What is an optimist?

There is an advantage in having an Optimistic Explanatory Style. When we mention the term Optimism we mean much deeper issues than the popular image of whether the glass is half full or half empty. Think about the following questions:

i. **How would you describe an optimistic person?**
Usually an optimistic person presents as thinking positively, as having good problem-solving skills, and as being emotionally stable. However optimists are rocks of strength rather than skites or braggers.

ii. **How would you recognise a pessimistic person if you were speaking to them?**
Pessimists tend to drag everyone down (including themselves). They think negatively, they tend to complain often because they feel powerless, and they seem to be either down or angry most of the time.

iii. **How do you know when you are Optimistic?**
When I am optimistic I feel calm and contented. I see my day as having challenges rather than problems. I feel ready to meet those challenges as I believe I have the resources or can find the resources. I guess I imagine myself as being Mary Marvel. What about you?

**Meet the Students**

Olive is a mature-aged student enrolled internally in a Teaching Degree at CQUni. She is studying in the internal mode. Although Olive didn't finish High School Study, she gained access to tertiary through the STEPS Program.

**Olive:** Hello everyone. My name is Ollie and I am a student of CQUni in the Faculty of Arts Business Informatics and Education. I am in my second year of studying a Bachelor of Learning Management. I was disappointed with my results last term and even thought I might have to give up. Then I heard about this Optimism Course and thought to myself Ollie, give it a go. If this can help you to pass then go for it.

Mike made entry to university from high school and now studies in the Bachelor of Information Technology. Mike lives with his family, has plenty of mates and loves sport. He has part-time employment in a large chain store.

**Mike:** G'Day everyone. I chose my program in IT because I have always liked working with computers and believe it's a good job for me to aim for. I didn't make much of an effort at school 'cause sport was more important. At uni it's a different story. They don't give you homework they just set you adrift with a list of instructions. So there is pretty well nothing to do for the first three or four weeks. Then about week 4 or 5 all these assignments are due, usually before I have a chance to even start them. So last term I failed a couple, mainly because of the referencing system. Then the assignments kept coming till week 12 and there was no time to study for exams. Exams at uni are a nightmare for me. I crammed but was so tired on the day of the exam I couldn't think straight. Another student recommended this course so I'll see how it goes. I hope it is going to make Uni life easier.

Emily is a distance student who lives in Brisbane in a flat with her partner. She works fulltime for a business firm and is studying to upgrade her credentials for promotion at work.
Emily: I have enrolled in this course because I am having so much trouble with time management I am getting further and further behind. I am really finding the courses very interesting but I seem to have nothing in my life except work and study.

Pete is an international student who has come to Australia to obtain a Bachelor of Business degree at CQUni. He lives in a house with four other international students. Pete is learning to cope with the language and cultural differences he finds in this university.

Pete: My name is Papinder but please call me Pete. Study is very different at this university. Some of the differences are that in my country the teachers gave us a lot more help. It is hard for me to do assignments because I am not used to that form of assessment. The hardest things for me are the written exams because we often had oral exams in my country. I really do want to learn how to study in Australia so I am hoping the optimism course will help me.

Thanks Olive and Mike and Emily and Pete for your stories.

Do you think Ollie or Mike are Optimists? Why or why not?

I don't think Ollie is an optimist yet but she has the openness to change that is required. She is ready to change and that is important. On the other hand Mike is perhaps still looking for a miracle so that he can start to succeed in his program without doing the work.

You be the judge. Which one is more likely to improve in their study results this term?

Like the four students you have met the challenge of study turns into a problem when we are afraid of failing or not performing to our expectations. The fear of failure is an adversity we all need to face and conquer.

Are you familiar with the Hagar Cartoons?

Determine whether Hagar is acting like an Optimist or a Pessimist?
Activity 1: Hagar and his Dog

- Does Hagar’s reaction reflect optimism or pessimism?
- What do you think Hagar was saying to himself?
- Can you catch his thoughts?
- Write down what Hagar may be thinking.

Catching your thoughts

Have you decided whether Hagar is an optimist or a pessimist?

What do you think Hagar was saying to himself?
Hagar might have been saying a number of things to himself like *Yes, I know you think I'm just a mongrel dog: or She's in a bad mood again.* If you have been able to make up a negative comment you are probably right about what Hagar was thinking.

- Can you catch his thoughts?

He is probably thinking something like *I’m not much of a man. As a Viking I go out and plunder and pillage. Yet when I came home I’m just treated like a dog.*

- Write down what Hagar may be thinking.

You may like to write down what your version is of Hagar’s thoughts and write them on the discussion board

It is easy to recognise an Optimist but we also need to know how to become optimists ourselves.

There is an idea that you can be an Optimist just by pretending everything is good and avoiding unpleasant people or events such as study or assignments that look too hard. Avoidance does not lead to optimism; it only leads to pessimism.

Optimism can be learnt best by changing the way you think in adversity.

In times of adversity, like when things go wrong or when we are worried, disappointed or overwhelmed, we talk to ourselves about what has happened. We call that the *Internal Dialogue.* Everyone does this so it is perfectly normal.

But because it is inside our heads no one else can hear what we are saying. Often we do not even know what is happening ourselves as the words or voices just start automatically in our brains. We call that the *Jingle Channel.* Everybody has a jingle channel that seems to take off by itself sometimes singing, sometimes repeating messages over and over. Unfortunately when bad things happen our Jingle Channel can be very negative and critical with words like "I can’t do this. This is dreadful. I'll never get there".

There is a way we can control those negative messages that occur with bad events but first we have to identify and catch those thoughts. *Thought Catching* is the ability to recognise thoughts that fill
your Jingle Channel at times when you are feeling low. Although these thoughts can be almost imperceptible, they can profoundly affect your mood and behaviour in negative ways.

This session we will start to catch our thoughts. If you catch your negative automatic thoughts and question their validity, I can assure you they won't have the same power over you. So the next time you experience a negative reaction ask yourself “What am I thinking now?”

Mike:
Yeah! I guess I have plenty of negative thoughts that make me see my world as a negative experience. One I have a lot of at the moment is connected to the fact that I haven't been able to start this first assignment and keep putting it off. I think I am stupid and a loser and that doesn't seem to help.

Ollie:
I have a good friend who seems to do brilliantly in her course. She doesn't ever seem to worry and just sails through without needing any help. When I sit down to study I often ask myself why can't I be like that?

Now that Ollie and Mike have caught their Negative Automatic Thoughts they can learn to change their way of thinking.

After all, in regard to what Mike thought, don’t most students have trouble starting an assignment? Don’t you?

And as for Ollie, how does she know that her friend is happier than her or that her friend doesn’t struggle with study?
My experience with high achieving students is that they often have high amounts of negative thoughts about themselves.
Each of us needs to know what we are thinking and start thought catching today.

Take time every day to Catch Your Thoughts. Being able to Catch Your Thoughts will give you control over your study life as we explore how important our thinking is every day.