

Are You (Still) An Optimist? These Questions Might Help Explain Why

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Imagine you're back in high school — fluorescent lights humming, hard plastic chairs, a classroom stuffy with hormones and anxiety — and you've just aced a test. Do you think to yourself, "I guess I got lucky today?" Or does your internal monologue say, "Damn, I'm good!"?

Now imagine that you've failed the test. Does the voice inside you whisper: "Of course. You're so bad at this." Or does it say, "Ugh — you just didn't study hard enough."

And which of these responses might brand you as an optimist?

You might think, for example, that the first response — crediting luck for a good outcome — is a sign of optimism, since it suggests good times ahead. (After all, you're lucky!) But the belief that a good result is thanks to elements out of your control actually indicates a pessimistic outlook.

And while the self-critical response to the bad outcome (you didn't study hard enough) might seem like a downer, it's actually a product of positive thinking — since it suggests you believe that, if you take a different approach to future tests, you can expect a better result.

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