

Burkeman Sample Essay #10

In the article “The Benefits of “Negative Visualization” by Oliver Burkeman, we get to understand an interesting aspect of the human mind—its desire for a better future. Everyone can agree that they want to improve themselves throughout their lives. How we imagine our future is the primary subject of the article. In the essay, Burkeman discusses the two ways human minds think of the future. The first, positive visualization, is the idea that if you imagine your success and are optimistic about everything, life will be better and you will be more successful. The second mindset, negative visualization, focuses more on facing worst case scenarios and accepting the possibility of failure. The author states that negative visualization is a much better mechanism of achieving happiness. It creates a much greater appreciation of what we already have because we recognize the possibility of losing it all, and it diminishes our anxiety by helping understand that the worst possible outcome will most likely never occur. His reasoning for why positive visualization is the worse mindset is that it oftentimes leads to disappointment because we imagine an ideal outcome and achieve a less ideal result. It also creates an anxiety that grows because of the possibility of failure. Overall, Burkeman believes positive visualization leads to a weaker sense of happiness while negative visualization creates a deeper appreciation of what we already have.

I agree with the author to a certain extent. It is important to be able to accept the possibility of failure. The greatest things in life all have a chance of failing that we must accept. If I was too afraid of not making it into any of the UC's I applied to, there could have been a possibility of me not even applying. Never accepting and embracing the possibility of failure could've lead me to disappointment and regret, both of which are major instigators of sadness and depression within humans. That is very far from happiness. Another major point that I agree with is that negative visualization helps us avoid “hedonic adaptation”; our desire for more leading us to ignore what we have that makes us happy. The possibility of losing what we love will help us grow a greater appreciation for it. I think about this every time I hear someone complain about slow internet, traffic jams, or strict parents. The people who make these complaints don't understand how lucky they are. I've been to places in both Mexico and the US where phones, cars, and even having two parents is not common. These experiences give me a much greater appreciation of my current situation. I have a family, friends, a home, food, and I'm going to college. Knowing I could be in a much worse situation helps me and many others avoid the hedonic adaptation the author discusses.

I don't completely agree with positive visualization being worse though. I believe it complements negative visualization well. It's good to be realistic about the future, but being optimistic is also very important. I recently had the honor of listening to a female

Stanford graduate speak about her struggles throughout her life. She came from Mexico when she was 10. Her parents constantly told her to ignore her studies even though she didn't want to. She moved out at 15 because of this. She worked two jobs, took every AP class possible, joined every sport she could, and worked hard. She constantly had people telling her she was bound to fail, but she achieved her dream. She told us about how her desire for a better future and her fear of ending up like her parents drove her to her success.

I agree that we need to be realistic about life and failure, but hoping for and imagining a better future isn't necessarily something that should be avoided. We should all strive for balance in every aspect of our lives, and this is no exception.

SCORE: This essay received a score of 5.

RUBRIC LANGUAGE: A 5 paper is clearly thoughtful and competent. The response consistently relies on effective examples that are carefully developed. All parts of a 5 paper will be on topic, though the overall response will not be as accomplished or elaborated upon as a 6 paper. A 5 paper often has a less fluent and complex style than a 6 paper, but it does show a clear control over word choice and sentence variety while coherently observing the conventions of written English.

COMMENTARY: Essay 10, which demonstrates purposeful control of language, starts with an extended and articulate explanation of Burkeman's ideas and then argues that it's good to accept the possibility of failure. The paper analyzes this point in relationship to applying to UC campuses, and states that if the possibility of failure were impossible to even consider, there might never have been any applications in the first place. The essay also agrees with Burkeman's view that negative visualization works as an aid to counteract hedonic adaptation. This is supported by the writer's recognition of how much worse off so many people are, which makes the writer aware of the value of looking at the negative possibilities to appreciate what a person actually has. Moreover, the paper also discusses some value in positive visualization through an extended example of hearing a presentation by a Stanford graduate who had overcome many obstacles by envisioning success, as opposed to not envisioning success: *"She came from Mexico when she was 10. Her parents constantly told her to ignore her studies even though she didn't want to. She moved out at 15 because of this. She worked two jobs, took every AP class possible, joined every sport she could, and worked hard."*