

Say “No!” to the Three P’s!

Choose any of the situations below. Think about how a pessimist vs. an optimist will respond.

To what do you attribute the cause?	Is it personal?	Is it pervasive?	Is it permanent?
Optimist	It is not because of something innate with me.	This is only for this specific instance (situation).	This is temporary. Tomorrow is another day.
Pessimist	It is because of me or a quality of myself that I cannot change.	This will happen over and over again, in every situation or any set of conditions.	Things will not change.

You may choose any of the situations below or create your own!

Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3
You gave a lackluster report/presentation at the staff meeting.	The parent meeting was horrible. No action plan was generated.	The lesson on fractions didn’t go very well. Students yawned all throughout.

Discuss the *explanatory style* of a pessimist vs. an optimist.



EXPLANATORY STYLES

Martin Seligman, one of the **cofounders of Positive Psychology**, described explanatory style as “*the manner in which you habitually explain to yourself why events happen*” (Seligman, 1990). In other words, they are the little stories we tell ourselves to make sense of our life. The three defining characteristics (also known as the “3Ps”) of an explanatory style are:

1. **Permanence**: relates to the perception of time. Events are perceived as permanent or temporary.
2. **Pervasiveness**: relates to the perception of space. Events are perceived as global or specific.
3. **Personalization**: relates to the perception of causality. Events are internally or externally caused.

The mechanics of optimistic & pessimistic talk

The key to recognizing the type of explanatory styles lies in using the 3Ps to examine the way “good” or “bad” events are described. **Optimism** assumes that good things are permanent, pervasive and internal. Bad things are seen as temporary, specific and externally caused. Pessimism is the reverse of this logic, as shown in the table below (Peterson, 2006):

	Good Situation	Bad Situation
Optimist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permanent• Pervasive• Personal (internal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Temporary• Specific• External cause
Pessimist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Temporary• Specific• External cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permanent• Pervasive• Personal (internal)

Source: Positive Psychology Program (2016). <https://positivepsychologyprogram/>