



# Three Good Things

## BACKGROUND

The Three Good Things exercise, also known as “The Three Blessings,” is arguably one of the most well-known positive psychology interventions. This exercise entails writing down three things that went well and reflecting on these things at the end of each day (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). In a study by Seligman and colleagues (2005), participants were asked to write down three good things that happened to them each day, for one week. The results showed that this daily activity had a significant impact on reported levels of well-being and depression. Moreover, for participants who continued the exercise beyond the suggested 1 week, it was found that the activity increased happiness and decreased symptoms of depression for up to 6 months of follow-up.

In another study, reported in Seligman’s book *Authentic happiness* (Seligman, 2002), even more profound effects were observed. In this study, severely depressed participants were instructed to recall and write down three good things that happened each day for 15 days. 94 percent of them went from severely depressed to mildly to moderately depressed during that time.

Interestingly, exercises similar to that of “The 3 Good Things” have been used in clinical settings for quite some time. Effective interventions for depression have often included positive activity “homework” for those with major depression (Lewinsohn & Graf, 1973). What is new is the Positive Psychology paradigm underlying these positive exercises: attention to the positive for the explicit purpose of increasing well-being and not as medicine for troubled states of mind.

## ACTIVITY

In this exercise, you will remember and list three positive things that have happened in your day and reflect on what caused them. In doing so, you will tune into the sources of goodness in your life. The hope is that you will remember events that otherwise would have been overlooked. It is a habit that can change the emotional tone of your life, increasing an overall sense of gratitude for your life.

## SHORT FORM

Each night before you go to sleep:

1. Think of three good things that happened today.
2. Write them down.
3. Reflect on why they happened.

## LONG FORM

Each day for at least one week, write down three things that went well for you that day. Also, provide an explanation for why they went well. Preferably, create a physical record of your items by writing them down. The items can be relatively small in importance (“I had a nice chat with my friend”) or relatively large (e.g., “I earned a big promotion”).

After each positive event on your list, answer in your own words the question “Why did this good thing happen?” For example, you made the nice chat with your friend possible because you called her.

To make this exercise part of your daily routine, some find journaling before bed to be helpful. As you write, follow these instructions:

1. Give the event a title (e.g., “co-worker complimented my work on a project”)
2. Write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible, including what you did or said and, if others were involved, what they did or said.
3. Include how this event made you feel at the time and how this event made you feel later (including now, as you remember it).
4. Explain what you think caused this event—why it came to pass. You may also focus on what you did to make this good thing happen.

Use whatever writing style you please, and do not worry about perfect grammar and spelling. Use as much detail as you would like.