

ARE YOU AN ATTENTIVE OPTIMIST?

TAKE THE TEST

Excerpted from the book *Mind Gym* by Sebastian Bailey, Ph.D., and Octavius Black

According to hundreds of well-controlled studies, optimists tend to be better off than pessimists. Time and again research has shown that optimists live longer, are healthier, achieve more, and have better, stronger relationships.

Some pessimists prefer to label themselves “realists.” And that is a fair assessment: the realist school justifies their mode of thinking by arguing that by being realistic about the world, they will never be disappointed or let down by events. The irony is that even with this play-it-safe behavior, when something apparently bad does happen, an optimist tends to focus on the upside, while a realist focuses on the downside.

An attentive optimist will accept appropriate responsibility when a task, event, or situation goes wrong, and then explore what can be learned from the experience. This is likely to include lessons for the future, which is in sharp contrast to the undiluted optimists, who tend to place the responsibility elsewhere. An attentive optimist, then, is the kind of person we should all strive to be. But how much of one are you?

The following diagnostic is designed to help you determine how much of an optimist you already are and which ways you can adapt yourself to become an attentive optimist, if you want to.

For each of the following statements, imagine the described situation and allocate a total of 10 points between the four options (a, b, c, and d). This could be a combination of 3, 3, 4, 0 or 10, 0, 0, 0 or 7, 0, 2, 1—whatever you think best represents your inclination in each situation. The only rule is that the total points for each statement equal 10.

EXAMPLE:

0. My favorite color is blue.

- 2 a. Only on weekends
- 4 b. Unless it's paired with orange
- 0 c. Because it feels cool
- 4 d. Because it brings out my eyes

(total points: 10)

YOUR OPTIMISM/PESSIMISM DIAGNOSTIC

1. Someone is rude to me for no obvious reason.

- _____ a. They are having a bad day.
- _____ b. They are a rude person.
- _____ c. I barely noticed.
- _____ d. I must have done something wrong.

2. My proposal for a new project at work is rejected.

- _____ a. I can learn from this for next time.
- _____ b. I messed up.
- _____ c. They wouldn't know a great idea if it was in front of their noses.
- _____ d. That destroys my chances of promotion.

3. I phone my favorite local restaurant to reserve a table, but it is already fully booked.

- _____ a. I may as well find somewhere better.
- _____ b. It's my own fault for not calling earlier to make a reservation.
- _____ c. Why is it always me who has to book the restaurant anyway?
- _____ d. I've ruined the whole evening.

4. I cook dinner for friends, and although they say it is delicious, most of them barely touch the food on their plates.

- _____ a. In the future, I'll practice a new dish before trying it on guests.
- _____ b. I'm embarrassed. I am a terrible host.
- _____ c. My friends said it was delicious and I've no reason to doubt they were telling the truth.
- _____ d. My friends will never want to visit me again.

5. I get lost on my way to visit a friend.

- _____ a. I can see where I went wrong; it'll be easier next time.
- _____ b. I am a lousy navigator.
- _____ c. My friend's directions are useless.
- _____ d. My friend will be very upset that I'm late.

6. I read an article in the newspaper that gives me the information I need to impress a client.

- _____ a. It's a good thing I keep up to date with current affairs.
- _____ b. What a fluke.
- _____ c. Good things happen to me.
- _____ d. I suspect my client knows the information already.

7. My team wins a game in a two-on-two basketball tournament.

- _____ a. We're a great team.
- _____ b. The opposition must not be very good.
- _____ c. I am a fantastic basketball player.
- _____ d. It was all thanks to my partner.

8. My partner/close friend really likes the birthday present I bought her.

- _____ a. I am good at buying presents.
- _____ b. Thank goodness she gave me a hint.
- _____ c. I bet there aren't many partners/friends who would have chosen so well.
- _____ d. I'll never be able to get her something as good for Christmas.

9. I cook dinner for friends and they praise my food.

- _____ a. I'm a good cook.
- _____ b. My friends are easily pleased.
- _____ c. When I really try at something, I can make a success of it.
- _____ d. There wasn't anything special about it. They must have low expectations about my abilities.

10. Someone compliments me on my clothes.

- _____ a. I do look good in this outfit.
- _____ b. He clearly doesn't have much of an idea about style himself.
- _____ c. He must really like me.
- _____ d. What a nice thing to say.

YOUR RESULTS

Total your points for each option (a, b, c, d) in the diagnostic and enter the numbers here:

_____ a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d.

To see how much of an optimist or pessimist you tend to be, use this formula to calculate your points: $(a + c) - (b + d) =$ _____

If your total is a positive number, then you tend to think optimistically; if it is negative, then you tend to look at things pessimistically. The higher the number, the more you tend to think in this way (the maximum is 100 on either side, positive or negative).