

Welcome to

**Training Module 1:  
Attribution  
Blaming and Taking Credit**

05/10 B

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# Attribution: Blaming and taking credit

Attribution = working out causes for events.  
(e.g. blaming ourselves/others or giving or taking credit for things that happen)

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We often overlook the idea that the same event can have very different causes.

**What causes could have contributed to the following situation?**

A good friend didn't call you on your birthday.

# Explanations

Why did your friend not call you?

Possible causes for this behaviour...

???

# Explanations

Why did your friend not call you?

Possible causes for this behaviour...

- I'm not important to her. If it were someone else she wouldn't have forgotten.
- She's a very disorganised woman and might even forget about her own birthday.
- She has an important exam to pass and no time for anything else.

# Explanations

Why did your friend not call you?

Possible causes for this behaviour...

...myself

I'm not important enough.

...others

She's disorganised.

...a situation or  
chance

She has an exam to pass  
and no time.

# Blaming and Taking Credit

As the example shows, events can have many different causes.

In most cases, several factors contribute to a situation.

Nevertheless, many people have a preference for one aspect (e.g. blaming others instead of oneself or opposite).

"You're discharged from hospital almost symptom-free."

Emergency room

## Reasons...

...myself

...others

...a situation or chance

“You’re discharged from hospital almost symptom-free.”

Emergency room

## Explanations...

### ... myself:

*(can be changed to some extent)*

- The recovery process was successful because I was highly motivated.
- I insisted on certain treatment options, which played a major part in me getting well.  
*(more difficult to change)*
- I think I would have recovered anyway without therapy or drugs.
- Recovery was due to my *excellent genes*.

### ... others:

- The medical staff in this hospital is highly competent.
- Without my family, it wouldn’t have been such a success.

### ... A situation or chance:

- I was fortunate that the hospital staff wasn’t as busy as usual.
- The recovery was due to the medication I took.

“You’re discharged from hospital almost symptom-free.”

Emergency room

## Explanations...

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*(can be changed to some extent)*

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- I was fortunate that the hospital staff wasn’t as busy as usual.
- The recovery was due to the medication I took.

Caution: one-sided explanations!

“You’re discharged from hospital almost symptom-free.”

Emergency room

Now, please come up with some answers that involve a variety of causes (i.e., others, the situation & myself)

???

???

???

“You’re discharged from hospital almost symptom-free.”

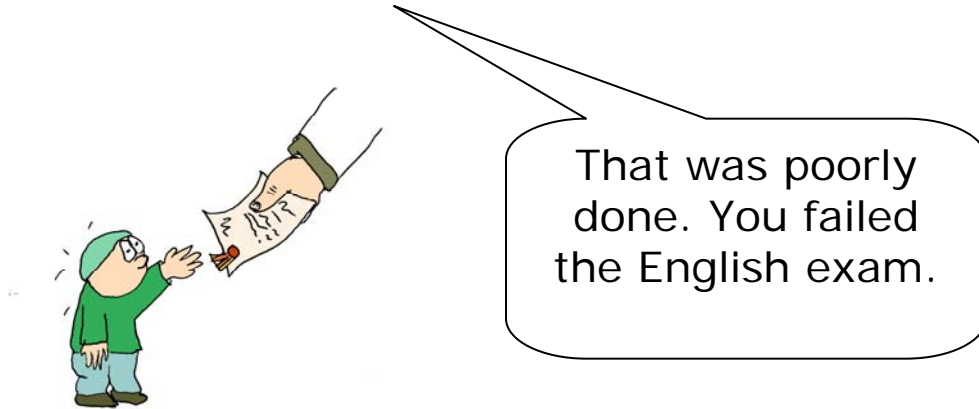
Emergency room

Now, please come up with some answers that involve a variety of causes (i.e., others, the situation & myself)

- “The support of my family, the doctors, and the medication have all contributed to the recovery process. Last but not least, some of the success can be attributed to myself because I was highly motivated, and I actively participated in the treatment process.”
- “I was motivated to change, and I asked to participate in a specific group therapy that was well-conducted by the therapists.”



