

ANTI-PESSIMISM SHEET: PREPARE FOR CHALLENGES!



MAIN FEATURES

Reinforced skills (TASC Cluster)	CONSTRUCTING. AIMING
Suitable for	Teachers, Students
Difficulty level	Low
Individual setting	Yes
Group setting	Yes
Minimum number of participants	1
Average time length	60 minutes + 60 minutes
Special Equipment	No
Online	Yes

1. DESCRIPTION

The anti-pessimism sheet is a beneficial exercise in improving the optimistic mindset. Students are asked to indicate on a piece of paper a future event (a class test, an important test,...) that they have faced in a pessimistic way in the past. Before this event, they must honestly mark the best version of what will happen, the worst version and the trend that they deem most likely. After the event has occurred, they must indicate what actually happened. After a certain number of events, these recordings can be compared with each other and examined by a trusted person (a teacher, one or more classmates, or other reference adults). In this way, it is possible to concretely verify how much one's predictions are correct or distorted, analyse the actual results, and become aware of one's way of verifying that their negative attitude is not justified by the facts. Furthermore, they may realize that they should not confuse possibility with probability. It is possible that the future event will go wrong, but there is a good chance that this will not happen.

The exercise is a cross-over between narrative practice and positive psychology (Tarragona, 2019). Positive psychology studies positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Mostly it aims to improve the quality of life. Positive psychology and narrative practices have a lot of convergencies, with personal agency development ranked first inside this association. Personal agency is the capacity to choose and to act willfully. In narrative practice, personal agency is often described as being in the driver's seat of one's life. That's what the anti-pessimism sheet would do for your students.

2. AIM / BENEFITS

The activity facilitates the identification of critical, ambitious goals worth achieving in a project during the school year, both in terms of learning and developing communications and interactions in the classroom. The critical aspect is the standard definition of the obstacles that can facilitate the achievement of the goal. The activity, therefore, aims to nurture students to nurture a positive attributive style. Optimism is closely linked to people's attributive style to attributing specific causes to events. In particular, positive psychology emphasises that considering an injury or a defeat as an isolated and temporary event favours optimism. Likewise, assessing that an obstacle can be faced and overcome generates optimism and the ability to recover and return to the surface after a defeat or injury. According to the narrative perspective, it becomes more useful to say in this situation: "I have not done enough" instead of "I am not capable".

3. COMPETENCIES CLUSTER(S) RELATED

CLUSTER NR 1 CONSTRUCTING, and NR 3 AIMING

Why

The exercise mainly focuses on constructing and aiming, considering the TASC framework.

1. Considering constructing, Personal and group agency processes can be the pivotal elements to develop this competence. During the anti-pessimism activity, students can work on their agency development, defining strategies to build up the ways to act to face complex situations.
2. Considering aim, Goal-oriented approach, Future-oriented approach, and Working on hypotheses ("Suppose that...") can be considered as the fundamental processes to develop a complete strategy in finding solutions to complex problems by students.

4. HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

Step 1 / To recall events and situations managed in a "pessimistic" way. In this first phase, students are asked to recall, by choosing them from the experiences of the current school year or the previous one, situations (homework, tests, ...) that they have managed in class in a "pessimistic" way, therefore thinking already before realising them of failing to complete them, or of obtaining a negative evaluation and so on. These will generally be events that had a negative outcome (a bad grade, a non-positive evaluation, etc.), but they can also be events that ended positively. It is necessary to identify at least one event from the past. Still, it is preferable to identify more than one to have alternatives of choice on which to carry out the activity (and to be able to insert more experiences within the anti-pessimism sheet). Each student identifies their past experiences.

Step 2 / Fill in the anticipatory part of the "anti-pessimism sheet". Once the pessimistic experience has been chosen, students can individually fill in the "anti-pessimism" sheet. It is (see attachment) a simple table with the following structure:

Next event After the event	Before the event			After the event
Description of the next event	The best I can predict that will happen is	The worst that I can predict will happen is	The outcome that seems most likely is	The actual outcome was

The first part of the document briefly describes the future event in which the student will be engaged and on which it is necessary to intervene to enhance optimism in this regard. Then begins the real phase of building optimism on the specific activity, anticipating a series of elements, before the realization of the event itself: the best that you imagine will happen, the worst that you imagine will happen, and the outcome that seems more likely to happen for the student. For example, suppose the planned activity is a class test or examination. In that case, the best you can imagine is that the test will be written in time, with all the expected contents and a high overall quality level. Furthermore, among the positive aspects, there could be a control of emotions and performance anxiety. Conversely, the negative aspects could include delays in delivery or only partial realization. At this point, the student is asked to estimate, after weighing the possible positive and negative outcomes, which is the most likely outcome, given these assumptions. After completing these parts, we await the actual completion of the task, and its outcome.

Step 3 / Complete the “anti-pessimism sheet” after completing the task. Once the task has been completed, all that remains is to fill in the last part of the sheet, with the actual result. Before the final reflection it is useful to record several events, so that they can be compared with each other and examined with the teacher’s support.

5. DEBRIEF

With the support of the teacher, when more recordings of actual events are available, the student can verify in practice how their predictions are correct or distorted, analyze the actual results, become aware of their way of anticipating events, and etc. The following final reflection questions may be helpful:

- Examine the predictions you made systematically before the activities were carried out, and considering previous experiences: how many are correct, which ones appear distorted? On which elements do the congruences appear, and on which instead the inconsistencies?
- Examine the actual outcomes of the activities: which characteristics do they predominantly have? Are they about content? Or the learning processes that you were able to activate? What emotional reaction did you experience when comparing the predictions with the final outcome?
- Examine your systematic ways of anticipating events: what characteristics do they have? What was your prevailing trend (positive or negative?)

In this way, the pessimists have a way of verifying that the facts do not justify their negative attitude. They also may realise that they should distinguish possibility from probability. The future event may go wrong, but there is a good chance that this will not happen.

6. SPECIAL MATERIALS

The exercise does not require unique materials for its implementation other than the format to be filled in to create the "anti-pessimism sheet".

7. TIPS AND TRICKS

The activity requires a short period to be carried out. Still, it is good to repeat it frequently over time to accustom students to continuous reflection and anticipation of the activities they will have to carry out at school. So the suggestion is to constantly stimulate students to fill in the sheet during the school year.

The activity is designed to be individual, but it can also be used in a group version, to work on maintaining good social relationships. Maintaining good social relations is a fundamental factor in achieving and maintaining optimism. They represent the social support that allows you to generate satisfying life experiences. In the class version, the activity allows you to make sense of the experience, generating positive emotions. The activity in the group version can be organized by always asking students to work individually to fill in the anti-optimism sheet, but to share it with at least one "peer", therefore a classmate, who acts as a "friend critical ", and therefore for the forecasting phase he can question what the individual student says about how to prepare an event. In addition, the final outcome description phase can have a shared version in the classroom, in which students present their work to their classmates to receive confirmation and feedback.

8. ON-LINE VERSION

The activity can be done online, both in the individual version and in the group version, and in either a-synchronous mode (for example with email exchanges), or synchronous (with tools such as meet, zoom, etc.).

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY - SITOGRAPHY

Anolli, L. (2005). *L'ottimismo*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Seligman, M. E. P. (1990). *Imparare l'ottimismo*. Milano: Giunti.