

Positive Activity Interventions
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This document includes instructions for simple and brief positive activities that have been shown to increase well-being in randomized controlled studies. Following the instructions for each activity are at least two articles that support the efficacy of the activity; the citation list is non-exhaustive. Although other positive activities have also shown success in increasing well-being (e.g., meditation; Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008), the following are the activities that our own laboratory has tested most extensively.

Five Acts of Kindness

In our daily lives, we all perform acts of kindness for others. These acts may be large or small and the person for whom the act is performed may or may not be aware of the act. Examples include helping your parents cook dinner, doing a chore for your sister or brother, helping a friend with homework, visiting an elderly relative, or writing a thank you letter. During one day this week (any day you choose), you are to perform five acts of kindness – all in one day. The acts do not need to be for the same person, the person may or may not be aware of the act, and the act may or may not be similar to the acts listed above. Next week you will report what acts of kindness you chose to perform. Please do not perform any acts that may place yourself or others in danger.

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 111-131.

Layous, K., Nelson, S. K., Oberle, E., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Lyubomirsky, S. (2012) Kindness counts: Prompting prosocial behavior in preadolescents boosts peer acceptance and well-being. *PLoS ONE* 7: e51380. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0051380

Gratitude Letter

Please take a moment to think back over the past several years of your life and remember an instance when someone did something for you for which you are extremely grateful. For example, think of the people – parents, relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, teammates, employers, and so on – who have been especially kind to you but have never heard you express your gratitude. Although you should try to write your letter of gratitude to a new person each week; if you prefer, you can write another letter to the same person you wrote to previously.

Now, for the next 10 minutes, write a letter to one of these individuals. Use the instructions below to help guide you through this process:

1. Use whatever letter format you like, but remember to write as though you are directly addressing the individual you are grateful to. If it is helpful to head the letter “Dear so-and-so,” or end with “Sincerely, XXX,” feel free to do so.
2. Do not worry about perfect grammar and spelling.
3. Describe in specific terms why you are grateful to this individual and how the individual’s behavior affected your life.
4. Describe what you are doing now and how you often remember their efforts.
5. Remember: Anything you write will remain strictly confidential. Although you are welcome to show or give this letter to anyone you please, for the purposes of this study, the letter you write is a private document in which you can express your gratitude freely without intent to deliver it to anyone. Should an experimenter read this entry in the future, it will be identifiable only by a subject number and not by a name.

Boehm, J. K., Lyubomirsky, S., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011a). A longitudinal experimental study comparing the effectiveness of happiness-enhancing strategies in Anglo Americans and Asian Americans. *Cognition & Emotion*, 25, 1263-1272.

Lyubomirsky, S., Dickerhoof, R., Boehm, J. K., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011). Becoming happier takes both a will and a proper way: An experimental longitudinal intervention to boost well-being. *Emotion*, 11, 391-402.

Counting Blessings

There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful about. Think back over the events of the past week and write down on the lines below up to five things that happened for which you are grateful or thankful.

This week I am grateful for:

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 377-389.

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 111-131.

Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist, 60*, 410-421.

Best Possible Self

The next four are variations on a “**Best Possible Self**” intervention in which people write about their best possible future self in different life domains. The four domains below are focused on college students, but the instructions can vary to be more relevant to whoever is using them. For example, we have also asked community-dwelling adults to think 10 years into the future instead of only 3 years.

[BPS Prompt Academic]

Please take a moment to think about your best possible **academic** life during your time in college. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. Perhaps you have successfully chosen a major or concentration that you enjoy and are achieving good grades in all of your classes. Furthermore, perhaps your academic studies challenge you enough to keep you engaged without feeling too overwhelming. Think of this as the realization of the best possible academic life you could ever hope for yourself.

Now, for the next 10 minutes, please write continuously about what you imagined. Use the instructions below to help guide you through this process:

1. Be as creative and imaginative as you desire.
2. Use whatever writing style you please, but remember to imagine your ideal life in the FUTURE (during college).
3. Do not worry about perfect grammar and spelling.
4. Use as much detail as you want.
5. Remember: Anything you write will remain strictly confidential. Should an experimenter read this entry in the future, it will be identifiable only by a subject number and not by a name.

[BPS Prompt Social]

Please take a moment to think about your best possible **social** life during your time in college. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. Perhaps you have developed good relationships with your friends and roommates throughout college. Furthermore, you may have gotten involved with clubs or other extracurricular activities on campus. Think of this as the realization of the best possible social life you could ever hope for yourself.

[BPS Prompt Career]

Please take a moment to think about your best possible **career preparation** during your time in college. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. Perhaps you have been able to obtain a summer job or internship that will help you work towards your future career goals. Furthermore, you may have a job lined up following graduation. Think of this as the realization of the best possible career preparation you could ever hope for yourself.

[BPS Prompt Health]

Please take a moment to think about your best possible **health** during your time in college. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. Perhaps you have maintained a healthy lifestyle throughout college and are in good shape. Furthermore, you may have achieved athletic goals that you have set for yourself. Think of this as the realization of the best possible health you could ever hope for yourself.

Boehm, J. K., Lyubomirsky, S., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011a). A longitudinal experimental study comparing the effectiveness of happiness-enhancing strategies in Anglo Americans and Asian Americans. *Cognition & Emotion*, 25, 1263-1272.

Layous, K., Nelson, S. K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2012). What is the optimal way to deliver a positive activity intervention? The case of writing about one's best possible selves. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1007/s10902-012-9346-2.