

# Don't Overthink It



Make Easier Decisions,  
Stop Second-Guessing, and Bring  
More Joy to Your Life

Anne Bogel

“Ruminating about decisions and problems can waste all kinds of time. In this upbeat and encouraging book, Anne shows readers how to escape this mental trap and free up space for life’s adventures.”

**Laura Vanderkam**, author of *Off the Clock* and *Juliet’s School of Possibilities*

“Decisions don’t have to be so hard. Anne Bogel tells us why and shows us how. With a delightful combination of her own experience and practical research, Anne brings us relief from overthinking, making at least one decision quick and easy: get this book!”

**Emily P. Freeman**, podcaster and bestselling author of *The Next Right Thing: A Simple, Soulful Practice for Making Life Decisions*

“Anne Bogel can read our minds, and our minds are overthinking. She gets it, and she has real answers instead of pithy platitudes. We don’t want to live this way—ruminating and caught in negative thought patterns—and Bogel teaches us the way out. With personal tales of wisdom, humor, and truth, *Don’t Overthink It* helps us break free. This book will be a permanent fixture on my nightstand.”

**Patti Callahan Henry**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Becoming Mrs. Lewis*

“As a card-carrying member of Overthinkers Anonymous, I didn’t just want Anne Bogel to write this book, I *needed* her to write it. I am so grateful she did. This isn’t just a book about overthinking; it’s a practical, doable guide to stop doing it—and to find the wholeness and freedom that come from taking the steps Anne has so thoughtfully provided.”

**Marybeth Mayhew Whalen**, author of nine novels, chronic overthinker,  
and cofounder of She Reads

“Any interaction with Anne or her work leaves me feeling calmer about life. She’s our wise internet sister who always has solid advice, and this book is no exception.”

**Kendra Adachi**, author of *The Lazy Genius Way*

“Reading Anne Bogel’s words feels like having a conversation with your calmest, most reasonable friend—the one who gives you the advice you most need to hear. Get ready to feel happier, less panicked, and more at peace before you even finish the book.”

**Mary Laura Philpott**, bestselling author of *I Miss You When I Blink*

“I call them ‘swirly thoughts,’ that maelstrom of what-ifs and uh-ohs that invade my mind at the most inopportune times: the middle of the night or when I’m on a deadline. Anne Bogel has been there, and she knows the way through the mental storm. With a firm, guiding hand and plenty of compassion, she shows you how to transform your thoughts into your most reliable ally to calm your mind and live your best life.”

**Melissa Joulwan**, author of the bestselling Well Fed cookbook series

“I wish I would have had this book ten years ago. It’s practical, insightful, and incredibly helpful. When we become better at making decisions, we waste less energy and time and become better at contributing our best to the world. If you waste time deliberating over decisions, get this book!”

**Allison Fallon**, bestselling author and founder of Find Your Voice

“Overwhelmed by life? Got a big decision on the horizon? Need a pick-me-up to get through the hard stuff? *Don’t Overthink It* is a feel-good, how-to guide to making your life work for you the way you want it to. Reader, read! Stat.”

**Claire Diaz-Ortiz**, author and speaker

“My top strength on the Gallup StrengthsFinder test is Intellection, which can easily get me stuck in the quicksand of my mind called overthinking. I am grateful to Anne for this practical guide to get me out of that quicksand and keep me productive and acting on my thinking and ideas.”

**Erik Fisher**, producer and host of the *Beyond the To-Do List* podcast

“With her signature combination of best-friend warmth and expert insight, Anne Bogel has provided a gift in *Don’t Overthink It*. For those of us who care about living wisely and contributing well, Anne offers practical, rich perspective on how we can make decisions without getting stuck in ‘what-ifs.’ *Don’t Overthink It* will be a companion for readers as they make transformative decisions and find themselves stumped by everyday dilemmas.”

