ASSERTIVENESS

I Statements Worksheet: 6 Free Exercises for Adults

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An I statements worksheet is only worth doing if it fixes the sentence you actually say, not the one in the textbook. Most people already know the formula. They have seen "I feel ___ when ___" on a poster in a waiting room. They can recite it. And then in the moment they say "I feel like you're being unfair," which is a you statement in a costume, and the conversation goes exactly where it always goes.

The six exercises below are built around the places this skill actually breaks. Work through them in order. Each one takes about ten minutes with a pen, and you will need real examples from your own week, not made-up ones. If you want the wider picture on assertive communication (/assertiveness/communication/) first, start there and come back. This page is for practice.

Why an I statements worksheet beats reading the formula again

The formula is not the hard part. Nobody fails at I statements because they forgot the word order.

They fail for three reasons, and each has its own exercise here. The first is that the sentence is secretly still about the other person. The second is that they cannot name the feeling, so they substitute a thought and call it one. The third, and the most common by a distance, is that they describe how they feel and then never say what they want. The other person is left holding a complaint with no exit from it.

Writing catches all three in a way that thinking does not. “I feel like you always do this” looks fine in your head at speed. On paper, with a pen, you can see there is no feeling in it and no request at the end of it.

If you want a baseline before you start, the Assertiveness Assessment (/quiz/assertiveness/) gives you a score you can retake in a month.

Worksheet 1: Catch the you statement in disguise

This is the exercise that matters most, so do it properly.

A real I statement describes something happening inside you. A disguised one describes the other person and puts “I feel” in front of it. The reliable test: if you can swap “I feel” for “I think that you” and the sentence still makes sense, it was never an I statement.

Rewrite each of these. Cover the answers with your hand.

1. “I feel like you don’t respect my time.”
2. “I feel that you’re being selfish about this.”
3. “I feel you never listen to me.”
4. “I feel like I’m the only one who does anything around here.”
5. “I feel attacked when you get like that.”

Now yours. Write down the last three things you said in a disagreement that began with “I feel.” Be honest and write what you actually said, not the improved version you thought of in the car afterwards. Apply the swap test to each.

Worked answers, for comparison rather than copying:

1. “I feel frustrated when I’m ready at seven and we leave at half past.”
2. “I feel uneasy about deciding this without knowing what I want yet.”
3. “I feel dismissed when I finish a sentence and the subject changes.”

4. “I feel worn out by the end of the week and I want to look at how the jobs are split.”
5. “I feel small when the volume goes up.”

Notice that number five did not become nicer. It became specific. “When you get like that” is a character judgement. “When the volume goes up” is an event that either happened or did not, and it is much harder to argue with.

Worksheet 2: Find the actual feeling word

“I feel that,” “I feel like,” and “I feel you” are all thoughts wearing a feeling’s clothes. A genuine feeling word can stand alone straight after “I feel” with nothing else attached: tired, embarrassed, anxious, relieved, hurt, resentful, uneasy, dismissed, lonely, exposed.

Take the three real sentences you wrote in Worksheet 1. For each one, answer these on paper:

- What is happening in your body right now as you write it? Tight chest, hot face, heavy arms, a wish to leave the room.
- Which single word gets closest? Choose one. Not three separated by slashes.
- Is that word a first feeling or a second one? Anger is very often the second feeling. Underneath it there is usually something more exposed: embarrassed, frightened, not wanted, taken for granted.

The second-feeling question is the useful one. “I feel angry when you cancel” is true, and it puts the other person straight into defence. “I feel like I’m not a priority when plans change on the day” is also true, is closer to the actual thing, and is far harder to fight with. Say the one underneath if you can stand to. That is where the whole technique gets its power, and it is also why it is uncomfortable.

Worksheet 3: Build one from your own week

Now the full frame. Four parts, in this order.

Feeling. One word. From Worksheet 2.

Trigger. The specific observable event. Not a pattern, not a habit, not a summary. One thing that happened, with a time attached if you can. “When the dishes are left” is a summary. “When I came down this morning and the pans from last night were still there” is an event.

Why, briefly. One clause, no more. This is where people write a paragraph and lose the room.

The request. What you want to happen next. Concrete, small enough to actually do, and phrased as a request rather than a rule.

Pick three real situations from the last fortnight. One at work, one with family, one with a partner or close friend if you have them. Write all four parts for each. Then read them out loud, because sentences that look reasonable on paper sometimes sound absurd in the air, and better you find that out at the kitchen table than in the conversation.

Worksheet 4: Cut the editorial

Take the three you just built and delete every one of these that appears:

- always, never, constantly, every single time
- obviously, clearly, honestly, frankly
- a bit, kind of, sort of, slightly, I guess, just
- anything that reads as a character description rather than a description of an event

The absolutes hand the other person an easy escape. Say “you never help” and they only have to remember one Tuesday in March when they did, and now you are arguing about that Tuesday instead of about the thing.

The softeners do the opposite damage. “I just feel kind of a bit unappreciated, I guess” invites the answer “well, don’t.” Every hedge you add is a small note saying you are not sure you have the right to say this.

Count the words you deleted. Most people cut somewhere between a fifth and a third, and the shortened version is almost always the one they wish they had said.

Worksheet 5: Say the ask out loud

Go back and look at your three sentences. Is there an actual request in each one, with a verb in it?