# Effects of certain attributional styles on negative events!



## **Self Attribution**

(e.g. "I should have studied harder!")

**Disadvantage: ???**

**Advantage: ???**

## **Others/Situational Attribution**

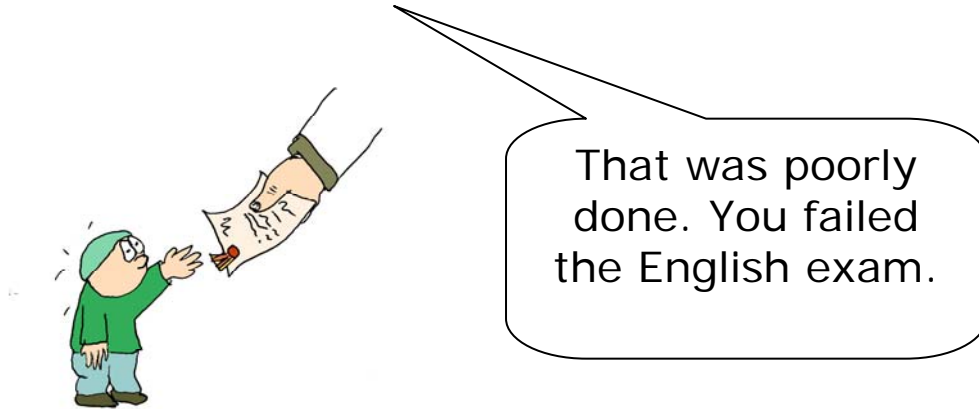
(e.g. "The teacher is a moron and hates me.")

**Disadvantage: ???**

**Advantage: ???**



# Effects of certain attributional styles on negative events!



## **Self Attribution**

(e.g. "I should have studied harder!")

**Disadvantage:** reduces self-confidence

**Advantage:** regarded as noble to take responsibility

## **Others/Situational Attribution**

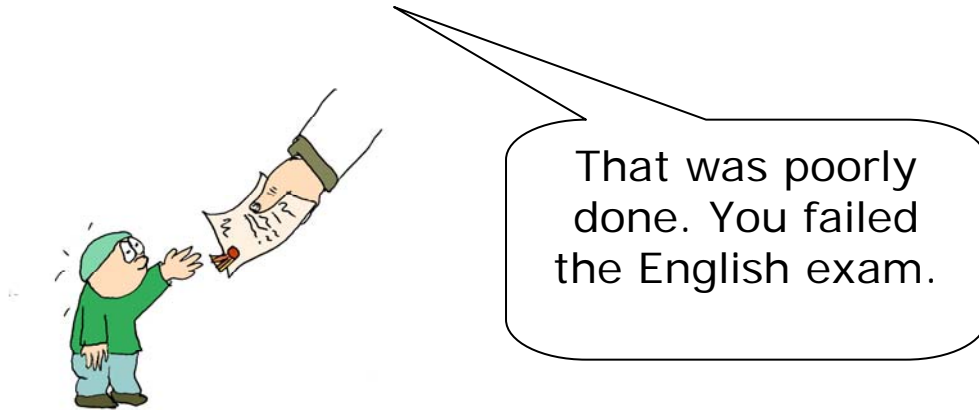
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**Disadvantage:** ???

**Advantage:** ???



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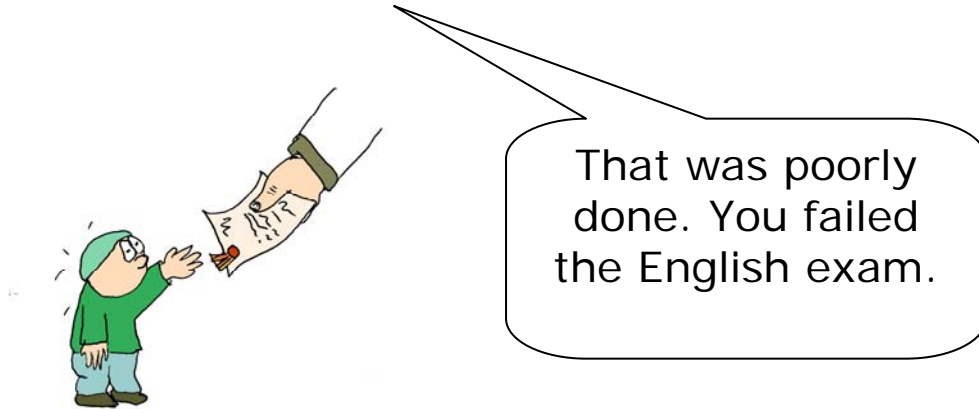
(e.g. "The teacher is a moron and hates me.")

