Positive Psychology
The Science of Wellbeing

Instructor: Adam Siler
# Course Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class #1</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>What is positive psychology?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #2</td>
<td>Positive Interventions</td>
<td>How do you define/measure/increase wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #3</td>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>How can you authentically change your mood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #4</td>
<td>Engagement/meaning</td>
<td>What is your profile of character strengths?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #5</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>How can you think more optimistically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #6</td>
<td>Positive Health</td>
<td>How can meditation/exercise help you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Course Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class #1</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>What is positive psychology?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #2</td>
<td>Positive Interventions</td>
<td>How do you define/measure/increase wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #3</td>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>How can you authentically change your mood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #4</td>
<td>Engagement/meaning</td>
<td>What is your profile of character strengths?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #5</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>How can you think more optimistically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #6</td>
<td>Positive Health</td>
<td>How can meditation/exercise help you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is positive psychology?

• New sub-field
• Still “under construction”

• **Definition**: scientific study of how to...
  • theoretically **define**
  • empirically **measure**
  • practically **grow**
Brief History of Psychology

“Wellbeing is not merely the absence of disease. It involves something more. And that ‘more’ is P.E.R.M.A.”

- Dr. Martin Seligman
What is wellbeing?

According to Dr. Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania, wellbeing involves:

1. Positive Emotion
2. Engagement
3. Relationships
4. Meaning
5. Accomplishment

Each of these elements is definable, measureable, and growable using science.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class #1</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>What is positive psychology?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #2</td>
<td>Positive Interventions</td>
<td>How do you define/measure/increase wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #3</td>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>How can you authentically change your mood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #4</td>
<td>Engagement/meaning</td>
<td>What is your profile of character strengths?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #5</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>How can you think more optimistically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #6</td>
<td>Positive Health</td>
<td>How can meditation/exercise help you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What determines wellbeing?

Image: Pie chart showing:
- Genetics: 50%
- Actions and Thoughts: 40%
- External Circumstances: 10%

Source: Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D. University of California, Riverside
12 Positive Interventions

1. Expressing gratitude
2. Cultivating optimism
3. Avoiding over-thinking
4. Practicing acts of kindness
5. Nurturing social relationships
6. Developing strategies for coping
7. Learning to forgive
8. Increasing flow experiences
9. Savoring life’s joys
10. Committing to your goals
11. Practicing religion
12. Taking care of your body

The Person-Fit Diagnostic suggests four of these positive interventions. All of them should increase your wellbeing. However, the four provided are more likely to boost your wellbeing in addition to being more enjoyable and sustainable.
## Course Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class #1</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>What is positive psychology?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #2</td>
<td>Positive Interventions</td>
<td>How do you define/measure/increase wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #3</td>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>How can you authentically change your mood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #4</td>
<td>Engagement/Meaning</td>
<td>What is your profile of character strengths?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #5</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>How can you think more optimistically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #6</td>
<td>Positive Health</td>
<td>How can meditation/exercise help you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are positive emotions?

Examples of **positive emotions**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Pride</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Amusement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serenity</td>
<td>Inspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Awe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive vs. Negative Emotions 1.0

Traditional psychology has regarded emotions as a four-part process:

1. Physiological arousal
2. Subjective feeling
3. Cognitive interpretation
4. Behavioral expression
Positive vs. Negative Emotions 1.0

Traditional psychology has regarded negative emotions like ANGER as a clean four-part process:

1. Physiological arousal → HR, pupils, muscles
2. Subjective feeling → Grrrr...
3. Cognitive interpretation → Boundary was crossed
4. Behavioral expression → Fight

Specific Action Tendency
Clear indicators
Positive vs. Negative Emotions 1.0

Traditional psychology has regarded positive emotions like **JOY** as a messier four-part process:

1. Physiological arousal → Energy, awareness
2. Subjective feeling → Yippee!
3. Cognitive interpretation → Things are good
4. Behavioral expression → ???

