

ENG 100 and ENG 100S and Optimistic Realism as a Mindset

CORE POINT: The optimistic realist-mindset, in the context of ENG 100, recognizes that the course will be challenging because the premise of learning so many different writing skills and genres in fifteen weeks is already challenging and daunting; at the same time, individuals with this mindset recognize that growth mindset and general positivity are stronger responses instead of excessively positive, excessively negative, or 'high-school kine'-style mindsets. As author Thomas Oppong notes, "Being balanced means neither ignoring reality nor allowing our dreams to take precedence over facts. It's about finding a middle ground that encompasses optimism and pessimism, so you can find solutions instead of dwelling on problems" (Oppong 01).

Terminology: Optimistic realist-mindset. The individual mindset subjectively reacts to situations and circumstances in a positive manner, while still asserting a sense of realism based on one's current skills or limitations thereof. Applying growth mindset to each task during a set term, individuals with this mindset continue to struggle, asking for help along the way, but still see the big picture of how the 'difficult' situation can be beneficial.

Toxic positive-mindset. The individual mindset blindly responds to all situations with a sunny outlook and sunny disposition, often relying on pretense and artifice to mask all limitations, worries, and fears. Individuals with this mindset seem to be putting forth an eternally brave and smiling face regarding the situation, but often go it alone, never revealing to peers or others their own private struggles. By masking their private pain and anxiety, they do not often reach out for assistance.

Toxic negative-mindset. The individual mindset frequently defaults to all situations with a cynical outlook and negative disposition, often using blunt honesty and/or grievances to complain about situations and circumstances. The individual seems to be consistently frustrated and may possess a bleak, fixed mindset about situations; they might externalize blame on others and authority figures, seeing those individuals as largely at fault for the situation. This mindset does not often take ownership of their part in difficult situations.

'high-school kine' sensibility-mindset. The individual mindset might not be aware of their own limitations, and might possess either a sense of grandiosity or extreme low self esteem regarding circumstances--to an extreme degree. Even if they might possess imposter syndrome, the lack of awareness of their skill level or over-estimating or under-estimating skills on tasks could be harmful.

Situational awareness and how the varied types might respond to circumstances.

"Class, we have just fifteen weeks to do our best with 5 essays and pass a portfolio check set by the department."

'high-school kine' sensitivity-mind set	"This class is going to be a breeze. I can procrastinate on stuff just like I did in high school." "I wrote many essays in high school and the teachers all gave me A's, so I am probably a writing genius!" "This class is going to be insane. I can't possibly even survive the next week in this class." "English teachers tend to just accept any sort of B.S. on a paper and they'll pass us."
Toxic negative-minds et	"English class sucks in general." "That just sounds impossible...for me." "English teachers are terrible." "My teacher seems lame." "School is a conspiracy against me and a scam." "College was invented to keep people as obedient serfs and to indoctrinate people into compliance."
Toxic positive-minds et	"Oh, no matter what, if I smile and do my essays, everything will work out for the best." "So long as I just act happy and make the teacher like me, maybe they'll be an easy grader." "Just smile!" "I don't need to ask for help. I just have to be positive at all times."
Optimistic realist-mindset	"During the next fifteen weeks, it's probably going to be a struggle and a grind, but if I ask for help when needed and rely on services the school offers--librarians, counselors, tutors, and instructors--I should be able to pass with a "B" or better, and, if I revise well, possibly an "A."

"On this last essay, you might need to revise, because this paper received a RW (D-) grade. Please make the relevant changes."

'high-school kine' sensitivity-minds et	"I got a D-!? That's better than an F. I'll take it! A 'D' grade is minimal passing achievement, so it means I passed."
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	"A D- in college is probably like a C in high school; they have to pass me, right?"
Toxic negative-mindset	"This teacher sucks." "The assignment was rigged." "The topic was so stupid beyond belief that I was meant to fail." "This teacher must hate my guts." "I must be just really dumb in general. I must suck at English."
Toxic positive-mindset	"It is what it is. It doesn't bother me at all!" "I got a D-, but it still means I got a grade!" "Next class, I'll just smile and pretend it didn't bother me at all!" "This teacher is just being a negative nancy and hardass. Ignore! Ignore!"
Optimistic realist-mindset	"Okay, I wasn't expecting that grade, but the instructor has given me an opportunity to rework things, in terms of the purpose, audience, structure. If I push beyond the grammar and spelling errors and work on the major aspects of the essay, I can probably do way better to prepare for the portfolio. The portfolio grade is a more realistic sense of my actual writing ability, so with the teacher's help, I need to work harder."

"Apologies, but based on the algorithm in the Learning Management System as well as a cross-check with ChatGPTZero, it seems that some of the content in this essay could have been plagiarized."