**Beth Silvers**, coauthor of *I Think You’re Wrong (But I’m Listening)* and  
cohost of the *Pantsuit Politics* podcast

“I’ve been reading Anne Bogel for over a decade. As I look back, I see that her words have led me to some of the most important insights of my life. Her gift is showing how small shifts—especially in how we think—can open up a new perspective and a new path. While many of us struggle with a world full of choices, both big and small, *Don’t Overthink It* does what Anne always does—shows us there’s another way.”

**Sarah Stewart Holland**, coauthor of *I Think You’re Wrong (But I’m Listening)* and cohost of the *Pantsuit Politics* podcast

“I was pumping my fist in the air while reading through Anne Bogel’s words in *Don’t Overthink It*, because I know how many people—women, especially—need this book. As a lifelong anxiety sufferer, I’m always looking for new strategies to cope with the looping thoughts that can take over my decision-making. Anne made me feel less alone in the way my brain works and provided me a way forward when I feel stuck. For busy, multitasking,

and occasionally overwhelmed readers, *Don't Overthink It* provides solidarity and strategies to cope with analysis paralysis.”

**Laura Tremaine**, writer and podcaster

“*Don't Overthink It* is a timely and necessary book for this specific moment in culture, but even more, Anne Bogel is the perfect voice for such a message. Hand to God, I trust her so much that I would punch myself in the face if she recommended it.”

**Knox McCoy**, author of *The Wondering Years* and cohost of *The Popcast with Knox and Jamie*

“I’ve known Anne for years, and she is and will always be my favorite book whisperer. But a surprise in our friendship, particularly when it comes to business, has been how much she’s helped me stop overthinking. Now every reader can access the tools Anne used to help me become less of a waffler and more of a confident first-guesser.”

**Jamie B. Golden**, cohost of *The Popcast with Knox and Jamie* and *The Bible Binge* podcasts

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For  
Jackson, Sarah,  
Lucy, and Silas.



*My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.*

Maya Angelou

*With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts.*

Eleanor Roosevelt

*Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.*

Proverbs 4:23



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# 1

## How We Spend Our Lives

*Far more than you may realize, your experience, your world, and even your self are the creations of what you focus on.*

Winifred Gallagher

I'm scheduled to depart for Nashville in twenty-seven hours, and I can't stop refreshing the forecast. I have a million things to do before I leave—more than I can possibly accomplish—yet I persist in hitting refresh. I can see it's not helping; it's actually making things worse. Yet I keep doing it.

I'm driving south to work on a new project, one I've been planning for months. It wasn't easy to get the date on the calendar, but now it's finally here. My hotel has long been booked and my workbag is freshly packed. I've finalized my itinerary and downloaded a new audiobook for the drive. There's just one wild card: the weather.

All week long, I've been monitoring the volatile storms that threaten to derail my plans. The forecast is not for Southern summer pop-up storms but a massive front coming to blanket the region. My friend first noticed the situation at girls' night earlier this week. While we chatted and drank half-price glasses of wine, she peered over our shoulders at the silenced meteorologist on the bar's TV. "Hey, when do you leave for Nashville?" she asked. "That storm does *not* look good."

Because we've spent dozens of girls' nights discussing our fears, both rational and otherwise, my friends know I'm an uneasy road tripper even on

sunny days, and I abhor driving through storms. And they know how, just weeks before, my family had been caught in the worst thunderstorm I'd ever experienced, right on that same stretch of I-65 I would soon be driving again, solo. We were headed to Florida for our annual beach week; my husband, Will, was behind the wheel. Usually I'd be reassured by his steady presence, but this time even he looked fearful. Construction walls meant we couldn't pull over, and the radar showed the rain wouldn't let up for hours. Visibility was practically zero, and I'd told my friends after the fact that it was a miracle we didn't end up in a hundred-car pileup on the interstate.

"Never again," I'd said as I recounted the story.

But the five-day forecast made a repeat performance look possible. Maybe *likely*. "You'd better keep an eye on that forecast," my friend said.

I've taken my friend's words to heart, perhaps too much. This week I've been checking the weather constantly, hoping the storm would dissipate or its path would shift. Neither sunny outcome has materialized.

