

Unit 8 Academic reading

The science of optimism

Learning aims

- **topic: optimism and pessimism**
- **skills: note taking**
- **critical thinking: recognizing two sides of an argument**

1 This exercise aims to check students' understanding of two key words from the reading text and to generate interest in the topic. Discuss question one together first if you think the students are not familiar with these words. Once the meaning of *optimism* and *pessimism* has been checked, help students with the pronunciation of the words, as they will be actively used during the lesson.

Ask students to discuss questions 2–4 with their partner. In feedback, check students have understood the meaning of the two expressions (glass half full/empty, and rose-tinted glasses) and discuss any similar phrases in their first language if appropriate.

ANSWERS

good, bad (or their synonyms)

2 Tell students that they are going to read an article called *The science of optimism*. In this exercise they need to match the five paragraphs of the text to statements 1–5. These statements describe the key idea of the paragraph. Ask students to read through the statements first, and help them with any vocabulary that they are unsure of in the statements. Set them a time limit to read the article (approximately five or six minutes) in order to encourage them to read quickly. At the end of the time limit, ask students to check their answers in their pairs or groups and then check answers with the whole class.

ANSWERS

1 D 2 A 3 E 4 B 5 C

3 Elicit from students what they already know about note taking, and what methods they currently use. Then ask them to read through the suggestions in the Skills focus box.

Tell students that they are going to focus on two paragraphs from the article, B and C. To do this exercise they first need to look at the two sets of notes carefully and decide what kind of information is missing. Point out that the headings in B can help them decide what kind of information is missing and the arrows in C can help them follow the connections between the ideas in the paragraph. Then they need to read

paragraphs B and C carefully to find one or two words to fill each gap.

ANSWERS

1 neuroscientist 2 neural circuit
3 emotional 4 first-hand
5 questionnaire 6 positive 7 amygdala
8 memory or decision-making 9 past
10 negative 11 optimistic

4 Ask students to talk together about which style of notes they prefer and why. Elicit from students that the layout in C is useful for steps in a sequence or stages in a process – arrows can help to highlight the connections between stages/steps.

5 Students can now practise making their own notes on Paragraphs D and E (or just one of them if time is short). Remind students that there is not one correct answer, but they do need to note key points and organize the information in such a way that it is easy to look back at the key points later. When they have finished they should compare with their partner and discuss the differences in their note taking.

EXAMPLE ANSWER

Results

Future happy events:

Rated more positively than neg. ones

Would happen sooner than neg. ones

Saw from a first-hand point of view

→ The optimism bias (= belief that the future will be better than past & present)

Useful → motivates us to achieve our goals

→ stops us from worrying

→ lowers our stress levels

→ improves physical health (e.g. patients took more supplements, healthier diet, more exercise, ↓ risk)

Depression: assoc. with pessimism – can't view future in detail

Circuit connecting RACC & amygdala is faulty → can't downplay neg. exp. when thinking about future

6 The aim of this exercise is to focus students on the language the writer of the text uses in Paragraph D to show that there are two sides to being optimistic – positive and negative. A possible way to introduce this idea is to give the students an example with a structure they are familiar with, e.g. although he was an optimistic person, he sometimes doubted his decision (*although* highlights the contrast). Students need to read the article and find two phrases where the

writer expresses possible downsides to being optimistic.

ANSWERS

Seeing the future through rose-tinted glasses may be a bit naïve, but it's also useful. While extreme optimism can lead us to harm by underestimating risks, paying too much attention to negative predictions can impact badly on our daily lives.

7 This question asks students to analyse some of the language used in each sentence.

ANSWERS

linkers: *but, while*

modals: *may, can*

Modal verbs are a feature of academic writing – they help the writer to distance themselves from the statement. The modal verbs show that these things are a possibility, not a certainty.

8 Ask students to discuss in small groups why they think people in general tend to be optimistic, and some of the problems that being too optimistic can lead to. They can use ideas from the text or their own ideas. Get feedback at the end on interesting ideas.