'high-school kine' sensibility-minds et	"What does it matter? I rip .mp3's all the time and no one catches me." "At least I did the essay, bruh." "Welp. Time to bail! This teacher is a hardass."
Toxic negative-mindset	"This teacher truly has it out to get me. He wants me to fail." "I did the work. I don't understand why this teacher feels the need to rake me over the coals." "Man, I just hate this class." "The last time this happened to me, it just proved I suck at writing, which is why I decided to plagiarize in the first place. Someone else's writing is always going to be better than my own."
Toxic positive-mindset	"It is what it is. Plagiarism means that other people can write well and that I can borrow from them!" "Okay, I did take the content, but it feels okay, because I got the work done!"

	<p>"Next class, I'll just smile and pretend the plagiarism accusation didn't bother me at all! And maybe the teacher will just give me a higher grade since I'm a nice person."</p> <p>"This teacher is just trying to be a downer! I didn't do anything wrong. Copying and pasting is perfectly acceptable in any academic situation!"</p>
Optimistic realist-mindset	<p>"Okay, I wasn't expecting that accusation, but the instructor has given me an opportunity to meet with them to discuss the plagiarism, in terms of how to work in quotes and content ethically. They did me a solid, because they could have just sent me to the Student Affairs Coordinator and held me to the Student Conduct Code. If I push myself to do more ethical work inside of the essay, I can probably do way better to prepare for the portfolio."</p> <p>Or</p> <p>"But I didn't plagiarize. I will go to the teacher's Office Hours and explain how I sourced things rather than being scared or intimidated by the accusation, and I hope that will clear things up. I will explain the content of the essay so that they know that I clearly comprehend the content within the essay to clear my name."</p>

"Well, class, now it's crunch time and almost Spring Break / Thanksgiving, but some of you still owe me 4 essays. Because there are only a couple of weeks left in the semester, please engage in mindful behaviors that allow you to catch up on your work."

'high-school kine' sensibility-mindset	<p>"That's awesome. That means that I still have about 5 more weeks to level up in Cyberpunk 2077's expansion!"</p> <p>"Meh. I can just cram every essay into the last week of school--just like I did in high school--and will easily handle this class."</p> <p>"This class doesn't matter for my future career anyway."</p>
Toxic negative-mindset	<p>"All of my classes suck. I should just drop out of college, altogether. I am dumb for even thinking I belong here."</p> <p>"This teacher's expectations in terms of work are insane. They are a sociopath."</p> <p>"This teacher personally designed the class to torture us and</p>

	seems to enjoy making the content as difficult as possible."
Toxic positive-mindset	<p>"That's fine. I didn't do four essays, but if I just do one, I can still pass. The teacher in high school said if I did one essay, I could still graduate."</p> <p>"No big deal. I can always rip a couple of one-pagers off of ChatGPT and it'll work out. I can add some fluff and pass."</p>
Objective realist, with too many responsibilities / health issues / family issues and who might not be able to catch up (Mindset)	<p>"At the end of the day, ____ class is more important for my major. I might need to take a 'W' in this one and focus more on that other class. I might retake this one in Summer School, when I can focus more on just one subject at a time."</p> <p>"At the end of the day, my health is more important than this class, and I can always retake it next semester. I am unwilling to sacrifice my health over a class."</p> <p>"My relative's life is more important than academics. Academics isn't a race. I'll re-enroll again."</p> <p>"Work allows me to pay for rent. At this time, it's more important for me to prioritize work. And my boss is kind of insane, threatening to fire me if I bail."</p>
Objective realist, who can still potentially catch up (Mindset)	<p>"Welp. 4 essays are a lot. I should probably grind out essay one first--ASAP-- just to prove that it's not so bad and do my best on it within the given timeframe. I am going to ask the instructor to help me with an outline, then I'm going immediately to Study Hub to have them check my outline. Work is genuinely very tough, but I've been neglecting English class a bit much"</p> <p>"I'm going to reserve every Monday and Wednesday towards working on each essay, and then, during my break, I am going to electronically send my essays to a Hub tutor. I'm going to ask my teacher to take a quick look at them and tell me the top three things to improve. And then I will be able to catch up before it becomes too late. During the week, I will spend all of my time at Study Hub until I bash out my essay(s)."</p>

Further Reading

<https://medium.com/mind-cafe/how-to-be-an-optimistic-realist-like-a-stoic-philosopher-bea73f63ef9c#:~:text=Being%20an%20optimistic%20realist%20means,may%20be%20happening%20around%20you.>

Critical Questions:

Which mindset cluster do you tend to fall into? Can you explain why you default into that cluster? Perhaps you don't subscribe to any of these mindsets. How might you describe your own mindset?

If you have done poorly in English class or other classes, how does that experience mirror the mindset cluster depicted above? Does repeated failure impact mindset? How does repeated success impact mindset?

What happens when the instructor is indeed a certain "extreme" way (overly hostile/strict/demanding) and is unreasonable? Do you adapt or just accept how the situation is? Do you immediately drop the course or do you learn how to adapt to the teacher's style?