

## Good news at last: the world isn't as horrific as you think

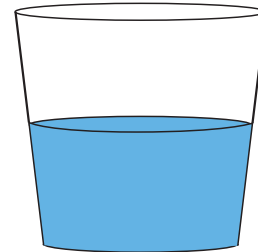
### Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

Is the glass half full or half empty?

Cross out the incorrect answer in each sentence.

1. People who are positive say that the glass is **half full / half empty**.
2. People who are negative say that the glass is **half full / half empty**.



Is there a similar expression in your language?

#### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then, find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

the media    instincts    corruption    life expectancy    resources    vaccinated

1. dishonest or illegal behaviour by people in power, especially when they take money for doing things for someone \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
2. things such as coal, trees and oil that exist in nature and can be used by people \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
3. radio, television, newspapers, the internet and magazines \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
4. given an injection to stop you from getting an illness or disease \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
5. the length of time that someone will probably live \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
6. when you naturally behave in a particular way without knowing why, because you were born that way \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)

mental peace    heartless    endangered species    poverty    source    rise

7. something that provides information for journalists and reporters \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
8. get bigger in size or number \_\_\_\_\_ (para 5)
9. a type of animal or plant that may soon no longer exist \_\_\_\_\_ (para 5)
10. when someone does not have enough money to pay for their basic needs such as food \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
11. showing no sympathy or kindness \_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)
12. a calm quiet feeling you have in your mind when you are not annoyed or worried \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)

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#### Good news at last: the world isn't as horrific as you think

Hans Rosling

11 April, 2018

- 1 Things are bad and it feels like they are getting worse, doesn't it? War, violence, natural disasters, corruption. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer; and we will soon run out of resources. That's the picture most people in the West get from the media.
- 2 I call it the overdramatic worldview. It's stressful and incorrect. In fact, most of the people in the world are somewhere in the middle – neither very rich nor very poor. Their girls go to school; their children are vaccinated. Step by step, year by year, the world is improving. In the past two centuries, life expectancy has more than doubled. The world has many problems but in many ways, it has become better.
- 3 The overdramatic worldview comes from the way our brains work. We still have the instincts that helped us survive in small groups of hunters and gatherers.
- 4 We want sugar and fat, which our bodies needed for energy when there was not much food. But today, we eat too much of these things. In the same way, we are interested in gossip and dramatic stories, which used to be the only source of news and useful information. This need for drama helps create an overdramatic worldview. We need to learn to control our drama intake.
- 5 It is true that there are many bad things in this world. The number of deaths during wars has been reducing since the Second World War but the Syrian war has made this number rise again. Terrorism is rising, too. The list of endangered species is getting longer.
- 6 It is easy to hear about all the bad things happening in the world but it's harder to know about the good things. Good things happen slowly. Over the past 20 years, the number of people living in extreme poverty has almost halved. But in most countries, fewer than 10% of people know this.
- 7 Our instinct to notice bad news more than good news comes from three things: we remember the past incorrectly; journalists report the bad news, not the good; and we feel that when things are bad, it's heartless to say they are getting better.
- 8 For hundreds of years, older people have said that things used to be better. But that's not true. Most things used to be worse.
- 9 Stories about slow improvements are not usually big news stories even when they affect millions of people. And because of the internet, we hear about more disasters than ever before. In the United States, the number of violent crimes has been reducing since 1990. But most people believe that violent crime is getting worse.
- 10 How can we help our brains to realize that things are getting better? Think of the world as a very sick little baby in hospital. After a week, she is improving but she has to stay in hospital because she is still not well enough to go home. Can we say that the baby's situation is improving? Yes. Can we say it is bad? Yes. It's both bad and better. That is how we must think about the world.
- 11 Remember that negative stories are more dramatic than positive ones. When you hear about something terrible, calm yourself and ask: would they write a story about a positive improvement?
- 12 This is "factfulness". Understanding this can bring you mental peace. Like a healthy diet and regular exercise, it should be part of people's daily lives. Practise "factfulness" and you will make better decisions and not be stressed about the wrong things.

Hans Rosling was a Swedish physician, academic and statistician, who died in 2017. This is an edited extract from his book, *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong about the World – and Why Things Are Better Than You Think*, co-written by Ola Rosling and Anna Rosling Rönnlund.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 11/04/18

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#### 3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer to each question.

- 'Factfulness' is ...
  - ... training yourself not to read the news every day.
  - ... training yourself to think carefully about the news so that you get a clearer picture.
- 'Factfulness' can ...
  - ... bring you mental peace and less stress.
  - ... destroy your mental peace and bring you more stress.
- It will help you to ...
  - ... make better decisions.
  - ... use your instincts.
- You should try to ...
  - ... make it part of your daily life.
  - ... practise it once a day.

#### 4 Using the key words

Complete these sentences with some of the key words from task 2.

- News stories that we get from \_\_\_\_\_ often give us a very negative and overdramatic view of the world.
- These news stories make us believe that there is only war, violence, natural disasters, \_\_\_\_\_ and other bad things in the world today.
- We read and hear that the world will soon run out of natural \_\_\_\_\_.
- It is true that the list of \_\_\_\_\_ is getting longer.
- Also, the number of deaths during wars fell after the Second World War but the Syrian war has made the number \_\_\_\_\_ again.
- We are naturally interested in dramatic stories and gossip. In the past, these used to be our only \_\_\_\_\_ of news.
- Sometimes, even though we know things are not all bad, we don't want to say that because it seems \_\_\_\_\_.

#### 5 Putting things into perspective

Use these key words and information from the article to write three positive facts.

- poverty
- vaccinated
- life expectancy

#### 6 Discussion

- Talk about some good things that are happening in the world today. Add facts from articles you have read and news stories you have heard.
- Share your good news with the class.

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#### KEY

##### 1 Warmer

1. half full
2. half empty

##### 2 Key words

1. corruption
2. resources
3. the media
4. vaccinated
5. life expectancy
6. instincts
7. source
8. rise
9. endangered species
10. poverty
11. heartless
12. mental peace

##### 3 Comprehension check

1. b
2. a
3. a
4. a

##### 4 Using the key words

1. the media
2. corruption
3. resources
4. endangered species
5. rise
6. source
7. heartless

##### 5 Putting things into perspective

###### (possible answers)

The vast majority of the world's population are not living in extreme **poverty**.

Most of the children in the world get **vaccinated**.

In the past two hundred years, **life expectancy** has more than doubled.