This is where most people stop, and it is the single biggest reason the technique disappoints them. They name the feeling, they get it out cleanly, the other person says “okay, sorry,” and nothing changes. Nothing changes because nothing was asked for. A feeling on its own is information. It is not a request, and most people will not go looking for the request hidden inside it.

For each of your three, write the ask as one sentence starting with “I’d like” or “Would you be willing to.” Then check it against these:

- Is it something a person could actually do this week?
- Is it one thing, or three things joined by “and”?
- Could they say no to it? If no is not available, you did not make a request.

That last one is the real test. “I’d like us to talk about money on Sunday” can be declined. “I’d like you to stop being so careless” cannot, because it is not a request, it is a verdict.

Worksheet 6: The line for when it lands badly

Assume it goes wrong, because sometimes it will. You deliver a clean, well-built I statement and the other person gets defensive anyway. Every worksheet on the first page of Google stops before this point, which is unhelpful, because this is the moment people give up on the skill entirely.

Write out, in advance, your one follow-up line. Not an argument. One sentence that does two things: it declines the fight, and it leaves the request standing.

Some that work:

- “I’m not saying you did it on purpose. I’m saying that’s how it landed for me.”
- “I don’t need you to agree that it’s fair. I’d still like to try it for a fortnight.”

- “We can talk about who started it another time. Right now I’d just like an answer on Sunday.”

Write two of your own and learn them well enough to say them while your heart is going. That is the entire trick. Under pressure you do not compose, you retrieve, so the sentence has to be in there beforehand.

How to use these

Do one worksheet a day rather than all six in a sitting. The gap matters, because between sessions you will catch yourself doing the thing the last exercise described, and that noticing is what actually changes the habit.

Start with low stakes. Practise on a colleague who keeps booking over your lunch, not on the biggest unresolved thing in your closest relationship. The skill needs to be boring before it is useful.

Expect a strange fortnight. People who are used to a version of you that does not ask for things will notice, and some of them will not enjoy it. That reaction is not proof you did it wrong.

Then retake the Assertiveness Assessment (/quiz/assertiveness/) after a month and compare.

When an I statement is the wrong tool

There are situations where this skill does not apply, and every worksheet I checked while writing this one left them out.

An I statement works by telling someone precisely what affects you and how much. With a person acting in good faith, that is the whole mechanism. With someone who is not, you have handed over a targeting list. If you have ever had a feeling you named repeated back to you later as a weapon, or been told that having the feeling is itself the problem, this is not the technique to reach for. Read narcissistic abuse (/toxic-dynamics/narcissistic-abuse/) and DARVO (/toxic-dynamics/darvo/) instead, where the recommended move is the opposite: say less, keep it factual, and stop supplying material.

It is also the wrong tool when the answer is simply no. You do not need to explain your inner state to decline a request. “I can’t take that on” is a complete sentence, and dressing it up as a feeling can quietly turn a decision into a negotiation. Saying no (/saying-no/) covers that properly.

And it is the wrong tool for something that has already been raised four times. At that point the sentence is not the problem, and a fifth better-phrased version will not fix it. What is missing is a consequence (/boundaries/consequences/), which is a different piece of work.

Frequently asked questions

Is this I statements worksheet printable, and is there a PDF?

Yes. Use your browser’s print option to print this page and write on it by hand, or pick Save as PDF in the same dialog for a digital copy. There is nothing to buy, no download step, and no email address to hand over first. Pen and paper works better than screen for these particular exercises, because the rewriting is the point and typing lets you edit before you have seen your own first draft.

Why does my I statement still start an argument?

Usually because it is not an I statement. The most common version is “I feel like you don’t care,” which is an accusation with the word I bolted on the front. The other person hears the accusation, not the grammar. Worksheet 1 is built specifically for this. The second most common reason is that the statement is true, well formed, and delivered to someone who reacts badly to any request at all. That is information about the relationship rather than about your sentence.

Are I statements manipulative?

They can be, and it is worth being honest about it. An I statement used to smuggle in a criticism you would not say directly is manipulative, and people can feel it even when they cannot name it. The test is whether you would be content if the other person simply said no to your request. If the sentence is really designed to make them feel bad enough to comply, it is a guilt trip in a nicer font.

Do I statements work with someone who is abusive?

No, and this is the part most worksheets leave out. An I statement hands someone a clear map of what hurts you. With a person acting in good faith that is exactly the point. With someone who is not, you have just given them better aim. If naming a feeling has been used against you before, the skill you need is not this one. Please see the note near the end of this page and the resources at the bottom.

More worksheets and guides

- Assertiveness worksheets (/assertiveness/workbook/): the same format, applied to the wider skill set.
- Assertive communication (/assertiveness/communication/): the full technique list this sits inside.
- Assertiveness skills (/assertiveness/skills/): where I statements rank against the others.
- Boundaries worksheets (/boundaries/worksheets/): naming and holding limits.
- Saying no worksheets (/saying-no/worksheets/): for when the answer is just no.
- Assertiveness guide (/assertiveness/): the wider cluster this belongs to.

Reviewed by Dr. Barthwell, addiction medicine specialist. This article is for educational purposes and is not a substitute for professional therapy. If you are experiencing abuse or domestic violence, please contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233.

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