

Attitude Activity 2: Check Ahead, Check Back

“Comparison is the thief of joy.” (Theodore Roosevelt)

The quote above, often attributed to the American president Theodore Roosevelt, suggests that if we compare ourselves to others, we may find ourselves unhappy.

It sounds common sense. Except perhaps it isn't always the case; it's true that sometimes we can make ourselves miserable by comparing ourselves to people we think have it better than us, but at other times we can actually make ourselves feel better by comparing ourselves to those in less fortunate positions... including our previous selves, or previous generations.

Consider this:

In the lottery of birth you got a winning ticket.

- 1. You've been brought up in a country free from war or geological disaster. You don't have to worry about famine, conflict or persecution.*
- 2. What's more, you're born in the 21st century. There's clean water, food, warmth and shelter. There are rights and freedoms your grandparents could only have dreamed of. Plus 24-hour internet access.*
- 3. And you're a successful learner with a healthy and developing brain. You can read, write, pass high-stakes exams, absorb new information, follow your country's breakneck 24-hour news cycle, swim, maybe even drive or ride a bike, master tricky computer games, build flatpack furniture, cook a little bit, maybe skateboard, dance, use a Macbook Pro...*

Having read that, hopefully you're feeling just a little bit better! When it's well-used, comparison can be good. We just have to be careful about when it's best to:

Check Ahead (seeing what's on the road ahead; the challenges we've still to face, the people we think might be further along than us,) or

Check Back (by reminding ourselves how far we've come, considering how lucky we are and what progress we've made.)

It's well worth assessing your current state of mind, then choosing which column you might explore in more detail...

Check Ahead	Check Back
Best done when: you're feeling stable and confident, you're optimistic and ready for a challenge	Best done when: you're feeling like you've struggled through a few setbacks and you're doubting your ability
Questions you might ask yourself: What three challenges are coming up soon? What do I need to be ready for? Who is ahead of me at the moment? What is one thing they are better at than me? What technique could I learn by looking at how they do things? What qualities or characteristics have they got that I would like to cultivate? How do they approach their work?	Questions you might ask yourself: What has been the hardest thing I've achieved so far? If I had to choose three things I'm proud of myself for, what would they be? What didn't I know a month ago? A term ago? A year ago?that I know now? What couldn't I do in year 11 that I've mastered now?

	Who is less fortunate than me... and what might I do to help them?
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Healthy comparison is about knowing what you need, psychologically.

- Some days, we need the reassurance and comfort of checking back and seeing everything we've achieved and how far we've come.
- Other days, we might need a wake-up call; a moment where we get ready for and enthusiastic about the hard work ahead.

Try this activity if you feel in need of either!

Check Ahead..... (Use the box below to add your response to the Check Ahead questions)

Check Back..... (Use the box below to add your response to the Check Back questions)