**No Specific Action Tendency**

**Vague indicators**
“Broaden and Build” Theory

- **Positive Emotions**
  - Joy, Love, Contentment, Interest, Happiness

- **BROADEN**
  - Expands Inventory of Thoughts and Action

- **BUILD**
  - Develops Physical, Mental and Social Resources

- **TRANSFORM**
  - Advances Personal Growth and Creates More Positive Emotions
Positive vs. Negative Emotions 2.0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subjective Feeling</strong></td>
<td>Anger, fear, disgust</td>
<td>Joy, interest, serenity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physiological Arousal</strong></td>
<td>Restrict</td>
<td>Broaden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive Interpretation</strong></td>
<td>Something is wrong</td>
<td>Everything is fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioral Impulse</strong></td>
<td>Anger $\rightarrow$ fight</td>
<td>Joy $\rightarrow$ play, create</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear $\rightarrow$ flight</td>
<td>Interest $\rightarrow$ explore, learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disgust $\rightarrow$ vomit</td>
<td>Serenity $\rightarrow$ savor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effect</strong></td>
<td>Deplete resources + Downward spirals</td>
<td>Build resources + Upward spirals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Benefits of Positive Emotions

1. Builds **psychological** strengths
   - Optimism, resilience, openness, acceptance, drive

2. Builds **physical** health
   - Enhanced immune functioning
   - Lower blood pressure
   - Less pain
   - Fewer colds
   - Better sleep
   - Lower risk of disease (e.g. stroke, diabetes, hypertension)
   - Longer lives
Positivity Prescription

• Negativity is more potent than positivity; humans are biased

• The secret is to monitor your positivity/negativity ratio
Positivity Self Test

Take two minutes to complete the Positivity Self Test now. Your score provides a snapshot of how your emotions of the past day combine to create your positivity ratio.

Instructions: How have you felt in the past day? Look back over the past day (i.e., from this time yesterday up to right now). Using the 0-4 scale below, indicate the greatest degree that you've experienced of each of the following feelings.

0 = Not at all
1 = A little bit
2 = Moderately
3 = Quite a bit
4 = Extremely

According to Dr. Fredrickson...

- 3:1 ➡ flourishing
- 2:1 ➡ languishing
- 1:1 ➡ suffering
Boosting positive emotions

“Three Blessings Exercise”

• Positive intervention

• Instructions: “Write down three things that went well each day every night for one week. In addition, provide a causal explanation for each good thing.”

• Debrief: What went well? Why does this intervention work?
## Course Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class #1</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>What is <strong>positive</strong> psychology?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #2</td>
<td>Positive Interventions</td>
<td>How do you define/measure/increase <strong>wellbeing</strong>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #3</td>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>How can you authentically change your <strong>mood</strong>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #4</td>
<td>Engagement/meaning</td>
<td>What is your profile of <strong>character strengths</strong>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #5</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>How can you think more <strong>optimistically</strong>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #6</td>
<td>Positive Health</td>
<td>How can <strong>meditation/exercise</strong> help you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Engagement

• Element of wellbeing (i.e. PERMA)

• Definition
  - Absorption, interest
  - Involvement
  - Being “one with the music”

• Extreme engagement = flow
Engagement

The what of FLOW

• Extreme engagement
• Complete and total absorption
• Outside world is forgotten
• Being in “the zone”
• Optimized intrinsic motivation

The why of FLOW

• According to Dr. Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi, “people are most happy when they find their flow”
Engagement → Flow

The how of FLOW

• Not random

• Cultivate-able

• Does not necessarily follow from doing what you like

• Occurs at the friction point between “challenge” and “skill”
Engagement ➔ Flow

“Flow occurs when one’s highest strengths are leveraged against the right amount of challenge.”
Engagement → Flow

“Flow occurs when one’s highest strengths are leveraged against the right amount of challenge.”