**Disadvantage:** pushing the responsibility onto others is considered impolite (taking the easy way out)

**Advantage:** self-confidence is not threatened



# Effects of certain attributional styles on negative events!



More balanced responses (i.e. combining influences from self, others, and situation; offer different explanations):

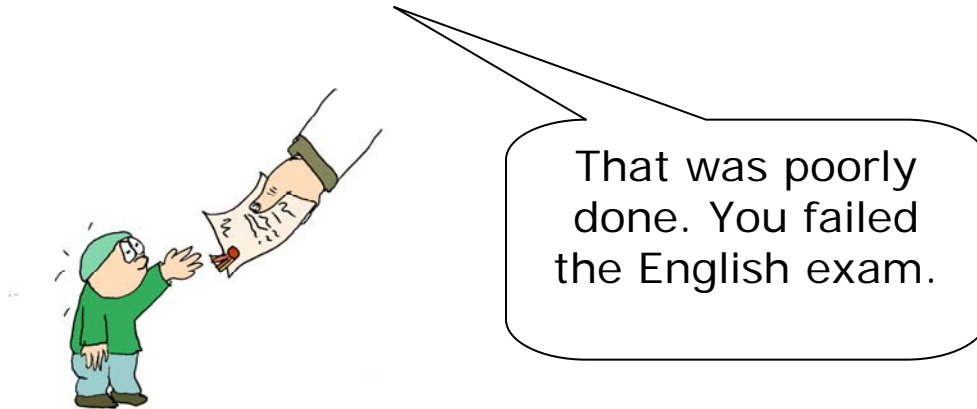
???

???

???



# Effects of certain attributional styles on negative events!



More balanced responses (i.e. combining influences from self, others, and situation; offer different explanations):

"I'm not used to that kind of exam; I'll be better prepared next time."

"I should improve my relationship with the teacher. He wouldn't fail me out of pure resentment anyway."



# Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



## **Self Attribution**

(e.g. "This was an excellent individual piece of work.")

**Disadvantage: ???**

**Advantage: ???**

## **Others/Situational Attribution**

(e.g. "Anybody could have scored from there.")

**Disadvantage: ???**

**Advantage: ???**



# Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



## Self Attribution

(e.g. "This was an excellent individual piece of work.")

**Disadvantage:** self-praise is arrogant

**Advantage:** increases self-confidence

## Others/Situational Attribution

(e.g. "Anybody could have scored from there.")

**Disadvantage:** ???

**Advantage:** ???



# Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



## Self Attribution

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**Disadvantage:** self-praise is arrogant

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## Others/Situational Attribution

(e.g. "Anybody could have scored from there.")

**Disadvantage:** self-confidence is decreased by playing down one's achievements

**Advantage:** You are deemed to be modest, and a team player



# Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



More balanced responses (i.e. combining influences from self, others, and situation; offer different explanations):

???

???

???



# Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



More balanced responses (i.e. combining influences from self, others, and situation; offer different explanations):

"I'm very proud, but Steve's contribution was awesome, too."

"That's my job, but it was hard to score from that angle."

"Thanks a lot. It's going very well at the moment."

