studies (62 effects); the pattern for instructional and motivational self-talk is taken from the APS press release, as the paper was not opened. Cyclists: Blanchfield et al. (2014), Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise, 24 participants, two-week motivational self-talk intervention. Time to exhaustion at 80 percent of peak power rose from 637 to 750 seconds (about 18 percent) with lower ratings of effort; the control group did not change (Bangor University abstract). The point that two

weeks is too short for much change in fitness is the writer's interpretation, in line with the authors' focus on perceived effort.

Name and "you": Kross et al. (2014), Journal of Personality and Social Psychology; speech task with five minutes of preparation, details from the University of Michigan release and a World Economic Forum summary, not the paper. Brain studies: Moser, Kross et al. (2017), Scientific Reports, one EEG and one fMRI experiment; "within about a second" refers to the EEG study. The researchers call the "no extra effort" result preliminary.

Excitement: Brooks (2014), Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, via the APA release. Karaoke scores averaged 80 percent (excited), 69 percent (calm, angry, or sad), and 53 percent (anxious); the math group scored about 8 percent higher; speech ratings had no figures in the release. Affirmations: Wood, Perunovic, and Lee (2009), Psychological Science, two experiments with 68 and 116 students. Whether this result has been replicated was not checked.

Inner speech: frequency varies widely between people in descriptive experience sampling (one study averaged about 23 percent of beeps, from none to most). The 5 to 10 percent figure for little or no inner voice is an estimate by Nedergård and Lupyan (2024), not a population survey. Shared brain areas, small throat-muscle activity, Vygotsky's private speech, and the link between rumination and depression are well-established findings described in general terms. All figures are as reported in sources available in November 2026.