So, if we want to boost engagement, we need to identify our character strengths and race them.
Engagement ➔ Flow
Meaning

• Element of wellbeing (i.e. PERMA)

• Definition
  ➢ purpose
  ➢ direction
  ➢ connection beyond
  ➢ ≠ happy
Meaning

According to Emily Esfahani Smith, “meaning is defined by connecting or contributing to something that lies beyond the self.”

“Your life can be meaningful even if you aren’t positive or cheerful or happy all the time.”

Pursuing meaning ≠ happiness
- Being part of a family
- Raising children
- Mastering musical instrument
- Pursuing a degree
- Starting a business
Meaning

According to Emily Esfahani Smith, “meaning is defined by connecting or contributing to something that lies beyond the self.”

“Your life can be meaningful even if you aren’t positive or cheerful or happy all the time.”

Pursuing meaning ≠ happiness

• Being part of a family
• Raising children
• Mastering musical instrument
• Pursuing a degree
• Starting a business

Stress, Effort, Pain, Hard-work, Sacrifice
According to Emily Esfahani Smith, “meaning is defined by connecting or contributing to something that lies beyond the self.”

“Your life can be meaningful even if you aren’t positive or cheerful or happy all the time.”

Pursuing meaning ≠ happiness

- Being part of a family
- Raising children
- Mastering musical instrument
- Pursuing a degree
- Starting a business
Meaning

“The pursuit of meaning – not happiness – is what makes life worth living.”

“Meaning occurs when one leverages a strength/interest toward a need.”

- Tom Rath
Meaning

“Meaning is defined by connecting or contributing to something that lies beyond the self.”

“Meaning follows from leveraging a strength or interest to address a need.”
Meaning

“Meaning is defined by connecting or contributing to something that lies beyond the self.”

“Meaning follows from leveraging a strength or interest to address a need.”
Meaning

“Meaning is defined by connecting or contributing to something that lies beyond the self.”

“Meaning follows from leveraging a strength or interest to address a need.”
Meaning

“Meaning is defined by connecting or contributing to something that lies beyond the self.”

“Meaning follows from leveraging a strength or interest to address a need.”

So, if we want to boost meaning, we need to identify our character strengths and connect them to the external world.
If we want to boost engagement, we need to identify our character strengths and race them.

If we want to boost meaning, we need to identify our character strengths and connect them to the external world.
What is character?
Character is...

- At a broad level, “character” expresses the ways in which we *go right*, not the ways in which we *go wrong*.

- Drs. Martin Seligman and Chris Peterson examined “character” across time, space, nation, culture, religion, and philosophy.

- They composed the CSV, which classifies character strengths. This is in juxtaposition to the DSM, which classifies mental disorders.
Character is...

- Plural
- Nuanced
- Individualized
- Dynamic
- Expressed in degrees
Character is...

- Plural  \(\rightarrow\) many paths
- Nuanced  \(\rightarrow\) messy, complicated
- Individualized  \(\rightarrow\) unique to you
- Dynamic  \(\rightarrow\) changeable but stable
- Expressed in degrees  \(\rightarrow\) dimmer > on/off
Character is... 

- Plural → many paths
- Nuanced → messy, complicated
- Individualized → unique to you
- Dynamic → changeable but stable
- Expressed in degrees → dimmer > on/off