# Why are we doing this?

Studies show that many people with **depression** [*but not all!*]:

- tend to blame themselves for failures
- tend to give other people or circumstances credit for any successes

**This can lead to low self-esteem!**

# Why are we doing this?

Studies show that many people with **delusions** [*but not all!*]:

- tend to blame other people for negative events and failures
- tend to think that all events are beyond their own control

**The first attributional style in particular may lead to interpersonal problems!**

# How one-sided attributions promote misinterpretations during psychosis - examples

Event	Explanation during psychosis	Other explanations
A friend doesn't say hello.	Your friend doesn't want to know you anymore and is ashamed of you.	Your friend is worried; simply did not notice you.
You failed your exam.	The examiner wants to ruin your career.	Perhaps the examiner was strict, but insufficient preparation and lack of sleep are also possible causes.
Important documents were lost in your flat.	Someone has broken into your house and stolen the documents to harm you.	The documents were accidentally misplaced.

# Attributional Style

## Goal of today's session:

- Consider different possible causes of events
- Don't rush into accepting only one explanation
- Discuss the consequences of certain attributions

We should try to be as realistic as possible in our everyday life:

We should not always blame others for our failures, nor should we always blame ourselves when things go wrong.

# A friend is talking about you behind your back.

What caused your friend to talk about you behind your back?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



# You are invited to a job interview.

Why have you been invited to this interview?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



A friend is unpleasantly surprised by your unexpected visit.

What caused your friend to be unpleasantly surprised?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



# Other people laugh while you are talking.

What caused other people to laugh while you were talking?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



"An inner voice tells you that you are no good."



## Reasons...

...yourself

...others

...situation/circumstances

“An inner voice tells you that you are no good.”



## Reasons...

### ... yourself:

- “Unfortunately, I constantly blame myself. This seems to be some kind of hidden self-hate.”
- “I am going insane.”
- “It seems *as if* someone else is thinking. But I do know that these are my own thoughts.”

### ... others:

- “Something got implanted into my brain.”
- “I don’t know how this could happen, but someone took control of my thoughts.”

### ... Situation/circumstances:

- “I am feeling stressed these days. That is why I experience everything more intensely, including my thoughts.”
- “My ears are ringing from listening to loud music.”

“An inner voice tells you that you are no good.”



## **Psychosis: the inner voice is attributed to other persons/powers:**

- “Something got implanted into my brain.”
- “I don’t know how this could happen, but someone took control of my thoughts.”

# Hearing voices

## Own thoughts or remote-controlled?

### Pros and cons



<b>Why do you think the voices are inserted from outside?</b>	<b>Are there perhaps other explanations for the assumptions expressed on the left side?</b>
"I can hear it clearly. In contrast, my thoughts are completely silent!"	???
"These thoughts are not under my control. When I try to counteract it, it gets worse. That shows me that someone really wants to put me down."	???
"I would never have such evil thoughts. I could never do any harm to anyone. But still, I constantly have these aggressive thoughts."	???

# Hearing voices

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<p>"I can hear it clearly. In contrast, my thoughts are completely silent!"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approximately 15-20% of the normal population hear such voices from time to time</li><li>• Intense thoughts are sometimes almost audible (catchy tunes, ruminating, hearing a friend's voice while reading his or her e-mail).</li></ul>
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# Hearing voices

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<p>"I would never have such evil thoughts. I could never do any harm to anyone. But still, I constantly have these aggressive thoughts."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We often have thoughts that are opposite to our usual way of thinking. Thoughts do not equal action! 20% of the normal population have passing thoughts about committing suicide, but they don't do it. Even when it comes to people we love, we sometimes feel aggression (e.g. a mother and her crying child).</li> </ul>

# Hearing voices

## Own thoughts or remote-controlled?

### Pros and cons



The explanation that strange thoughts are somehow being controlled remotely raises a lot more questions than it answers, e.g.:

- Is it technically feasible?
- When and where did the implantation take place?
- Who would be interested in harming you? Who would have the time and money to do so?
- There are easier ways of harming someone. Why should such a complex (perhaps impossible) method be chosen?

# A friend gave you a lift home.

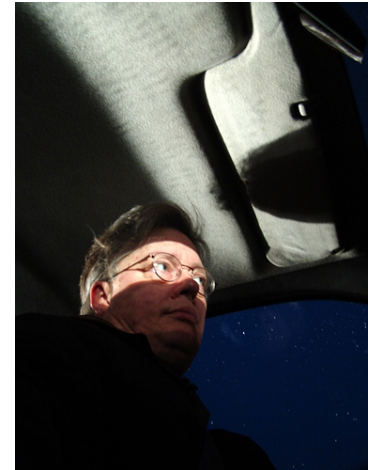
What caused your friend to drive you home?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



# A friend didn't show up to a meeting with you.

What caused your friend not to turn up?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



# A friend didn't send you a postcard.

What caused your friend not to send you a postcard.

