

The background is a vibrant teal color. It features several abstract elements: a large teal shape in the top-left corner, a pink shape in the middle-right, and a teal shape in the bottom-right. There are also two clusters of dots, one teal in the top-right and one pink in the bottom-left. Two white, hand-drawn wavy lines are positioned at the top and bottom center of the page.

Beginner's Guide to Happiness

A Positive Journal® Companion

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We can be happier.

The thing is, we've forgotten the basics. Even before the novel Coronavirus pandemic, we'd substituted nourishing (yes, nourishing) human contact for the pings and pokes of our digital screens. We'd already swapped the arc of the sky and the lure of the distant horizon for strips of fluorescent light and breezeblock. We'd taken the joy of physical movement and turned it into a gym-prisoned lycra nightmare that could put anyone off for life.

Sadly, we live in a world that manipulates us. A world that wants to make us unhealthy so we spend on slimming, insecure so we spend on beauty, sad so we spend on entertainment... *do you see a pattern?*

We've been misled.

We need a re-education in the basics of a contented existence. When it comes to happiness, we need to start thinking like beginners.

Some Principles of Happiness (for Beginners)

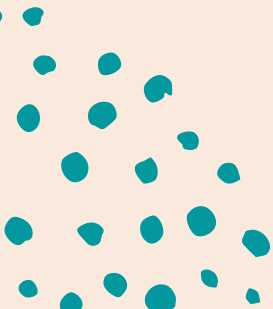
1. Happiness is not one thing; we would do better to think of it in the plural.
2. Our *happineses* (positive emotions) are the building blocks of a happy life.
3. Positive emotions, then, are not superfluous.
4. Positive emotions get us moving (in *motion*).
5. We don't need to perform positivity; we just need to notice what's there.
6. Noticing and expressing our emotions is good for us and helps us to understand ourselves and others.
7. In a sense, then, happiness is a kind of story we tell.
8. We get to be creative with our story.



Think like a beginner: Starting a Positive Journal

These basic principles also underpin a Positive Journal practice.

Print this companion to journal your own map of happiness(es), using the principles as a starter guide. Alternatively, use it alongside a bound journal, loose sheets of paper or a notepad.



1. Happiness is not one thing; we would do better to think of it in the plural.

Circle any of the below that you've experienced in the past 48 hours. Around the words, you might note what was happening.

Interest

Serenity

Acceptance

Joy

Pride

Amusement

Trust

Surprise

Hope

Anticipation

Gratitude

Ecstasy

Admiration

Amazement

Optimism

Awe

Love



2. Our *happineses* (positive emotions) are the building blocks of a happy life.

Drawing from the previous exercise, list as many things as you can think of that generate positive emotions for you. Nothing is too big or (importantly) too small: a cup of tea, chatting with friends, the laugh of a loved one, the sun outside the window.

3. Positive emotions are not superfluous.

Without positive experiences and emotions, life would be pretty dire. Positive emotions are not nice extras; they are essential to human survival.

In this space, write about how positive emotions have been important to your survival, e.g. trusting others, forming bonds, learning new things, or feeling hopeful.


4. Positive emotions get us moving (in *motion*).

Not only would life be dire without positive emotions, we also wouldn't get much done. Our emotions, both literally and figuratively, 'move' us. Fear and disgust move us *away*; joy and awe move us *toward*. In this space, write about a time when positive emotion inspired or motivated you to take action.



5. We don't need to perform positivity; we just need to notice what's there.

Sit comfortably, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Try to imagine the feeling of one or more of the positive emotions you've reflected on so far. Where do you feel joy? As butterflies in your stomach, or a 'rush' in your veins? What is the specific sensation of serenity? Write what you notice.

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6. Noticing and expressing our emotions is good for us and helps us to understand ourselves and others.

Human beings are complex tapestries of emotion (positive and negative). Expressive writing helps us make a bit of sense of this; it's a way of, if you like, explaining ourselves to ourselves. Here, write all of your thoughts and feelings about something that is challenging you right now.

7. Happiness is a story we tell.

Because our negative emotions feel so urgent, and our positive emotions tend to be fleeting and ephemeral, life may often seem unduly 'skewed' towards the negative when, actually, it isn't. In a journal, if we only capture the tough stuff then we are likely to have a warped view of the life we are actually living. Here, revisit the challenge from the previous prompt. What is helping you face this challenge? Hope? Love from others? Gratitude for basic comforts? Write about this.

8. We get to be creative with our story.

We must all find stories with which we can live. We can all emphasise the things that matter most and find compassionate, redemptive (or, at the very least, accepting) ways to narrate our lives. A word for this ability to 'see things differently' is *creativity*.

Here, begin a story. It can be about you, someone a bit like you, or not about you at all. Give them a fictional challenge to face. What happens? Be as silly, playful, absurd or serious as you like. There is no right or wrong way to tell your story.

Use this space to continue your story...

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Research

Hayes, M. (2018). *Write Yourself Happy: The Art of Positive Journalling*. Gaia.

Hayes, M. C., & Hefferon, K. (2015). 'Not like rose-tinted glasses... like taking a pair of dirty glasses off': A pilot intervention using positive emotions in expressive writing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5(4): 78-95.

Hayes, M. C., & Van Zyl, L. E. (2019). Positive Journal Writing Across Multicultural Contexts: A Protocol for Practice. In *Positive Psychological Intervention Design and Protocols for Multicultural Contexts* (pp. 415-433). Springer.



About

I am Dr Megan C Hayes, author of *Write Yourself Happy: The Art of Positive Journalling* (Gaia, 2018). I help individuals and groups use writing and story to promote happy wellbeing.

My Positive Journal® approach to personal writing puts the science of positive psychology onto the page and wellbeing into words.

Visit www.positivejournal.org to #writeyourselfhappy with more guides and prompts.

