



POSITIVE THINKING

“Positive thinking” is often misunderstood, having become associated with empty-headed slogans and trite clichés. As a result, many people disregard its power. Psychologists, however, endorse the idea that our thoughts shape our actions, so it is very important to make sure your thoughts aren’t undermining your hard work. Here are some strategies to help keep your thinking positive.

Strategy #1: Stop Negative Thoughts

This approach is dedicated to a single goal: squash negative thoughts! There is no attempt to scrutinize attitudes or explore beliefs. When an unhelpful notion enters your mind, stop thinking it. It’s a pretty simple idea. Of course, “simple” isn’t the same as “easy,” and this takes some work. But it can be done. Possible methods include

- Mentally tell yourself, “Stop!” when you begin to indulge a negative thought. Don’t rationalize, don’t analyze, don’t even try to correct the thought. *Just shut it down.*
- Find a different key word that is meaningful to you. You might try “no,” “scat,” “out,” or “get thee gone!” The plan is to find a command that speaks to you so strongly that it has the effect of stopping the negative thought cold.
- Some people say the word out loud. (Effective, but not recommended in every setting!)
- Wear a rubber band around your wrist. Snap it against your wrist whenever you have a negative thought.

Strategy #2: Cultivate Positive Thoughts

This requires time and effort in advance, but it’s well worth the work. The goal is to identify your best qualities and most reliable resources and dwell on them. Deliberately focus your energy on these things. Write positive thoughts down so you won’t forget. Put them on sticky notes around your home, in your books, or in your shoes! Constantly remind yourself of your strengths and your value.

Here are four guidelines as you begin to brainstorm for these positive thoughts:

1. Think about character traits, skills, past achievements, and meaningful relationships. All of these point to your competence and your worth.
2. Emphasize your present situation and accomplishments. Don’t list dreams and future aspirations, because they aren’t proven yet. Stay focused on what is definite.
3. It’s important to identify qualities and achievements that realistically apply to you. Don’t lie to yourself, because you’ll always know better, and then you’ll grow to disbelieve the truth.
4. Avoid clichés. You want to highlight positive features about yourself, but trite, fluffy phrases could be about anybody. They will feel less real when you say them.

Some positive examples include:

- I’ve done hard things in the past, and I can do them now.
- I enjoy college.
- People come to me for advice.
- My family understands that this is important to me.
- I can do square roots.
- I keep up with all of my assignments.

Take some time now to think about your skills, accomplishments, and resources. Write them below. After this exercise, it would also be helpful to talk with people close to you and ask for their perspectives. You might be surprised by what they admire about you!

Strategy #3: Replace Negative Thoughts with Positive Ones

This method builds on the previous two strategies. The first step is to stop the kind of thinking that is hurting you; then, move on to evaluate the thought. Finally, you replace it with a positive idea.

For example, say you've been struggling in your math course with word problems. Then, you come to one on your test and discover yourself saying, "I stink at math!" The following process can help:

1. Stop the Negative Thought
 - Say, "Hold on."
 - Don't repeat the negative, unproductive words that can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy.
2. Evaluate the Truth of the Thought
 - Ask yourself, "What are my overall grades?" or "Am I saying I can't add $2 + 2$?" or "Do I struggle with all math skills or is this one task particularly challenging?"
 - Learn from the negative statement. In this case, you are being reminded to pay more attention to the word problems on the test.
 - Accept the truth of the challenge that faces you, but *don't overreact*. Difficulty with word problems is not the same as stinking in math. Also, just because they were hard for you when you first did them in class doesn't mean you can't correctly solve word problems on the test in front of you at that moment.
3. Coach Yourself
 - Remind yourself of the reality: "I've had trouble with word problems, not math in general. I've done alright with math up to this point. We've covered all of this in class, and I've worked dozens of them correctly in my homework."
 - Recall your strengths: "I work hard. I've come a long way so far. I am a logical person. I can do hard things."
 - Encourage yourself: "This is hard for me, yes; but, there is no reason I can't get it right this time. I can figure this out."
 - Keep things in perspective: "If I don't get this problem right, it's not the end of the world. Even if I fail this test, my future will not be determined by it."
4. Replace the Negative Thought
 - Try saying something like, "I've learned how to do this, and I'm going to give it my best."

<p>Would you like to learn more?</p> <p>If you would like to explore how your attitudes may be affecting your actions, a Counselor is available to meet with you. Call 704-330-6433 to schedule an appointment.</p>