Instead of fading out, the storm has intensified—along with my anxiety level.

Leaving early isn't an option. I have work to do at home in Louisville. I've also been traveling a lot this season and am not keen on the idea of leaving my family again. I don't want to miss another family dinner or my son's big baseball game on what promises to be a beautiful summer night.

But I don't see how I can drive two hundred miles in the storm.

So now I'm staring at my computer monitor, hoping against hope that my next click will deliver a happier version of reality. But each time, I don't like the new answer The Weather Channel serves up—and so I click again, and again. I make myself walk away from the computer to, you know, *actually accomplish something*, but I can't concentrate with the storm looming. So I sneak back to my screen and check again. I feel more agitated with every click.

Before long, I'm snared in the too-familiar spin cycle of overthinking, unable to focus on anything else. I know the signs: lots of mental action, none of it constructive, all the while knowing I have better things to do. All

my mental energy is consumed by the forecast—which I can't do a thing about—instead of the things that actually need my attention.

The more I think about what to do, the less sure I am about the answer. *Should I leave now? Should I wait? Should I keep waiting and hoping?* The deeper I sink into my overthinking spiral, the less confident I feel about my *ability* to decide, and the specific problem in front of me mushrooms into a larger concern: What kind of idiot spends hours staring at The Weather Channel? Shouldn't a competent adult be able to make a simple decision? I'm in danger of losing all perspective, when the humor of it hits me. I text my friend this message:

Current situation: massively overthinking my trip to Nashville to begin work on a book tentatively titled *Don't Overthink It*.

## **Overthinking: What It Is, What It Isn't**

Anyone who's picked up a book called *Don't Overthink It* can sympathize with me, because you've been there. You know what it feels like to get caught in a loop of unproductive—or even destructive—thought.

When we talk about overthinking, we're not talking about having our basic needs met, like a place to sleep or where we'll find our next meal. Those fundamental questions merit concern and require thought—sometimes lots of it. And we're not talking about major life decisions, like whether to change careers or end a relationship or move across the country. Big decisions like these require dedicated thought. When we talk about overthinking, we're talking about those times when we lavish mental energy on things that don't deserve it. Those times when we can't seem to think about anything else, even though we know our thoughts are better spent elsewhere.

Overthinking takes different forms. Sometimes it looks like worry. We might feel stuck reviewing something we've done in the past or imagining something that might happen in the future. We might spend twenty minutes leaping to imaginative and dire conclusions about that short email from our boss or the note from our child's teacher, or we may construct an elaborate and scary scenario in our mind about why our mom hasn't returned our call. We might lie awake at night wondering what our friends really think of us or if a loved one seems tired of us or if our library fines are getting really and truly out of control.

Sometimes overthinking looks like fretting about the small stuff, devoting disproportionate amounts of brain space to the relatively insignificant. We might catch ourselves in the middle of a long train of thought about whether we should exchange that new pair of jeans for the next size up, or why the washing machine water doesn't seem as hot as it used to and what we should do about it.

Sometimes overthinking looks like second-guessing ourselves. We put just-because flowers on the grocery list, but are they *really* worth the money? We're interested in that concert, but would we be better off with a night in? We want the kids to see the meteor shower, but will the loss of sleep be worth it? Seeing old friends is great, but will we regret using all our vacation time for the reunion? Waffling feels uncomfortable, but without any guiding principles or coherent philosophy, we can't seem to help ourselves.

Whether the concern elbowing into our thoughts is big or small, we recognize the common thread: these thoughts are repetitive, unhealthy, and unhelpful. Our brains are hard at work but accomplishing nothing. It is exhausting and makes us feel crappy. Dr. Susan Nolen-Hoeksema was a psychology professor at Yale whose research focused on women's mental health and well-being. Her studies over a twenty-year period showed that overthinking makes life harder, hurts our relationships, and may contribute to mental disorders like depression, severe anxiety, and alcohol abuse.

Overthinking also carries a significant opportunity cost. Mental energy is not a limitless resource. We have only so much to spend each day, and how