Character is best understood as a profile of strengths.
Character is...plural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wisdom</th>
<th>Courage</th>
<th>Humanity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Head Strengths)</td>
<td>(Heart Strengths)</td>
<td>(Strength of Others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Bravery</td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of learning</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Social intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgement</td>
<td>Zest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temperance</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Transcendence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Strengths of Self)</td>
<td>(Community Strengths)</td>
<td>(Strengths of Spirit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>Appreciation of beauty &amp; excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prudence</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Wisdom & Knowledge** | Creativity: Originality, adaptive, ingenuity  
                      | Curiosity: Interest, novelty-seeking, exploration, openness to experience  
                      | Judgment: Critical thinking, thinking things through, open-minded  
                      | Love of Learning: Mastering new skills & topics, systematically adding to knowledge  
                      | Perspective: Wisdom, providing wise counsel, taking the big picture view |
| **Courage**          | Bravery: Valor, not shrinking from fear, speaking up for what’s right  
                      | Perseverance: Persistence, industry, finishing what one starts  
                      | Honesty: Authenticity, integrity  
                      | Zest: Vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy, feeling alive and activated |
| **Humanity**         | Love: Both loving and being loved, valuing close relations with others  
                      | Kindness: Generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruism, compassion, altruism, “niceness”  
                      | Social Intelligence: Emotional intelligence, aware of the motives/feelings of self/others, knowing what makes other people tick |
| **Justice**          | Teamwork: Citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty  
                      | Fairness: Just, not letting feelings bias decisions about others  
                      | Leadership: Organizing group activities, encouraging a group to get things done |
| **Temperance**       | Forgiveness: Mercy, accepting others’ shortcomings, giving people a second chance  
                      | Humility: Modesty, letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves  
                      | Prudence: Careful, cautious, not taking undue risks  
                      | Self-Regulation: Self-control, disciplined, managing impulses & emotions |
| **Transcendence**    | Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence: Awe, wonder, elevation  
                      | Gratitude: Thankful for the good, expressing thanks, feeling blessed  
                      | Hope: Optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation  
                      | Humor: Playfulness, bringing smiles to others, lighthearted  
                      | Spirituality: Religiousness, faith, purpose, meaning |
Character is...plural

• Character strengths are universal personality traits that manifest through thinking (cognition), feeling (affect), willing (volition), and action (behavior)

• Morally valued

• Beneficial to oneself and others

• You have **signature strength(s)**
Character is...plural

Signature Strengths
– Strengths that a person owns, celebrates, and frequently exercises
– Typically, people have between 2-5

Criteria for signature strengths
– The “real” you
– Excitement
– Rapid learning curve
– Yearning to display
– Almost inevitable
– Invigoration > exhaustion
– Intrinsic motivation

![Character Strengths and Virtues](image)
Character is...plural

Watch Video
Character is...plural

**VIA survey**

- Measures 24 character strengths
- Valid (i.e. accurate)
- Reliable (i.e. replicatable)
- Taken by more than 3 million people, representing every country in the world
Character Strengths in Rank Order

This graph depicts the character strengths ordered by average raw score: 5 - “Very much like me,” 4 - “Like me,” 3 - “Not like or unlike me,” 2 - “Unlike me,” and 1 - “Very much unlike me.”
Character is...plural

Benefits of using signature strengths

- Increased life satisfaction
- Decreased depression
- Increased flow (i.e. PERMA)
- Increased purpose (i.e. PERMA)
- Increased employee retention
- Increased intrinsic motivation
- Improved therapeutic outcomes
Homework

Pick one of the following positive interventions:

- **Option 1**: Identify your signature strength. Use it in a novel way each day this upcoming week.

- **Option 2**: Identify your signature strength. Identify something that you don’t like doing in your everyday life. Re-craft the activity to incorporate your signature strength and try it.
Homework

Pick one of the following positive interventions:

➢ **Option 1**: Identify your signature strength. Use it in a novel way each day this upcoming week.

- **Humor**: Adam has a haircut this evening. He could consider going to the barber shop with the intention to laugh and make others laugh.
- **Fairness**: Adam has noticed his wife cooked most dinners last week. He could cook the lion-share of the dinners this week.
Signature Strength: Social intelligence
Crappy Task: Bagging groceries at Trader Joe’s
Job Re-crafted: Make the conversations you have with patrons the social highlight of their day.

➤ **Option 2**: Identify your signature strength. Identify something that you don’t like doing in your everyday life. Re-craft the activity to incorporate your signature strength and try it.