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



A car has been driving behind you for half an hour.

What caused the car to drive behind you?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



The bus you wanted to catch is leaving right in front of you.

Why didn't you get the bus?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



# A neighbour invited you for a drink.

What caused your neighbour to invite you for a drink?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



For quite some time, a man has been reading the newspaper in front of your door.

What caused the man to read the newspaper in front of your door?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



# A friend thinks you are unfair.

What caused your friend to think you are unfair?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



# A friend thinks you are smart.

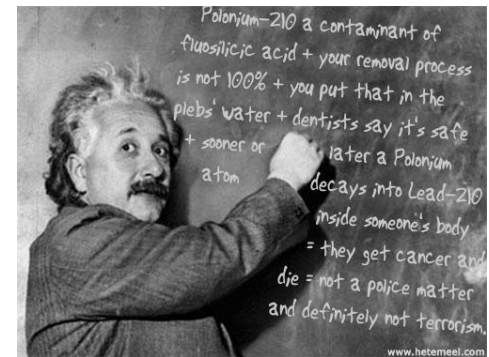
What caused your friend to make this judgment?

What is the main reason for this event?

**Yourself?**

**Another person or other people?**

**Circumstances or chance?**



## Transfer to everyday life

### **Learning objectives:**

- Always consider different factors that could have contributed to the outcome of an event (i.e. yourself/others/circumstances).

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- Always consider different factors that could have contributed to the outcome of an event (i.e. yourself/others/circumstances).
- We should try to be as realistic as possible in everyday life:  
It's not justified to *always* put the blame on others, just as it is not *always* our fault when things go wrong.

## Transfer to everyday life

### **Learning objectives:**

- Always consider different factors that could have contributed to the outcome of an event (i.e. yourself/others/circumstances).
- We should try to be as realistic as possible in everyday life:  
It's not justified to *always* put the blame on others, just as it is not *always* our fault when things go wrong.
- Usually, many factors contribute to an event.

# What does this have to do with psychosis?

Many people with psychosis tend to explain complex events with one single reason only. Sometimes, other people alone are blamed for one's failure.

**Example 1:** Edward gets a phone call. An automated phone voice asks him about his consumer habits.

**Own belief:** His landlord is spying on him to get him out of his apartment.

**Alternative explanation:** The call came from a market research company, which picked him randomly. Edward has never had any conflict with his landlord. There is no reason for his belief that his landlord is trying to remove him from his apartment, because Edward is an ordinary man who always pays his rent on time.

# What does this have to do with psychosis?

Sometimes, other people carry *partial* responsibility, but other important factors have to be acknowledged as well.

**Example II:** Anna relapses into psychosis!

**Own belief:** Relapse was caused by memories re-awakened when she bumped into her ex-husband on the street. They quarrelled a lot during their marriage.

**Additional factors:** This could be one possible reason, but there are additional factors: Anna stopped taking medication. She has had problems at her workplace and worries that she may lose her job.

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your attention!

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The Jamoker	flickr	Missed The Bus	CC	Bus passing by/Der Bus fährt weg
*MarS	flickr	wine II	CC	A neighbour invited you for a drink (Glass of white wine)/Nachbar hat sie auf ein Gläschen eingeladen (Glas m. Weisswein)
heater	flickr	Commute (reading gang signs)	CC	Reading the newspaper/Zeitungsleser
Katrin Ze.	fotocommunity	enttäuscht	CC	A friend thinks you are unfair/Ein Freund findet sie unfair (in der Ecke kauernde Frau)
judge mental	flickr	The Fluoride uncertainty Theory	CC	A friend thinks you are smart (Albert Einstein)/ Ein Freund findet sie klug (Einstein)

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