

Optimism Practice #3

A Positive Future

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Duration: 15 minutes

Frequency: Daily for one week

Level of Difficulty: Moderate

Overview: When it comes to developing an optimistic mindset, one of the most powerful ways to do so is to cultivate a positive view of the future. This exercise is drawn from the work of psychologist Laura King, and is designed to help us do exactly that. In King's study, she invited participants to engage in roughly 20 minutes of journal writing over the course of several days, with a particular focus in mind. Specifically, participants were asked to imagine their "best possible future self," and to write about their future if all their hopes and dreams were to come true.

Although it might not seem that such a brief writing exercise would yield such powerful results, the findings from King's studies were remarkable. Compared to those in a control group, individuals who wrote about their "best possible future" were found to be significantly happier even weeks later. Not only that, but they had better physical health outcomes and were less likely to fall ill, with these gains lasting for several months.

Why did this simple exercise yield such powerful changes? It appears that not only did the writing exercise help individuals feel better in the moment; it also helped them feel empowered to begin making tangible and concrete positive changes in their lives. Writing about their "best possible future self" may have also helped the participants tap into and identify what they valued most in life, and inspired them to set goals to help them live in a more aligned way with these values.

Instructions: For the next week, set aside 20 minutes per day to journal about your life in the future. For this practice, try imagining that in this future, various aspects of your life have begun to really fall into place. What is the best possible future that you can imagine?

Picture yourself 5 or 10 years from now, or even further into the future if you'd like—consider the various domains of your life, including your relationships, your work, your health, and your hobbies. Close your eyes if it helps, and picture what your life would look like if your dreams became realized and you achieved your most meaningful goals.

Spend the next 20 minutes free-writing about this best possible future. Feel free to use the space below to get the ball rolling. And keep in mind the following guidelines if they help you in the process:

- Don't worry about spelling or grammar—just write whatever comes up for you as you envision the future in this way.
- Don't worry if the positive future seems far off, or unrealistic in any way. Just try to envision your best self, and what your life would look like if your dreams came true.
- Try to be specific—instead of envisioning vague possibilities, see if you can hash them out a bit more and be a bit more concrete.
- Experiment a bit—try focusing on different time-points (e.g., a year from now, five years from now, 10 years from now, and so forth), as well as different parts of your life (e.g., your romantic relationship, your friendships, your professional life, family, and so forth).

How and why it works: This practice helps us become more optimistic and achieve greater levels of happiness in a number of ways. First, it helps us to get in touch with our core values—the parts of our lives we hold most dear—and gives us ideas of how we might live more according to these values. Second, this practice helps boost optimism by creating a sense of hopefulness towards the future. Third, this particular practice can help us see that these dreams are within our grasp. As a result, we can begin taking even small steps towards them in the coming days.

Notes/Impressions:
